

School Twinning - Educational Standards and Benchmarks

Introduction

“A coherent view of curriculum, assessment and teaching is at the core of any vision of more effective education.” Prof. Linda Darling-Hammond (Stanford University) in A Blueprint for Creating Schools That Work 211.

School twinning is touching the lives of thousands of students across the world. Dedicated educators have been motivated to create twinning opportunities for their students for many reasons that relate to wanting their students to live out and experience real connections to Jewish peoplehood.

The project to develop Standards and Benchmarks for school twinning arose from the sense that all these efforts could be strengthened if there were common goals in the form of student outcomes that point towards transformational aspirations we want to see happen in their lives.

When thinking about standards for twinning, we concluded that they would most useful if they focused only on the value added of school twinning to already existing and related learning outcomes within schools. In other words, school twinning standards will most likely be integrated into frameworks for Jewish studies, Israel education, etc. as a way to actualize that learning for students through people-to-people connections.

Basic assumptions

The unique educational relationship between twinned schools is grounded in two guiding principles: The first is the essential content of Jewish culture, and the second is the methodology of *mifgash*, encounter.

- Jewish culture is the shared content area that forms the connection among members of the Jewish people. This common denominator provides a values base for developing connections and programs between educators and students in Israel and in Jewish communities around the world.
- A meaningful relationship is formed through a *mifgash*, an encounter. We understand *mifgash* to mean planned experiences that happen recurrently (more than once). Face-to-face connections are developed when trips abroad are made possible; virtual connections can be made on-going through the ever-developing means of technology at our disposal. *Mifgash*, as far as we are concerned, is the foundation for the development of our unique twinning relationships.

These basic assumptions constitute the broad framework that allow for the development of connections and programs in alignment with the core content standards that continue to develop in Jewish Peoplehood and Israel engagement. Therefore, we view these guiding principles in terms of overarching student outcomes (benchmarks) associated with any planned school twinning experience.

Overarching Benchmarks for Mifgashim

The *mifgash* is the central method to be integrated with the entire body of core content standards.

Students participate in *mifgashim* with overseas friends (virtual or physical, face-to-face encounters) around the School Twinning standards (as detailed below). As a planned learning experience, *mifgash* is designed to achieve student outcomes (benchmarks).

Students:

- Know personally counterpart students (in their peer group) from the partner community in Israel.
- Know the lifestyle and unique Jewish identity of students in the partnership community in Israel.
- Express closeness with counterpart students with whom they are in contact.

In order to create an educational connection, students are expected to:

- Develop an ongoing relationship with students from the partner community through a minimum of 4 activities
- Meet at least once a year with students from the overseas partner community, via video/Skype conferences or a face-to-face meeting.
- Initiate direct contact with students from the partner community—beyond the structured group relationship that is being conducted.

Overarching Benchmarks for Deepening familiarity and connection with Jewish culture and heritage

The school-to-school connections will create space for discussing values and content concerning the meaning of Jewish culture and heritage for students.

Students:

- Understand and are recognize essential values of Jewish culture through encounter with different types of Jews.
- Recognize Hebrew's role as the foundational language of the Jewish People.

- Articulate their connection with Judaism and Jewish culture by virtue of their ties to their overseas counterparts.

In order to create an educational connection, students are expected to:

- Mark the Jewish calendar and apply Jewish values as part of their connection and relationship with their overseas partners.

Content Standards

We recognize that Jewish and Israeli schools have curriculum for studying the history of the Jewish people and the state of Israel, Jewish culture and tradition, and the Hebrew language. School Twinning provides students with the opportunity to apply that learning into the real life connection-forming with Jewish peers overseas. The content standards for School Twinning are focused on the value-added this program brings to the curriculum in four content areas, and will ideally be integrated into the Standards schools have for the formal curriculum in those areas.

Standard One: Jewish consciousness and sense of belonging to the Jewish People

Students feel and express a sense of belonging to the global Jewish People as a significant component of their identity.

Knowledge Benchmarks

Students:

- Know generally the history and demographics of Jews around the world.
- Know generally the history and demographics of the parallel community.
- Recognize the pattern of life in the partnership community and learn about the issues on its community agenda [as a particular case on the agenda of the global Jewish people].
- Recognizes Hebrew as a source for understanding Jewish values and identity.

Attitude and Behavior Benchmarks

Students:

- Demonstrate their belonging to the Jewish people through a sense of mutual concern for the Partnership Community.
- Builds their connection to their counterparts through Hebrew as an expression of their Jewish values and identity.

Standard Two: Connection and commitment to Israel

Students are connected and committed to Israel as the state of the Jewish People around the world and as a Jewish state.

Knowledge Benchmarks

Students:

- Know and understand the connection between World Jewry and Israel as the historical land and modern state of the Jewish People.
- Know about the Partnership region in Israel, including its Jewish history.
- Appreciate transformative revival in modern times.

Attitude and Behavior Benchmarks

Students:

- Display and express their commitment to Israel as a center for the Jewish people.
- Demonstrate unique connection to the partnership region in Israel.
- See that the Hebrew language facilitates the connection between Jews around the world.

Standard Three: Appreciation and respect for various expressions of Judaism in contemporary life

Students understand, respect and appreciate the uniqueness of Jewish life in the area in which they live. Similarly, they understand, respect and appreciate the uniqueness of Jewish life among their friends in the Partnership.

Knowledge Benchmarks

Students:

- Recognize various modes of expression in Jewish life.

Attitude and Behavior Benchmarks

Students:

- Express their being a part of the cultural, spiritual and religious diversity & richness of the Jewish People.
- Demonstrate openness to encountering and discussing various expressions of Judaism through encounters with Jews their age who express their Jewishness in different ways.
- Behave respectfully and tolerantly towards Jewish outlooks that are different than their own.