



Upper School Innovations

When we hear the word innovation, we typically think of “new ideas, devices, and methods”. (1) However, innovation also means the application of better solutions that meet new requirements, unarticulated needs, or existing market needs. (2) At AJA Upper School, innovation means both and more.

Our dual curricula affords multiple opportunities for students to hone and develop new universal skills that will prepare them for success in the next stages of life. Academic rigor and real-world relevance are educational goals that unify our instructional approaches in both general and Judaic studies. Our courses are designed to strike the perfect balance among skill building, engaging text-based discussions, reflection, and personal connections. In a traditional classroom setting, the teacher is commonly viewed as the expert and thereby holds all of the knowledge. In our innovative, learner-centered classes, the smartest person in the room *is* the room. We value all ideas and opinions as integral aspects of the learning process.

In addition to our innovative philosophical underpinnings, the physical space of Upper School has been designed with innovation in mind. All classrooms are outfitted with mobile, flexible furniture that can be easily configured to match corresponding learning goals. Our rolling triangular desks can be paired for chavruta text study or combined into a circle for engaging group discussions. The state of the art STEM labs are equipped with both fixed experimentation stations and flexible work stations. The orientation of each lab is nuanced to best accommodate the instructional approaches of either physics, chemistry, or biology. A makerspace is strategically centered between the STEM labs. Here, students will learn design thinking and engineering principles. Most importantly, they will prototype and bring their ideas to life.

To remain innovative, we must be committed to an iterative cycle of planning, implementing, assessing, reflecting, and revising. Following this framework will help us to identify new methods and approaches to meet the needs of our students and stay current with the demands of our ever-changing world.

On behalf of the entire AJA Upper School family, I would like to extend a formal invitation for you to join us for an exciting night of teaching and learning. Our annual Curriculum Night has been redesigned to provide a more intimate, authentic glimpse into who we are and what we do. Teachers have worked collaboratively to develop lessons that reflect our broader academic goals. We will facilitate 3 classroom-style rotations in which parents will engage as learners. Participants may select to attend mini-lessons in Talmud, Art, Hebrew, STEM, Humanities, or Tanakh. Afterwards, there will be an open forum to engage with all teachers and learn more about specific courses and subjects. Of course, anytime during the year, we encourage you to schedule time with your child's teacher as needed.

We hope that you will attend our Curriculum Night to experience Upper School innovation first hand. I look forward to seeing all of you!

Warm regards,

John

(1) "Innovation". Merriam-webster.com. Merriam-Webster. Retrieved 2016-03-14.

(2) Maryville, S (1992). "Entrepreneurship in the Business Curriculum". *Journal of Education for Business*. Vol. 68 No. 1, pp. 27–31.