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News Release

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Contact: Adam Hertzman

E-mail: ahertzman@jfedpgh.org

Direct Dial: 412.992.5225

JEWISH EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATORS FROM PITTSBURGH STUDIED EDUCATIONAL PHILOSOPHY IN REGGIO EMILIA, ITALY

PITTSBURGH, PA—12 Jewish early childhood educators just returned to Pittsburgh from a study seminar, *Exploring Reggio through a Jewish Lens*, in Italy (October 19 - 29). The Reggio Emilia Approach is an educational philosophy based on the image of the child, and of human beings, as possessing strong potentials for development and as subjects of rights who learn and grow in the relationships with others.

Seminar participants visited the Reggio Emilia infant-toddler centers and learned about some of the research projects carried out there. Research includes the image of “the competent child,” teachers as researchers, observation, children with special rights, the role of the environment and the pedagogy of listening.

Director of Early Childhood Education at the Jewish Federation of Greater Pittsburgh and seminar leader Carolyn Linder explains that the Reggio Emilia Approach is an innovative and inspiring approach to early childhood education, valuing the child as strong, capable and resilient as well as rich with wonder and knowledge. This approach supports collaboration on all levels and nurtures individuality.

“Our work focuses on supporting educators and directors on their journeys to become more focused on child-centered learning with an emphasis on discovery and play and to elevate the image of the child in their practice,” Linder said. “We are deeply inspired by the principles of the Reggio Emilia approach to early childhood education and guided by the Jewish values and culture within the context of each center’s unique community.”

The objective of this immersive study seminar was to deepen their understanding of the pedagogy of the Reggio Approach and connect it to the values and content of their own local Jewish Early Childhood programs.

This seminar marked the first time that local Jewish early childhood educators traveled to Reggio Emilia, Italy in order to learn from and be in dialogue with the educators in Reggio, to visit the schools in Reggio and to participate in many discussion groups with their Italian and North American colleagues. They joined 51 other Jewish early-childhood educators from Boston, Chicago, District of Columbia, Maryland and Israel.

“Reggio Emilia is perhaps the only city in the world that specializes in the field of Early Childhood Education. Over the decades their educators, citizens and civic leaders have

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made countless thoughtful choices that have supported the growth of extraordinary schools. We too make daily choices impacting the lives of children. As educators we are inspired by the Reggio concept of *intentionality*, [which is also] the Jewish concept of *kavana*,” Director, Temple Emanuel Early Childhood Development Center, Iris Harlan elaborated.

The Pittsburgh group included early-childhood professionals from Beth Shalom Early Learning Center, Rodef Shalom Family Center Preschool, the Jewish Community Center’s Squirrel Hill Early Childhood Development Center, Temple Ohav Shalom Center for Early Learning, Temple Emanuel Early Childhood Development Center, The Early Childhood program at Community Day School (CDS), The Early Learning Center at Yeshiva, and The Isadore Josophowitz Early Childhood Center at Hillel Academy, together with two local Pittsburgh Jewish Early Childhood Education Initiative (JECEI)/Bonim Beyachad consultants.

Upon returning, each cohort participant was challenged to introduce at least one change in their school or classroom from something that sparked inspiration in the seminar. On a community level, the Pittsburgh cohort will participate in two collaborative outcomes from the seminar that will be facilitated by Linder:

- The cohort will work collaboratively to create a document to be shared with colleagues and families that explores in depth the deep connections between Judaism and the Reggio Emilia approach. They will be tying this document to our Shared Communal Goals for Excellence in Jewish Early Childhood Education.
- The cohort will work collaboratively to create a piece of documentation that chronicles the Pittsburgh JECEI/Bonim Beyachad journey for the past nine years. This piece of documentation will then be publically displayed at each of the nine Pittsburgh JECEI/Bonim Beyachad ECE Centers.

The seminar enlightened and inspired many that attended, Assistant Director, Squirrel Hill Jewish Community Center; Annabelle Rubinstein Early Childhood Development Center Gina Crough was among these attendees.

“There is no simple way to communicate the deep and lifelong impact that this seminar will not only have on me, but also Early Childhood at the JCC. I feel encouraged, empowered, and excited to share and collaborate with my colleagues as we continue on a journey of discovery and innovation through best practices in early childhood education,” Crough said.

Local participation in the seminar was made possible thanks to the generous support of The Dr. Solomon and Sarah Goldberg Memorial Endowment Fund of the Jewish Community Foundation of the Jewish Federation of Greater Pittsburgh.

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