

Integrating Israel education in Jewish day schools

By: Sergio Carmona, Staff Writer
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A new initiative will aim to improve Israel experiences and education in Jewish day schools.

The iCenter, a national Israel education organization, has launched "iNfuse: Israel Education in Day Schools." Six day schools from across North America have been selected for the pilot program. The schools include three local ones — Donna Klein Jewish Academy in [Boca Raton](#) and Jacobson Sinai Academy and Hochberg Preparatory School, both in North Miami Beach. Through this initiative, each school will create a plan to make Israel education and experiences a more significant part of all aspects of school life, including general studies disciplines such as science or the arts, Jewish and Hebrew language studies, all-school Israel engagement and Israel travel.

"The goal is for schools to emerge from this 18-month process as exemplars of Israel education in Jewish day schools — where Israel is infused throughout the school, integrated across the curriculum, and aligned with an articulated vision," said Lesley Litman, one of the initiative's designers and iCenter educational consultant.

Litman said that much of Israel education happens in Hebrew language classroom, occasionally in Jewish studies, and in trips to Israel that some schools take. She mentioned ways in which the initiative can infuse Israel education in all parts of school life.

"For example, in a language arts class, why not use Israeli literature where students can engage with Israel in a very authentic way through the study of literature?" she said. "As part of the science curriculum, why not use some of the really powerful and important stuff coming out of Israel in science and technology? The same thing for arts and culture."

Representatives from most of the schools will gather in Jerusalem this month to begin the work and create a sense of community among the pilot schools. The schools will gather again in September for a formal kick-off and to begin the work in earnest.

Nancy Posner, head of school at Jacobson Sinai Academy, discussed the school's goals regarding the initiative.



Staff photo/Todd Roller

Students from Donna Klein Jewish Academy in Boca Raton (pictured) will get a broader Israel educational experience through the initiative "iNfuse: Israel Education in Day Schools."

"We have a special committee we've appointed from the faculty and they're going to survey our entire curriculum to see how we are currently infusing Israel education into our curriculum," Posner said. "First we're going to see what we do and what we do well. Then the committee is going to make recommendations for how we can enhance what we're already doing."

Yafa Levit, principal of Lower School Judaic Studies at Donna Klein, noted that this initiative will be introduced in kindergarten all the way through 12th grade.

"It's very important to start at a young age and create an enthusiasm about our Jewish homeland," Levit added. "Our approach is that we believe that education is the key to inspire Jewish youth through connections to Israel and to its people."

Dayna Wald, principal of Judaics at Hochberg Prep, said "This [initiative] is a great opportunity for us to really work on something that can be integrated with our Hebrew language, with our Jewish studies, and with our general studies while bringing it all together for the development of our students' Jewish identity."

The initiative is funded in part by The AVI CHAI Foundation as well as through matching funds raised in the schools' communities. It is modeled after BASIS, an Israel Education Day School project in Northern California facilitated by Jewish LearningWorks with funding from the Jim Joseph Foundation.