

A photograph of a classroom. In the foreground, two young boys are seen from behind, sitting at a desk. The boy on the left is wearing a blue and black striped shirt, and the boy on the right is wearing a blue and yellow plaid shirt. Both have their right arms raised. In the background, other students are also raising their hands, and a teacher is visible at the front of the class near a green chalkboard.

AVI CHAI Personalizes Learning with BetterLesson Coaching

BetterLesson & The AVI CHAI Foundation



“BetterLesson Coaches are professional, friendly and model teachers. It has been a pleasure to watch them work and to watch our teachers learn from them. The teachers at our day schools have found the experience extremely powerful.”

—Rachel Abrahams, Senior Program Officer

Leaving a Legacy with Personalized Learning

In 2015 BetterLesson began a multi-year partnership with the AVI CHAI Foundation, focused on supporting traditional teachers to adopt blended learning strategies in their classrooms. What started as a 43-teacher pilot has exploded to hundreds of participants and several spin-off partnerships with individual schools. The success of the partnership stems from a shared understanding of the importance of building teacher capacity by giving them the time, space, support and resources needed to successfully implement new pedagogical approaches.

A New Initiative in Personalized Learning

In 2010, the AVI CHAI Foundation announced a new initiative around supporting personalized learning initiatives in Jewish day schools. Increasing individualized instruction was an opportunity to improve the quality of education, enabling students to develop 21st century skills, and decrease the cost of schooling.

The program focused on providing seed funding for three key elements:

1. Integrating online and blended learning in established schools.
2. Incubating low-cost, high quality new schools to serve as proof points for blended learning.
3. Launching online offerings for Judaic Studies.

“Though I have always strived to reach each of my students, this process has helped me reinvent myself and find new and improved avenues to connect with the students of tomorrow.”

Foreign Language Teacher
Quebec, QC

A Stalled Adoption

In the first five years of the program, the foundation launched three low-cost schools and began investing in the creation of online learning resources for Judaic Studies, but they were not seeing schools adopt blended learning approaches. Even with a multitude of grants, workshops and programming, the vast majority of schools were still teaching in the traditional way.

The foundation realized shifting to a personalized learning approach requires a system that empowers teachers to learn new skills, experiment and be deliberate about change. Creating time and space to build leader, teacher and student capacity was essential to the success of this new pedagogic approach. With this new clarity in perspective, foundation leaders began looking for solutions that could accommodate all aspects of their needs.

Shared Vision of Investment

Senior Program Officer Rachel Mohl Abrahams met Jeff Liberty, BetterLesson's VP of Personalized Learning Initiatives, at the iNACOL Symposium in the fall of 2015. Jeff was sharing BetterLesson's first blended learning white paper and discussing the company's new professional development program. BetterLesson Coaching was designed specifically to provide teachers with the time, space and support needed to develop a blended model and implement it in their classrooms over the course of the school year.

This alignment in vision and approach produced a pilot for the spring 2016 semester. Forty-three teachers with some blended experience from 15 Jewish day schools across the U.S. and Canada received design support and ongoing coaching. Over the semester, teachers developed and implemented strategies specific to the advancement of student-centered learning in their classroom.

97%

OF TEACHERS

said BetterLesson Coaching had a positive impact on student outcomes

2.2x

GROWTH

seen by teachers in student ability to demonstrate a key skill

96%

OF TEACHERS

would recommend BetterLesson Coaching to a colleague

Exponential Growth and a Clear Way Forward

Since the 2016 pilot, the partnership has expanded to cover hundreds of teachers from across North America. Teachers have seen the coaching as transformative to their practice. "I learned so much about my teaching through BetterLesson coaching. I know that I am more reflective and, to a large degree, more responsive to the needs of my students," claimed Joanne Ketcham. Another teacher found her new approach to teaching has changed her student's approach to learning. "I see that students are taking more responsibility for their successes and failure. They know the areas they need to work on and are not upset when they work on different things in class. They are interested to do the best they can."

Administrators at participating schools also noticed the impact of BetterLesson Coaching. "Teachers are differentiating more, they are excited about new tools, incorporating more technology, transferring ownership to students, and feeling good about it!" noted Aliza Chanales, Assistant Principal of Yeshivat Noam.

Tracie Glazer, Head of Hillel Community Day School has seen changes across her school. "I was able to witness teachers applying new ideas and innovative practices in their classroom. My math teacher started utilizing station approaches and individualizing instruction in his classroom. My Judaic studies teacher for Kitah Aleph has consistently shared how valuable her time with a coach has been for her and her instruction."

Abrahams sees shared understanding of the time, space, support and resources needed to build capacity as critical to the strength of this partnership. "BetterLesson Coaches are professional, friendly and model teachers. It has been a pleasure to watch them work and to watch our teachers learn from them." With the partnership now in its third year, the focus is now on equipping schools to continue the initiative before the foundation sunset.