



South Peninsula Hebrew Day School
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Meet Dr. Allen Selis

SPHDS's Incoming Head of School



Coffee & Open House at SPHDS

Thursday, April 7 @ 8:00 pm

Background

In its search for our incoming Head of School, SPHDS began with a clear goal. We hoped to find a talented administrative leader who combined a passion for Jewish life with advanced training and hands-on experience in curriculum development and institutional management. We hoped to find an individual who was Jewishly learned and devoted to Israel, a savvy communal player and a strategic thinker. A Hebrew speaker. A skilled fundraiser. A good listener who puts parents at ease while setting high standards for staff, students and lay leadership. A broad thinker who would embrace our vision of a modern and proudly Orthodox school which welcomes committed Jewish families from all backgrounds. It seemed like a tall order to fill.

Search Process

SPHDS appointed a Head of School search committee whose members, included three former Presidents, who share the values of traditional Judaism and academic excellence that stand at the core of our mission. We thank Rabbi Avi Lebowitz, Moish Klughaupt, Esther Rosenfeld, Nancy Gofman, Avi Kopelman, Jonathan Novich (ex officio) and Stan Sussman (chair) for serving on the search committee. Beginning this past October, the committee circulated a position description nationally. We received more than 30 resumes, from which the committee selected a number of candidates for detailed interviews. After extensive reference checking, three candidates were invited to Sunnyvale to meet with staff, local rabbinical leaders, board members, lead donors and members of the search committee.

During the interview, Dr. Selis made strong and positive impressions on our community. His command of budgeting, strategic planning, marketing and fundraising was striking. His fluency in Modern Hebrew was noted by our Israeli families and staff. At the same

time, Dr. Selis' commitment to his own religious and spiritual growth demonstrated a depth and integrity that we found exciting. His commitment to Torah study and his level of observance gave evidence of a leader whose life and work are motivated by the same values that SPHDS affirms. As a school that is Orthodox, open and embracing, we wanted to find a leader who had an unwavering commitment to Jewish life as well as a strong desire to reach out and include the broadest range of families whose values match our school's mission. The search committee's decision to recommend Dr. Selis as our next Head of School was affirmed by the Board of Directors on February 20. We are pleased that Dr. Selis will formally begin his SPHDS tenure on July 1, 2011.

Dr. Selis' Education and Career

Dr. Allen Selis holds a BA in History with a concentration in Political Philosophy from Dartmouth College, from which he graduated *cum laude* in 1988. Dr. Selis received ordination as well as an MA in Jewish Studies from the Jewish Theological Seminary of America in 1994. For the next five years, Dr. Selis served as the leader of a small congregation in Boulder, Colorado before joining the staff of a much larger synagogue of 1,200 households in suburban Washington, DC. Early in his tenure in Washington, Dr. Selis began to feel the strong pull of a different professional direction. "I chose to work in the Jewish community because I value transformation and growth, both for myself and the people I serve. While I accomplished important things in the first eight years of my career, something was missing. Inner growth. Spiritual discovery. Serious learning. The embrace of mitzvot by my community. This is what I wanted to spend all of my energy creating."

Dr. Selis left his position and began full time Doctoral study at the University of Maryland in the field of Curriculum Theory and Development, earning a prestigious Wexner Graduate Fellowship along the way. While a Ph.D. student, Dr. Selis jumped into the field of education with gusto, leading professional development workshops at the Charles E. Smith Jewish Day School in Rockville, MD and completing a year-long internship with Rabbi William Altschul, the Headmaster of the Melvin J. Berman Hebrew Academy. Dr. Selis taught graduate level classes in the philosophy of education at the Baltimore Hebrew University and assumed the role of teacher and professional development coordinator for the modern Orthodox Beth Tfiloh-Dahan Community Day School in Baltimore, MD.

Dr. Selis served for four years as the Head of School of the Solomon Schechter Day School of St. Louis. While in St. Louis, Dr. Selis secured commitments for nearly \$3M in charitable gifts, raised the school's level of Hebrew instruction and became the first Solomon Schechter affiliate in the United States to forge a long-term staffing partnership with the Torah Mitziyon Kollel, a religious Zionist organization which places trained Israeli educators and Sherut Le'umi volunteers in schools around the world. At each step of his career, Dr. Selis has worked to strengthen Jewish identity and broaden the study of Torah by bringing Jews from different backgrounds together in respectful partnerships. It is our hope that Dr. Selis will be even more successful in Sunnyvale at promoting a spirit of growth and deepening the intensity of our community's commitment to Jewish life. Dr. Selis has already begun to work in close partnership with David Kulka and other school staff, as well as Rabbi Yitzchok Feldman, who will serve in the role of Posek Halachah and Mara d'Atra of SPHDS.

