

Akiba-Schechter Jewish Day School R&D Department

The Akiba R&D Department is a Jewish Educational Research and Development Lab designed to address a lack of innovation in Jewish education resulting in weaker connections to Jewish learning and Judaism. Often to address needs for change in Jewish education, the field looks towards innovations in general education to solve our problems. We pilot programs intended to assimilate pre-existing practices that are not designed for Judaic studies. The programs are often short lived or outright failures. This is irresponsible and must stop. We can do better. With the Akiba R&D Department we will do better.

The Akiba R&D Department is not a new program or model. It is a system that ensures new programs, models and ideas are thoughtfully studied, implemented and sustained. In many companies, R&D departments play an integral role in the life cycle of a product. For us, a Jewish school, we believe the Department will play an integral role in the lifecycle of teaching methodologies and student learning.

The Akiba R&D Department will be separate from the academic, development, marketing, and admissions departments, but will be related and often require collaboration. The department will focus on five areas; new programs or models research, new programs or models development, existing programs or models updates, quality checks on existing programs or models and general research on educational trends and innovations.

The Akiba R&D Department will utilize a design thinking approach to innovation which has at its core a prototyping approach versus a piloting approach. A prototype is an early approximation of a final system or product and not a completed one. It will be tested within the school, further developed and further tested in the school and ultimately, if successful, implemented in the school ensuring it works for the specific needs of the school. Prototyping will also be a more efficient driver of learning for our staff as they will not just be given instructions on how to implement a pre-existing program. They will have to study the new idea, try it out, learn what worked and what did not and retest it until it is either worth using or rejecting. They will be involved and invested.

We look forward to designing new ways of Jewish learning in our school, sharing what we learn with others and supporting the implementation of educational R&D departments in Jewish Day Schools around the globe.