

THE HEILICHER MAGAZINE

A PUBLICATION OF THE AMOS & CELIA HEILICHER MINNEAPOLIS JEWISH DAY SCHOOL

Strength to Strength: Where We Go From Here

What's Next for Heilicher
Aimee Orkin's Sabbatical Reflections
Record-Breaking Fundraising



Enduring Values • Extraordinary Education



From the Acting Head of School



Dear Heilicher Families & Friends,

As we emerge from the worst of the COVID-19 pandemic, my heart is filled with awe and gratitude for how this school community rallied to get us to this point. The creativity and resilience of our teachers ensured that students received a top-quality education despite challenges posed by the pandemic. Our administrators showed great flexibility and care as they helped teachers and families navigate the unknown. Families worked in so many important ways to support the school and each other. Our students delighted us with their smiles (we could still see them under their masks) and unwavering enthusiasm for learning and friendships. *Kol HaKavod* (All the respect)! What a year!

So what's next? I'm excited to share my plans for the coming school year in my new role as Acting Head of School (page 4). It's also a pleasure to introduce you to my new educational leadership partner Dr. David Ackerman, who joined us this summer as the Director of Jewish Living and Learning (facing page). David's expertise and fresh perspective have already made a meaningful impact on our plans for a robust year of Jewish Studies.

We welcome the leadership of Robyn Schein, a Heilicher parent and volunteer leader for many years, who is now Board President (page 5). One critical initiative we're pursuing is a year-long examination of racial justice, inclusion, and diversity as we confront our personal biases and our institutional ones. We as a staff are working on this with consultant Joelle Allen, CEO of Interaction Traction Inc., and look forward to involving parents and students in the work as it progresses (page 6).

Our theme for this issue is "Strength to Strength," and one measure of our strength is financial health. We are grateful to announce record-breaking fundraising totals this year that helped sustain us through a most challenging time. We'd like to keep that momentum going with our Annual Benefit on October 10 as we honor Stacy Pinck and Brad Birnberg, and Jill and Jon Halper, for their dedicated service to Heilicher (page 15). Please join us!

May the Jewish New Year 5782 bring you and your families good health, happiness, and strength.

L'shanah tovah,

Maia

Maia Poling, Acting Head of School

Meet David Ackerman, Director of Jewish Living and Learning

In May, we sat down with our new Director of Jewish Living and Learning, Dr. David Ackerman.

David recently relocated to Minneapolis from New Jersey, where he was Director of JCC Association's Mandel Center for Jewish Education. He brings a strong background in Jewish school leadership, having served as the Educational Director of a comprehensive synagogue school system in Los Angeles, the Associate Dean of the Fingerhut School of Education at the University of Judaism, and the Director of Educational Services for the Bureau of Jewish Education of Greater Los Angeles. He holds a doctorate in special education.

What are you most looking forward to in your new role?

I'm excited about the opportunity to help young people tackle the big questions they have about navigating life in the 21st century. I look forward to introducing them to the ways Jews have both asked and answered those questions over the centuries. It is exciting to help people feel rooted in a tradition while taking on responsibility for contributing to the evolution and continued vibrancy of that tradition.

I look forward to bringing my "fresh eyes" to the work the school has underway and to experiencing different ways of doing things I might not have considered before. I'm eager to bring what I can offer based on my background and experience but also to see what I can learn from Heilicher and the Minneapolis community.

What were your most meaningful personal Jewish educational experiences?

My most important influences were Jewish summer camp (Camp Yavneh and Camp Ramah in California) and,

honestly, just sitting at the dining room table. My father (z"l) was a renowned Jewish educator and camp director. My mother (z"l) was a psychiatric social worker by profession and was the "camp mom" (yes, that was an official title!). Family dinners were analogous to a master class on Jewish education. Israel was another formative influence. I grew up in a Zionist home and lived in Israel in 11th grade when my father was on sabbatical. After the outbreak of the 1973 war, I left college temporarily and went to Israel to work as a volunteer on Kibbutz Nirim.

What aspects of Heilicher's Jewish Studies program will you focus on first?

