

The Reason We Study TaNaKH – Articulating Vision Through Standards and Benchmarks

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What are the most critical reasons we teach a specific subject in school?

The other day I had a chance to participate in a workshop through the [Legacy Heritage Instructional Leadership Institute](#) around the teaching of *TaNaKH* (The entire Jewish Bible, lit. an acronym for Torah, Neviim [Prophets], and Ketuvim [Writings]). The Legacy Heritage Institute is housed at the [Wm. Davidson Graduate School of Jewish Education](#).

Our Lower School is embarking on a multi-year effort to further enhance the quality of teaching and learning in *TaNaKH*. The Leadership Institute's approach is based on what are called Standards and Benchmarks. Standards articulate an overarching learning outcome that includes a synthesis of knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors. Benchmarks specify learning outcomes at each grade-level or in bands of grade-levels (for example, K-2; 3-5) as students work toward achieving each standard. Using a standards-based approach provides a clear vision for curriculum.

Our Lower School has chosen two standards that will inform the teaching and learning of *TaNaKH* for all our Lower School students. The standards are:

- 1. Students will view *TaNaKH* as the formative narrative of the Jewish People—past, present, and future, and,**
- 2. Students will develop a love of Torah study for its own sake and embrace it as an inspiring resource informing their values, moral commitments, and ways of experiencing the world.**

During the workshop, our facilitator from the Legacy Heritage Institute led an exercise to deepen our understanding of the two standards we had chosen. The activity forced us to articulate in writing the content and skills we would use to meet the standard and then explain why the standard required those skills and approach. As an example, one faculty member articulated that they would teach "themes and ideas by asking students to examine, analyze, and apply the Torah text." And here is the "because" part; "because the standard views the Torah text as a living document that we want to become a moral compass for students as they use it to make personal meaning from our tradition."

At that moment, I felt that the true worth of our new *TaNaKH* curriculum is that it demonstrates front and center why the study of Torah is so important. Beyond the essential skills (skills I would say are 21st century learning goals) to read, analyze, evaluate, and apply the text, the standards-based approach we are working to apply is grounded in a clear declaration of why we teach the Torah text as a moral compass for students to build a meaningful life. The power of a standards-based approach in any subject area is that it requires schools to state the overarching reason it chooses to teach that subject.

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