

NGO assists Jewish day schools with tips to address mental health

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By JERUSALEM POST STAFF FEBRUARY 9, 2021 10:58



Residents of Hasidic Williamsburg have largely returned to pre-pandemic life, as seen on Sept. 29, 2020. (photo credit: DANIEL MORITZ-RABSON)

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Around 100 educators from Jewish day [schools](#) in the United States joined the "Hidden Sparks" program to address mental health amid the coronavirus pandemic.

The educators, met virtually with representatives from the Hidden Sparks non-profit, whose main goal is to ensure that the school officials have the tools and training they need to support students in mainstream Jewish schools.

Participating educators had the opportunity to choose from 11 lecture options, covering topics such as art therapy exercises in the classroom to teacher's self-care and personal growth.

The educators, from nine states and 45 schools, hailing from New York, New Jersey, Maryland, Arizona, Florida, Illinois, Missouri, Texas and Rhode Island, serve schools with non-denominational communities to hasidic students.

The school officials heard from speakers such as the dean of the Azrieli Graduate School of Jewish Education and Administration at Yeshiva University, co-educational director for Hidden Sparks Rona Novick and Hidden Sparks' Social Emotional Learning Coach Lily Howard Scott as well as other Hidden Sparks coaches.

Hidden Sparks has spent the past year monitoring Jewish day [schools](#) as the pandemic rages on, compiling information and methods to better assist educators and students within their overall classroom experiences. The topic of mental health was chosen directly in response to said findings.

"Fortunately, many yeshivas and day schools have managed, through careful planning, to stay open for most of the year, but this whole period has been especially challenging for our teachers," said Hidden Sparks executive director Debbie Niderberg. "It was very clear to us that the focus for our retreat this year had to begin with strategies for teacher self care, and then expand to how do I bring these strategies into my classroom.

"There has been such a focus on academic learning loss this year, but in reality there have been so many other kinds of loss that we have experienced through this time, and we recognize how important self care strategies and mental health sensitivity are for teachers and students," she said.