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Beth Emet Synagogue Bulletin Article

As you may recall, our nursery school is in the process of re-accreditation by our professional organization, the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC). This is a lengthy and complex process, involving a detailed review and evaluation of every aspect of our program.

The deadline for submitting our paperwork is January 31, so by the time you read this, we will be done with our self-study and completion of candidacy materials. While this work has been our focus for the past 12 months, the goal is not simply re-accreditation, but the genuine evaluation and growth of our program.

While our program has an excellent reputation, we know that there is always room for improvement. So what changed as a result of the self-study?

- **Curriculum development:** We reviewed and revised our curriculum to clarify our goals and teaching strategies. This curriculum supports and enriches the work we've been doing with children and families.
- **Assessment:** For many years, we've been holding parent-teacher conferences twice a year, with a conversation in the fall and a written evaluation in the spring. Based on the NAEYC criteria and our understanding of best practice, our staff developed an assessment tool that teachers used to prepare for fall conferences this year. Not only did this give parents a better understanding of their child's experience at school, it also structures information for the teachers to use in planning.
- **Classroom materials:** The self-study process highlighted the importance of quality classroom materials in every area (literacy, drama, art, math, science, social studies, etc). For example, we discovered that our science program was lacking. To address this, we purchased materials to strengthen the science curriculum, and teachers met to evaluate and plan new methods of using these materials with children.
- **Judaica:** During our study of Chanukah last month, we extended and enriched the experience for our students, building on our new understandings. NAEYC encourages teachers to think of ways to bring in all curricular areas when teaching. For example, one class compared Chanukah, birthday, Shabbat and Havdalah candles, predicting and graphing the length of time each would burn. Another class put a variety of potatoes in the sensory table, so that in preparation for making latkes, the children would become familiar with the primary ingredient. Strengthening our connection with the larger community, some classes included tzedakah projects at their Chanukah parties, decorating T-shirts for Israeli soldiers, and place mats for the guests at the Beth Emet Soup Kitchen.

The final step in the accreditation process is the Site Visit, where all of our materials are reviewed to determine whether or not we meet the criteria. We'll keep you posted!