PUSHING AGAINST THE TEFILLAH CEILING

How does a Jewish Day School make Tefillah a meaningful experience for students? At Heilicher Minneapolis Jewish Day School (HMJDS), a leadership team comprised of faculty from all subject areas has experimented with different approaches to Tefillah. Here are some of their key learnings:

A School Siddur Can Inspire
A special HMJDS siddur, designed in part by students, creates a shared liturgy with which all students and their families feel comfortable. This is especially powerful in the younger grades and reflects the child-centered school culture. We found that the beautiful drawings produced by students of all ages inspires future generations of students to experience Tefillah enriched by the efforts of their peers.

Students like to “Own” Tefillah
Students engage more in Tefillah when they have opportunities to “own” it. HMJDS rotates groups of students in 7th and 8th grade who are given multiple days to plan how they will lead Tefillah for a few weeks at a time. We found that all students like the variation in Tefillah this creates, and the chance to ask questions during the planning sessions.

Tefillah Can Connect to Everyday Life
Across all grade levels and with minimal teacher prompting, we found that students’ Tefillah experiences were enriched by sicha (conversation), an opportunity to connect some aspect of that week’s parsha to concerns in the students’ lives.

The AVI CHAI Foundation
This infographic is based on the case study “Pushing Against the Tefillah Ceiling,” part of the series “20 Cases on Jewish Day Schools.” Read the full case study at https://avichai.org/areas/case-studies/pdf/Pushing-Against-the-Tefillah-Ceiling.html