I'm excited about Israel education. Also, I have spent a lot of time thinking about *t'filah* (prayer/worship) and why it can be such a struggle. I am interested in children's spiritual development. How can we nurture that in a world hungry for meaning but often unwilling to explore tough topics?

I have read a great deal these past few years about text learning in Jewish life. How can we help people not only engage with the text but also develop a sense of ownership and feel this text is theirs? How can text study help young people see themselves as active participants in the ongoing story of the Jewish people?

Can you tell us a little bit about your family?

I have three grown children—Adina, Benja, and Aaron. Adina lives in Durango, Colorado, with her husband, Sean, and their two daughters, Eleanor and Ruby. Benja lives in Los Angeles and works in design and sales. Aaron is a human-factors cognitive researcher who lives in Concord, California (San Francisco Bay Area) with his wife, Lynn.



Dr. David Ackerman

What do you like to do in your spare time?

My primary hobby is music. I play guitar, mandolin, and Baroque recorder. I specialize in Yiddish folk music, Klezmer music, and Israeli folk songs. I love to cycle and enjoy photography and baking: I've been working my way through the Jewish canon of babka, rugelach, mandelbrot, and strudel throughout COVID!

What are you most excited about in Minnesota?

I am most excited about the adventure of coming to a new place, making new friends, and establishing a new community for myself.

David looks forward to meeting Heilicher families and can be reached at dackerman@hmjds.org.

Moving Ahead Strength to Strength

BY MAIA POLING



Maia Poling

Now that we're moving into a more "normal" school year at Heilicher, it's exciting to examine the opportunities in front of us. We don't have a road map for how a day school reemerges from a global pandemic. I wish we did! As much as we might

want to return to the way it used to be, that's neither possible nor advisable. We've learned so much this past year and a half, and we need to apply those lessons toward building the school's future. So, what were the lessons and how are we going to apply them?

The pandemic allowed us to rediscover how valuable our teachers are. In my view, a school is only as strong as its faculty, and we are so fortunate to have such a strong faculty at Heilicher. Moving forward, we're doubling down on professional development (PD), which we necessarily put on hold for the most part during the pandemic. Investment in the ongoing development of our teachers and their craft is essential to our mission.

We have come to realize that the transition from pandemic life will not be an easy road for some students. Our knowledge of students' neurodiversity is growing. With this in mind, we created new faculty positions and programs to address these emerging needs.

Through PD and our Student Services Department, we are committed to creating classroom environments that support all types of learners. Two new teacher leadership roles will support teachers and students in providing the best academic experience possible. An instructional curricular coach

will examine how each curriculum is applied and offer training on best practices and innovative approaches to reach every student. An enrichment specialist will create engaging and challenging programs as enhancements to the curriculum for students who would benefit from them. Our goal is to provide proper supports for each student's successful academic and social journey through eighth grade.

After quarantine and online preschool, we foresee that our incoming kindergarten class may have an unusually wide range of abilities, experiences, and social-emotional needs. To ensure each kindergartener's success, we are pioneering a K-Plus model at Heilicher. K-Plus provides one additional kindergarten teacher (not assistant teacher) for General Studies. K-Plus allows for better differentiation for each learner, more small group activities, and added enhancement and support opportunities for our youngest students.

Finally, last year we learned how to rely on our Heilicher Core Values as our north star. *Kol Yisrael Arevim Zeh B'Zeh*, we are all responsible for one another, was a guiding principle of school leadership through the pandemic. It was a marvel to watch our Heilicher teachers, students, administrators, families, and community members care for one another.

To this value I would add one more: *Lo Alecha*, it is not entirely upon you. During the past 18 months, we had to let go of our best laid plans, time-tested class projects, and some of our favorite pastimes. Some of us may have lost family members. In the letting go, we grieved, but, hopefully, we were also able to embrace some welcome surprises—the joy of seeing a friend after a long period of separation, the wonders of the outdoors, and special family bonds. We are taking bold steps forward—together. I have 100% confidence in the Heilicher team to press forward from a position of strength into what's next.



Maia shares reading time with incoming third grader Annie B.

