

CREATING COMMUNITY FOR TEENS

MetroWest offers many opportunities for Jewish teens to develop their Jewish identities through formal and informal means. The goals of this initiative are:

- *To create a community-wide sense that all of these opportunities are available to all teens;*
- *To create an understanding that different programs are available to different teens at different times in their identity development, and that these programs can build off of each other rather than compete with each other;*
- *To create community honors and other incentives for teens to pursue their Jewish identity development in significant and meaningful ways from ages 12-18;*
- *To develop a network of formal and informal youth educators who share information and ideas, and strive for the elevation of Jewish knowledge and the deepening of involvement for all MetroWest teens.*

Central Hebrew High School (CHHS) is but one program that impacts on Jewish identity development. Other MetroWest synagogues offer high school level programs that enjoy a level of popularity indicating value derived by the participants.

In addition to these programs, MetroWest teens attend 2 community day schools and other day schools outside of MetroWest. They attend Jewish summer day camps and residential camps. They participate in Israel experiences, either within their age cohort or with their families. They volunteer in myriad ways to help others who are less fortunate. They attend youth group events at the JCC or through movements, and participate ritually in their synagogues.

All of these experiences together offer a powerful combination of Jewish learning and Jewish living.

This new initiative will seek to link all of these experiences together to create an attractive and dynamic web of opportunities for MetroWest teens to explore.

Based on initiatives such as Meah in Boston (100 hours of Jewish study over two years), this initiative will create communal culture of comprehensive Jewish experience for teens in our community.

The MetroWest-wide program may be called “M”ET (pronounced, Emet, Hebrew for Truth) and stands for “MetroWest Experiences for Teens.” It will link together

all MetroWest teen experiences and track teen participation leading to honored “graduates” of the program by age 18.

Some possible elements of the program:

1. Establish communal goals for number of hours of “learning and living” required to fulfill goals in several tracks, such as:

- Formal study
- Informal learning
- Community service
- Ritual practice

The number of hours may be set with either annual, or cumulative goals, or both. In any case, they should not be less than the total number of hours currently devoted to learning at CHHS (4 hours per week). The objective is to create a communal environment that inspires teens to achieve these standards not necessarily in each area, but in a combination of all of these areas to develop as well-rounded and solidly grounded participants in the Jewish community who are better prepared to chart their own Jewish destinies as they enter young adulthood.

2. Identifying qualifying programs and experiences throughout MetroWest in which teens may participate to earn credit towards these goals. Standards for defining such programs may include

- ✓ Clearly articulated identity-shaping goals (What will be learned/experienced? How will that occur?)
- ✓ An understanding by the participants that they are connecting with Jewish content/values in an unambiguous way;
- ✓ Minimum duration of 1 hour;
- ✓ Facilitation by someone who is responsible for the above.

These programs and experiences would include:

- Day schools
- Jewish educational summer camps
- CHHS (more on this later)
- Synagogue-based education programs
- JCC and youth group events
- Israel experiences
- Community service projects
- Holocaust or Jewish studies courses in public schools
- Student (Jewish) teaching
- Leading youth activities

Teens who are enrolled in day school or who attend Jewish summer camps will receive automatic credit towards the goals in their respective tracks. In such a situation, a day school teen may easily meet the goal for formal study, but is still encouraged to strive to attain another goal, in community service for example. In another situation, a summer camper may meet the goal for informal learning, but would be encouraged to attain the goal for formal study, etc.

3. Providing incentives for teens to participate with prizes awarded for achieving milestone hours along the way. Prizes may include a subscription to J-Vibe (teen magazine), certificates for Jewish music CDs, books from the Avi Chai bookshelf, discounts to JCC events, etc.

4. Establishing community honors for teens who fulfill different levels of achievement in the program. Those who achieve a minimum level may be recognized as "Participants;" those who achieve a higher level may receive certificates; those who attain the highest level may be awarded diplomas. These citations will be publicized throughout MetroWest. "Transcripts" of these experiences will be forwarded as part of the college application process if requested by the student. In addition, those who achieve some level, perhaps the highest, but not necessarily, may also qualify for a free Israel trip or a similar prize.

5. A network of "M"ET educators will be developed among all MetroWest teen educators: day school and congregational school teachers, youth group leaders, camp directors, JCC workers and Israel Program Center professionals. Initially they will be connected via a web site developed by The Partnership for Jewish Learning and Life, and encouraged to communicate with each other via e-mail or other methods of their choosing. Educators will be identified along with the subject areas taught, age/grade levels, and honors and awards will be noted. These "M"ET educators will attest that the educational standards enumerated in #2 above or similar standards are being met, thus qualifying the participants for "M"ET credit. Creating this network of professional talent in itself will be a major step in advancing the culture of educational leadership required at all levels in our community.

6. All participants will be enrolled through a data base maintained by the Partnership for Jewish Learning and Life. All qualified programs will be encouraged to post and update their information on the web site so that teens will be able to view all the possible opportunities that exist throughout the community for gaining hours towards their goals, and if technically feasible to register for these programs online. Teens who enroll in "M"ET will create personal accounts to track their hours, which will be submitted by the supervising "M"ET educator on site. The number of hours for Ritual Practice would be self-reported, as this may include private prayer, meditation, spending time in a Sukkah, singing at a Shabbat meal, participating in a seder, etc. The MetroWest community will literally be able to see the cumulative number of hours that its teens invest in learning and living Jewishly growing every day.

7. CHHS will adopt this new approach by restructuring its curriculum to reflect these four elements (formal study, informal learning, community service and ritual practice) and echo this change through its new name: "M"ET Academy. The principal of "M"ET Academy will be the convener and coordinator for the

network of “M”ET educators. “M”ET Academy students will receive official transcripts for college applications. They are also eligible to receive an honors diploma when they successfully complete the community guideline number of hours in the four areas of learning and living. (Note: While this entire proposal needs further refinement, this area in particular needs special attention to ensure that the financial base of the new “M”ET Academy is secure, and that it can still attract tuition-paying students.)

8. The Partnership’s Teen Educator will be on the staff of “M”ET Academy, and will develop opportunities for the students and for all MetroWest teens to engage in more Jewish learning and living. He will be a presence in the teen community, speaking in Hebrew Schools and Congregational High Schools and youth groups recruiting for participation in “M”ET.

The Teen Educator will be able to communicate directly with all “M”ET participants since they are registered on the web site. These opportunities include teaching the Panim Jewish Civics Initiative in the “M”ET Academy, partnerships to enhance current JCC teen activities such as the Iris Tzedakah Program, consulting with youth group leaders, coordinating Mitzvot of MetroWest, Mitzvah Clowning, Rosh Chodesh programs, convening J-Serve (a community-wide day of teen service) and mega-events like a Great Shofar Blowout to break the Guinness World Record for the largest number of people sounding the Shofar in unison. He will also be the advisors to all “M”ET Academy students in developing their own personally designed track for Jewish learning and life during their teen years in MetroWest.