

On Thursday, June 3, we celebrated the closing ceremony of our first educational initiative with the Solomon Schechter School of Bergen County (SSDS). Our sense from the teachers and administration was that this was truly a meaningful experience for the students – it was an authentic learning process, allowing the children to combine creativity, empathy, innovation and problem-solving skills towards finding solutions for real children with challenges. The students were engaged, excited and motivated in their work.

AFAH's mission is two-pronged: not only are we meant to be the American fundraising arm for the hospital, but we are also tasked with increasing ALYN's visibility as a premier, global institution. The partnership with SSDS was covered both in the school newsletter as well as in the Jewish Standard. As a direct result, the Director of STEAM at the Ramaz Elementary School in NYC reached out to us, asking if we would be willing to develop a similar program with Ramaz, as they develop their own innovation space and associated curriculum. They see this project-based learning that encompasses Jewish values of inclusion and empathy as a great fit for the curriculum they have in mind. We will be meeting with them next week to discuss the opportunity.

As with any inaugural event, there are many lessons to be learned and improvements to be made. We learned that we need to decrease the time and energy commitment required of our Israeli team-members. The team at PELE was eager to be involved in the process, but in the end, it proved to be taxing and time-consuming. We learned that we need to put a definitive fundraising goal on the table from the beginning, and make sure the school is on board with helping us meet that goal. This time we addressed possibly too late in the game. This was, of course, affected by the pandemic as well, as school was not running as usual. While the students were mostly in school, the usual school-wide and community events which would have lent themselves to fundraising were cancelled as a result of COVID. Additionally, we learned that 12- and 13-year-olds with access to sophisticated technology can create amazing things.

Finally, we learned that there has to be a differentiation between which projects can be seen as immediate fundraising activities and which have to be taken at face value as true **development**, meaning that they need the time and space to develop – possibly over many years. The thought process behind initiating this program was tied to the concept of the lifecycle of a donor, by which if you develop meaningful connections with individuals at a young age, *at some point*, those children grow up and have the resources to be philanthropic - as do their families as they witness their child's connection to a valuable and important organization. This is a philosophy vis-à-vis development projects and, sometimes, it is a long-term game.