Q&A With Heilicher Board President Robyn Schein

Maia Poling is Acting Head of School, a position she feels lucky to hold. "I am grateful for the community's trust in me and for the fantastic team I'm privileged to call my colleagues and my friends," she shared.

Maia and her family (and dog Bowie) live in Southwest Minneapolis. They enjoy spending time in the backyard, playing football at the Rose Garden, biking, swimming, and anything Wisconsin sports related.



Maia, her husband, Patrick, and their sons, Otto (7) and Adrian (10), pose in the sun on a family trip to Arizona.



Robyn Schein

Robyn Schein, philanthropy professional, mom of three Heilicher students, and long-time member of the Heilicher Board of Trustees, became Heilicher

president in July. We caught up with her to find out about her aspirations for the day school.

What excites you most about this new role?

I'm most excited to be moving out of COVID-19. Through lots of hard work and dedication, Heilicher was able to thrive over the last 18 months, and we have done a great job in a difficult situation. It's an exciting time to think about what we learned over this period of crisis and to now be able to say intentionally, "What do we want to accomplish?"

What are some of your priorities over the next two years?

At this moment, we have a chance to take stock and consider the future we want to create for Heilicher. Some of the things I'm thinking about are:

- Navigating change as we are coming out of the pandemic and experiencing school leadership transition.
- The school's organizational work around diversity, equity, and inclusion.
- Reenergizing our endowment campaign to ensure the financial sustainability of the school.
- Volunteer roles and how can we make them meaningful and impactful.
- Taking time to hear from our stakeholders and families. What do they care about? What do they hope for?

Looking five years ahead, what would you like Heilicher to look like?

I don't have a crystal ball, but in my ideal 2026, Heilicher would:

- Be continuing on the path toward financial sustainability.
- See an increase in enrollment.
- Have more robust involvement and engagement of parents in the school.
- Continue to deliver on the product of an excellent education.
- Be viewed as an enduring community asset.

What's something that you think you'll always remember about Heilicher even long after your children graduate?

Each of my three kids is a distinct learner. I've loved and been grateful that the school meets each of them where they are. They each get the attention, pedagogy, and approach that works best for them. The teachers have also helped me as a parent to see their strengths and differences and to adapt how to support them at home. I am so grateful the teachers have seen my kids for the individuals that they are.

Anything else you'd like to share with the Heilicher community?

I take this leadership opportunity seriously, and I hold the role with a lot of honor. This is an indisputably unique and challenging period of time, yet I am confident that my kids are in the right school, getting a values-based education within a Jewish context. Their Heilicher education will help them navigate and make positive changes in this wild world. I believe strongly in the school's ability to do this, and I want to help ensure that future generations of Heilicher students will be able to benefit from our hard work today.

A Deep Examination of Diversity and Inclusion



Joelle Allen

Heilicher is embarking on a comprehensive examination of diversity and inclusion guided by consultant Joelle Allen, CEO of Interaction Traction Inc. Joelle has spent her career educating and coaching on diversity and inclusion to

businesses and nonprofits. She has worked with scores of organizations, both in the Twin Cities and throughout the country.

“It’s an honor to be able to help Heilicher kick-start and develop new goals for diversity and inclusion,” said Joelle. “It will be wonderful to see what positive changes will be catalyzed by this work.”

Over the course of this year, the faculty, staff, and board will delve into issues of diversity and inclusion and formulate goals. As a first step, Joelle will guide our faculty and staff through a school-focused Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI), which is a tool to provide insights on how people make sense of cultural differences and also how they respond to them.

The results will help Heilicher identify and implement school-wide goals for progress in this area and will guide the school in furthering diversity education for the Heilicher community. Areas of focus may include racial literacy, microaggressions, integrating diversity into the curriculum, external messaging, and inclusive leadership.

“Building a truly inclusive school requires a deep dive into our personal and institutional biases,” said Acting Head of School Maia Poling. “We are fortunate to have Joelle to help us in our ongoing work toward becoming a more welcoming community.”



Heilicher Highlights



TOP ROW

Our 2020-21 faculty and staff gather following the last day of school to celebrate staff milestones and wrap up the school year together.

MIDDLE ROW

Only R-S shows her beautiful *talit*, which she created for her Bat Mitzvah. Sixth graders create *talitot* (prayer shawls) and other ritual objects using batik technique.

