Dear Families,

I am eager to provide you with some information about the summer and updates as we plan for the fall at the Weinstein JCC Preschool.

For over three weeks, we have been successfully open for preschoolers and continue to be pleased with the overwhelming joy we see in our children and faculty reconnecting.

Our educators are paramount to the success of our program, and we honor their relationships through dedicated time each afternoon to communicate and grow professionally. In creating a new program during the COVID-19 pandemic, we knew it was vital to build time into our schedule after children leave for the day so faculty can connect, de-brief, share insights, update each other, and reflect through meaningful dialogue.

No one knew how reopening during COVID-19 after 3 months away would affect children and faculty. We intentionally planned ways to connect to understand and honor the sacred relationships between school and families, and we are constantly observing the children’s growth to learn along with them.

**Teacher as Researcher**

The Reggio Emilia Approach continues to inspire us in our ever-changing context, and currently, Professional Development Director Lisa Plotkin and I are focusing with the faculty on the concept of the Teacher as Researcher.

Having highlighted for the past year “Moments of Wonder,” we extend the idea of presence and hit’orerut (gratitude, wonder) into our ongoing observations of and with children. Children are born to search and research (Rinaldi, 2017) their world, and so are we as educators. Based on our observations and reflection of the successful current summer program, we hope to carry forward what our community (parents/caregivers) needs and what our experts (educators) have discovered about the needs of the children at this time.

“Teacher research is liberating and empowering inquiry that allows teachers and teacher educators to take their lives as teachers seriously, to generate knowledge and understanding that can improve teaching and create a more democratic and equitable learning community. Most important, teacher inquiry allows teachers to simultaneously study their teaching, their students, and themselves—the images they hold of children as learners and themselves as teachers—and as a result, it allows the possibility of transformation and renewal.” (Stremmel)
In reflection and as part of our shared masa (journey), we have observed many positive changes and enhanced enthusiasm in our children this summer. Here are several:

- Individual confidence levels in children have increased.
- Children have grown emotionally and socially, appearing more at ease.
- Children have adapted easily to the new systems and program.
- Children have found successful ways to express themselves.
- They have shown increased adaptability to new situations.
- Happiness and creativity are more prevalent than ever!

Through ongoing observation and reflection, we believe these changes are due in part to:

- lower teacher/child ratios
- shorter length of day
- consistent teaching teams throughout the day
- fewer transitions (no early morning, late afternoon, or switching from Preschool to Lunch Bunch or Childcare).

Additionally, other unique circumstances could be affecting what we notice:

- The children and faculty were away from school for three months, missing school and their routines, and missing teachers and friends.
- Could the effect of being home for three months, in a cocoon-type environment and developing closer bonds with family members, impact children?
- Children and educators have returned to a program with a major emphasis on outdoor experiences for much more time than before, not only for current health and safety needs, but also for the benefit of deeply connecting to the natural world.
- The faculty are very relaxed, enthusiastic, less-stressed, and HAPPY. They love having more time to get to know each child, spending quality, relaxed time outdoors, playing and exploring in nature.

It is through all of these observations and continued research that we are delighted to offer our revised and enhanced Preschool 2020-21 program to families, reflecting the extremely high quality of our educators and experiences we provide for children and families.

I hope you will join me in the next step of our school’s journey!

Donna Peters
Early Childhood Director