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Orlando educators participate in 'Hidden Sparks' program

Teachers from Orlando Torah Academy are taking part in an elite training program to better address the social and emotional needs of their students whose academic year will start off differently due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Hidden Sparks, a nonprofit dedicated to training teachers and providing them with the tools to support struggling students in mainstream Jewish day schools, is conducting the training, which focuses on Social Emotional Learning, and is helping teachers establish classroom routines which could be easily transitioned online if local authorities and administrators deem it necessary for the school to move to a virtual learning model. The program will take place over several months.

As part of the training, Hidden Sparks SEL Coach Lily Howard Scott, MS, is working with teachers in Orlando Torah Academy during the back-to-school season to help them prepare their students for success in the coming year. The program's goals are to empower teachers with strategies to support students' emotional responses to the pandemic and to train teachers on how to establish new classroom routines and practices that boost students sense of connection, engagement and investment at school.

Scott is a teacher as well as a curriculum developer. Her work, both written and video-based, has been used in graduate school programs and professional development seminars around the country. She is a graduate of Northwestern University and Bank Street College of Education.

“Research shows that the way students feel in the classroom is inextricably linked to how well they perform educationally, and that their social and emotional wellbeing is tethered to their academic wellbeing,” said Hidden Sparks Executive Director Debbie Niderberg. “We’re thrilled that Lily is guiding our educators on how to welcome their students back to school and how to talk about pandemic. Given that students are most successful when they feel connected to and a sense of belonging in their classes, she is also helping teachers to nurture caring and connected classrooms for all pupils.”

The workshops will include strategies for both virtual and in-person classrooms. Throughout the months of August and September, Lily Howard Scott met virtually with the faculty team and will continue to consult with and further train educators based on the needs of their specific students and classrooms.

Founded in 2006, Hidden Sparks is a nonprofit organization dedicated to helping teachers and schools educate struggling learners. Through professional development programs and on-site coaching for teachers, it helps educators deepen their understanding of learning and approaches for teaching all kinds of learners, particularly those who struggle. With 110 participating day schools and a total of 3,875 educators trained by the Hidden Sparks curriculum, the organization has impacted a total of 47,450 students since its inception. For more information please visit: www.hidden-sparks.org.

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