Fifth graders enjoy biking to get ice cream together as a special treat for the last week of school.

Iris M. and other second graders engineer boats to learn about buoyancy as part of their science unit on properties of materials.

BOTTOM ROW

In honor of Earth Day, sixth graders have an outdoor adventure around Cedar Lake.

First grader Na'amah S-R works on clay Judaica creations in Art class.

Matthew D. takes part in an eighth-grade challenge to design and build a thermos that could keep water warm for 30 minutes—part of the study of thermal energy and heat transfer.

First grader Louie H. shares his artwork based on Heilicher values: "You can be nice by being helpful."



Everything Clicks for Adam Ward



Adam Ward

Kids everywhere love to play with LEGO® bricks, as they are among the most popular and enduring toys. Adam Ward, who attended Heilicher in the early 1990s through fifth grade, has made a whole career out of LEGO, inspiring a new generation of youth and adults to build, create, and explore.

Adam first became interested in LEGO at the age of two, and the interlocking building blocks continued to be a passion for him throughout childhood. After mostly taking a break from LEGO during high school and college, Adam reconnected with it in his mid-20s while living as an actor and writer in Los Angeles and seeking to decorate his apartment. He used his childhood LEGO to build practical items for his home, including bedside tables, coasters, and lamps. Adam quickly realized that LEGO bricks were not only useful but a great outlet for his tremendous energy and creativity.

Adam began posting his creations online, and, fueled by a Kickstarter campaign, he soon launched an online business, Adam Builds (now called Peace + Bricks). Through his business, Adam customized and built special-order household items from LEGO. In 2015, Adam launched a video series,

“Brick x Brick,” with how-to instructions for building a wide variety of practical, creative, and decorative LEGO items. This highly popular show ran for four years and confirmed what Adam knew to be true—LEGO can be a great outlet for people of all ages.

In December 2020, Adam released his first book, *Brick x Brick: How to Build Amazing Things with 100-ish Bricks or Fewer* (Penguin Randomhouse). This book gives children and adults instructions for fun LEGO builds and crafts, along with trivia, micro-challenges, and advice to boost people’s creative confidence. Adam also continues to create and sell larger structures and artwork out of LEGO bricks and works with the LEGO company on a variety of content and promotions, including for the show “LEGO Masters,” where teams compete to build the best LEGO projects.

Reflecting on his Heilicher experience, Adam said that he felt very special there and has particularly fond memories of

Helen Siegel (who retired as Associate Head of School in 2017), and Elly Becker (a long-time faculty member who retired in 2018). Not surprisingly, he also recalls having fun in the art room—and always making a mess!

One of Adam’s core beliefs is that whatever we need, we have around us. Growing up, there was no such thing as a LEGO Ninja Turtle, so Adam had to create one! “Creative people do not believe in object fixedness,” said Adam. “Instead, creative people will see many different uses for an object. LEGO allows us to see items as possibilities. The past 1.5 years has taught us that pivoting and ‘making magic’ with what we have is the best way to maintain sanity, and LEGO is the perfect vehicle for doing that.”

Adam and his wife, Stacey, live in Los Angeles with their two rad daughters, Plum and Storey. To see more of Adam’s work, visit his website www.peaceandbricks.com and follow him on Instagram at @peaceandbricks.



Mazal tov and l'hitraot (until we see you again) **to the Heilicher graduating class of 2021**



A few parting words excerpted from eighth-grade graduation essays:

“When I first walked through the Heilicher halls at the beginning of first grade, I was nervous, I didn’t know anyone, and didn’t have any friends. The class brought me into their community and they became my family.”

—*Dahlia H.*

“From reading with Ms. Ziessman in kindergarten to talking about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict with Wendy [this year], you helped me learn, inform, and grow as a student. This is something I am grateful for, and I wouldn’t be here today without all of my teachers.”

—*Micah S.*

“Heilicher has not only taught me about the core value of ‘Get yourself a mentor and make yourself a friend,’ but it has also taught me about what it truly means to be a mentor and a friend to other people.”

