

OCA AIMS Evaluation Report Summary

AIMS presented the final report, based on the accreditation team's review of our Self-Study and site visit in March.

The team congratulates us on a job well done! They were pleased with our Self-Study and applaud us for both our School's seriousness about the process and our high standards.

From the AIMS Visiting Team Evaluation Report:

The Visiting Team could not have been more warmly welcomed at Ohr Chadash Academy and we thoroughly enjoyed our visit. Head of School Dr. Deborah Rapoport and her colleagues as well as board members, parents, and students all went out of their way to make us feel a part of this vibrant and forward-looking community. We send them our sincere thanks.

- OCA's commitment to Orthodox Judaism, Zionism, and academic excellence in both Judaic and general studies, is unique within the Baltimore Jewish community. Their mission is well crafted to serve the needs of each aspect of their community and is clearly reflected in the school and all that it does, in the class and out. The school fills an important need and has created a sense of family for their community, which the parents and school families appreciate being part of.
- The school has created a warm, Torah-centered environment that supports all its members. The students are happy to come to school, and know that their teachers are there to support them in every way. The result is a school culture that creates confident young adults who are ready to forge their own identities, and be leaders within their communities. They are committed to Torah and to all learning. They recognize and appreciate the support they receive from their teachers. The teachers report that they feel equally supported by their division leaders and feel comfortable to take risks in the classroom. They too are happy to come to school.
- The change in leadership in 2019 gave the school the opportunity to refine its direction and strengthen its core values. Under Dr. Rapoport's leadership, the school has done just that. A true teacher at heart, she has brought a clear vision and passion for excellence that has formed the new vision for the school. The entire staff and administration engaged in genuine self-reflection and teamwork to bring that vision to fruition. The school not only encourages a growth mindset in your students, they role modeled that in their own work.

Two themes emerged from the Self-Study and the conversations and observations we made during our visit.

1. Institutional Growth

Institutional advancement has made tremendous strides in the past few years. By turning attention to finance, fine tuning administrative structure, and continuing to look for a new facility, the school will be on track to achieve its full potential. Ohr Chadash has had wonderful enrollment growth coupled with a physical space limitation. In overcoming this and other challenges, the School demonstrated admirable resilience, flexibility, and adaptability. As mentioned earlier, this can, in large part, be attributed to the strength of the Board, the Head of School, and the community working together. This is very apparent in the way the administration, faculty, and staff enthusiastically pitch in to cover a myriad of educational and operational responsibilities with a relatively small number of individuals. Wearing many hats is the norm.

It is clear that in order to continue to grow and enrich the program, they will need to explore opportunities for new building opportunities and continued commitment to the mission, both mentioned in the Self-Study.

2. Educational Excellence

OCA is a school that strives for educational excellence which reflects in the enthusiasm we sensed in the classrooms. They have made tremendous strides in recent years under the leadership of Dr. Deborah Rapoport, with the rest of the administration all pulling in the same direction. Teachers have risen to the challenge of the revised Educational Philosophy and are eager to share their successes.

As the Board and Head of School continue to plan for educational excellence, the Visiting Team recommends that OCA:

- a. continue to develop their staff through formalizing a program for professional development as well as a comprehensive mentoring program for all new teachers.
- b. continue to develop their curricula, in both Jewish and general studies, and pursue curricular alignment across all grades.
- c. continue to evaluate pedagogical practices, and support teachers in implementing these practices with the delivery of instruction.

The visiting team recommends continuing to focus on staff development, curriculum development, and implementing best practices.

The Visiting Team would like to commend the entire Ohr Chadash community for the very thorough and thoughtful way in which they approached the Self-Study process. A number of individuals said how beneficial the process was in clarifying issues and helping point to paths forward. We also greatly appreciate the openness with which they approached all of their conversations with us. We also want to officially acknowledge the important role that Dr. Deborah Rapoport played in this process. It was her vision, and her drive that made it happen.

A particular highlight to the visiting team was speaking with the students. Their obvious joy and pride in their school reinforced what the team had been hearing throughout the visit; the OCA community is one that lets students and staff shine brightly. To quote one student, “the school feels like a big family.”