—*Sarah T.*

“I am very grateful to Heilicher for giving me the confidence to be able to move on to the next [step]—high school—stronger than ever. Thank you.”

—*Josh F.*

“Probably what this school does best is accepting everybody for who they are.”

—*Jack S.*

Heilicher Class of 2017 alumni are taking their next steps at these colleges, universities, and other experiences this fall. *Mazal tov!*

- Carleton College
- Fashion Institute of Technology
- Gap Year/Johns Hopkins University
- Indiana University
- Lewis & Clark College
- Minnesota State University–Moorehead
- Olin Business School at Washington University in St. Louis
- Rice University
- Southeast Missouri State University
- University of California–Los Angeles
- University of Kansas
- University of Miami
- University of Minnesota–Twin Cities
- University of Wisconsin–Madison
- Vanderbilt University
- Wellesley College

Listings are those known by Heilicher at the time of publication.

My Life-Changing Sabbatical

BY AIMEE ORKIN



Aimee Orkin

The idea of a sabbatical year emerged through my participation in a national Jewish day school teacher institute for the arts conference in 2017-2019 generously funded by an anonymous foundation. The institute showcased high-level curricula integrating Judaic Studies and Art. I met so many inspirational artists and teachers there, including Judaic artists David Moss and Rabbi Matt Berkowitz, who motivated me to more deeply examine my own teaching methods and Judaic art practice.

With more than 25 years of teaching and Judaic art making under my belt, I approached Heilicher administration with the idea of taking some time off from my classroom to pursue Judaic Studies and art in new ways. The sabbatical, which I took in 2019-2020, gave me the time to study Hebrew and prayer, travel to Israel, work with a variety of mentors, and create new art collaborations.

During this time, I studied prayer with Rabbi Debra Rappaport and Rabbi Arielle Lekach-Rosenberg of Shir Tikvah and Lon Rosenfield from Adath Jeshurun and other local scholars. I led workshops and created an art exhibit on the theme of Visual Prayer with my Interfaith Artist Circle. The exhibit has toured online and in person and is displayed at the University of Minnesota Wilson Library (through October 1, 2021) and then will be shown at St. Thomas More Catholic Church and School in St. Paul. You can see the exhibit online through the University of Minnesota and the Jay Phillips Centers for Interreligious Studies and Interfaith Learning at the University of St. Thomas and Saint John's University, respectively, at bit.ly/3tgoIys.

I received a Schochet Family Jewish Educator Grant to travel to Israel during my sabbatical and had an artist residency at the Kol HaOt art gallery in the Hutzot HaYotzer (Artists' Colony) located outside the gates of Jerusalem's Old City. I continued to work with mentors David Moss and Rabbi Matt Berkowitz and also studied with a Hebrew calligrapher and a rabbinic student teacher.

Before I left for Jerusalem, I led a collaborative art project resulting in an "Interfaith Prayer Wall," a 6-by-9-foot canvas featuring original artwork by 18 women artists of Jewish, Christian, and Muslim faiths. The backdrop features architectural forms reminiscent of important prayer walls from three major world religions. Especially in this time of religious and political strife, I wanted to create art that reminds us of our human connections and common hopes for the future.

The "Interfaith Prayer Wall" was first exhibited at the Kol HaOt gallery and is part of the Visual Prayer exhibit currently at the Wilson Library. This wall has been reserved already for three more installations with interactive projects to build interfaith bonds through the arts. I hope to bring those interfaith connections back to Heilicher in the coming years.

The sabbatical broadened my artistic and pedagogic circles and allowed

me to take a deep dive into my own spirituality and artistic development. I returned fresh and energized to take my craft to a new level and to bring my learnings back to Heilicher. Despite the emergence of the pandemic, I was able to develop new facets of the Heilicher art curriculum incorporating Hebrew calligraphy, Judaic art, and visual prayer.

I'm ever grateful to the Heilicher community for their investment in my development, and I look forward to continuing to share my experiences and nurture my students' creativity into the future.



Aimee stands with Israeli artist and mentor Hannah Yakin (second from left) and other gallery visitors in front of Aimee's "Judaic Prayer Wall."



On the first day Kol HaOt exhibited the "Interfaith Prayer Wall," several Arab college students from East Jerusalem visited and enjoyed the Islamic-inspired imagery. They returned the next day with more of their family members.

Another project that came to fruition during Aimee's sabbatical was a website for her Interfaith Artist Circle (www.interfaithartistcircle.com) designed by Heilicher alumna Shoshana (Rosie) Mann. You can view Aimee's Judaic art, and that of women artists from multiple faiths, on the website.

For more photos and videos from Aimee's sabbatical, please visit the Heilicher Blog on hmjds.org.

Get To Know the Silvers

When Alicia Silver (née Gedan) and her husband Brady began looking for a school for their elder son Edan, they searched for robust academics, great teachers, and a supportive community. They had to look no further than Heilicher.

Edan will be joining the Heilicher kindergarten class this fall, and the family couldn't be more excited. "Because of the pandemic, Edan hasn't even been able to tour the school, and yet he wakes up every morning asking to go to Heilicher," Alicia said.

Alicia is an alumna of the Minneapolis Jewish Day School, as it was then known. Her kindergarten teacher was Niza Schear, who also taught her sons at the Beth El Aleph Preschool (and who returned to teach second grade at Heilicher during the 2020-21 school year). "It's a close-knit community," she pointed out. "My hope is Edan will also experience close connections with his teachers as I did."

Alicia remembers the warm and welcoming environment, emphasis on community building, and the friendships she made at MJDS. "Some of these friendships have lasted a lifetime," she said.

"I remember how family life extended into the Jewish life at MJDS," Alicia recalled. "My parents would come for every Kabbalat Shabbat, and many of their closest family friends were day school parents." Today, Shabbat dinners



Brady and Alicia Silver with sons, Eyal (3) and Edan (5)

and holiday celebrations with family are a centerpiece of the Silvers' Jewish practice. They look forward to how Heilicher will help Edan feel even more grounded in Jewish history and heritage.

Alicia remembers the many public speaking opportunities she had as a young student at MJDS. She credits these early experiences with plays, music performances, oral reports, and debates for her ability to speak in public, which is a big part of her current health policy job.

When looking at schools, the Silvers were impressed by Heilicher's Jewish community, small class sizes, and opportunities for one-on-one

connections with teachers. "I can hardly believe how much the school has changed and developed over the years," Alicia said. "We feel Edan will be able to grow, learn healthy independence, and be known at Heilicher."

Alicia, Brady, Edan, and younger brother Eyal reside in Minnetonka. Their favorite hobbies are getting outdoors and traveling (one of which they were able to do during the pandemic). They look forward to an opportunity to get involved and meet new families this fall. "We know Edan will love kindergarten, and we can't wait to see the friendships he develops," Alicia said. Welcome, Silvers!

"My hope is Edan will also experience close connections with his teachers as I did."

Heilicher Donors

JULY 1, 2020 THROUGH JUNE 30, 2021

We extend our deep gratitude to the 460 donors who supported Heilicher with generous philanthropic gifts during this unusual pandemic year. Heilicher raised over \$3.8 million this year including both endowment contributions and annual gifts, which represents our highest fundraising achievement ever. This success was particularly notable given that Heilicher did not hold an Annual Benefit during the 2020-21 school year (please see page 15 for information on our upcoming gala on October 10, 2021).

The below list reflects all monetary donations to Heilicher during the last fiscal year. We apologize if any donor was inadvertently left off this list.

For corrections or questions about philanthropy, please contact Institutional Advancement Director Rebecca Skelton at 952.381.3503 or rskelton@hmjds.org. We welcome online contributions at hmjds.org/donate.

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Mike Zis and Deb Olkon with their children, (L to R) Saul, Meyer, and Abe

2021 ANNUAL FUND

Led by our Annual Fund Co-Chairs Deb Olkon and Mike Zis, as well as their parents, Ellis and Nancy Olkon and Burt and Gayle Zis, we had the most successful Annual Fund achievement in Heilicher history. The Annual Fund closed on June 30, 2021, at just over \$578,000 from 334 donors. We are honored and humbled by the generosity of the Heilicher community, which helped to bolster the school during this unique year.

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