In His Own Words:
Dr. Selis's Vision for SPHDS



Education has changed tremendously over the past several decades. Ready for a quick tour of the modern educational landscape? It includes balanced literacy, *Wilson* and *Spire* programs for reading acquisition and a range of increasingly sophisticated approaches like the *Six Traits* and *Writers' Workshop* models to ignite the passion of young writers. Math education has also undergone a radical transformation in method and materials, each representing a different philosophy of how children best learn and thrive. At the same time, a robust set of methods has grown out of research into brain development. Differentiation of instruction, curricular integration, multiple intelligences, experiential and project-based learning increasingly define the cutting edge of practice. By taking advantage of this knowledge base, we can ensure that each of our students reaches his or her fullest potential.

As the world grows more competitive, it is essential that we provide our children with the advantage of an education that is world-class and reflective of the emerging skills that they will need to master as adults. The age in which schools taught children to memorize basic facts is long gone. Increasingly, we have come to appreciate the importance of critical thinking, applied problem solving, communication (including bilingualism) and teamwork as crucial success skills for the Twenty-First Century.

The final advantage that we can offer our children is an understanding of our task as Jews to bring dignity and sanctity to daily life. HaRav Avraham Yitzchak HaCohen Kook, zt'l, offered a beautiful insight into HaShem's first question to Adam: "*Ayeka?*" which he understood to mean not "*Where* are you?" but rather, "*Who* are you?" The purpose of our school is to make sure that children will always answer that question with confidence and pride. *Who are we?* We are committed to learning, inspired by the opportunity to sanctify our lives through mitzvot, dedicated to helping others with acts of tzedakkah and gemilut hasadim and devoted to the building and strengthening of Eretz Yisrael.

As South Peninsula Hebrew Day School's incoming Head of School, I am committed to ensuring that our students will always know who they are and what they have to offer others. I am grateful for the opportunity to work with you in building both a school and a community where the joy of a life grounded in the values of Torah is made accessible to many without compromising the features that make us unique.

I look forward to our journey together.

Sincerely,

Dr. Allen Selis

Welcoming the Selis / Peckler Family

Dr. Allen Selis has a broad range of interests outside of work. He loves the outdoors, and looks forward to biking and hiking in and around Northern California. He is a squash player who is working diligently to sharpen his game and welcomes your help in that process. Finally, Dr. Selis is (of all things) a great chef, with a flair for creative vegetarian cooking, a love of Asian dishes and an appreciation for simple, fresh and organic kosher food.

We are fortunate to welcome Dr. Selis' family, as well. His wife, **Lisa Peckler**, is an alumna of Smith College, who went on to do graduate work in Modern Hebrew Literature at Columbia University. Lisa's professional career has been in the non-profit sector, including her work as Director of Development for the National Press Foundation in Washington, DC. She currently serves as the Foundation and Corporate Giving Officer for the Barnes-Jewish Hospital Foundation in St. Louis. In that role, Lisa has developed expertise in health workforce development, health inequities, health literacy, self-management of chronic conditions, and improving transitions in care. Outside of her professional life, Lisa is an avid reader, hiker, and racquetball player. She welcomes your interest in a game.

Lisa and Allen are the proud parents of two children, **David Raphael** (currently in 9th grade) and **Batyah Devorah** (currently in 6th grade).

David is passionate about his involvement in NCSY and the Jewish Student Union. He is an aspiring artist who works in acrylics and mixed media. David will spend the coming summer at Camp Ramah in Wisconsin as a Machon camper before joining his family in the Bay Area for 10th grade.

Batyah is one of the most well read pre-teens you will ever meet, and challenges you to find something that she has not read. When she is not reading or emailing four friends at once, she plays soccer and basketball, and also loves her time at Camp Ramah. We welcome Batyah to SPHDS as a 7th grader in the coming year, where we know she will add her own unique presence to our school.



What Are They Saying?



Mrs. Zipora Schorr

Director of Education
The Beth Tfiloh-Dahan Community Day School

Passionate, professional, and personable: These are words that best describe Dr. Allen Selis. With a strong commitment to halachah and an unquestioned focus on excellence, Dr. Selis has spent many years encouraging students and parents alike in their quest for Torah within the context of the modern world. As a Jew whose personal philosophy is underpinned by "Torah U-maddah", Dr. Selis serves as a role model for many students who have become more Jewishly connected because of his influence.

Rabbi Hyim Shafner

Bais Abraham Congregation
University City, St. Louis



It has been an honor knowing Dr. Allen Selis during his time here in St. Louis. He is a Jewish leader who is comfortable in many Jewish arenas, from Orthodox davening and serious Torah learning, to his many roles in the general Jewish community and his leadership as a Head of School. His open mindedness, one that is interwoven with a deep and serious commitment to Torah and Mitzvot, will make him a truly valuable asset to your community.

Dr. Itai Sened

Professor and Director,
The Center for New Institutional Social Sciences
At Washington University in St. Louis



Congratulations on your appointment of Dr. Allen Selis as your new head of school. We were very fortunate to have Allen serve as the head of our school. He impressed us with his sincerity and his vision to instill in our kids a solid education devoted to excellence in the general curriculum along with Jewish and Hebrew studies. Allen did a remarkable job at combining these three. We trust that you will soon appreciate him as a leader in your community in the same way that he was in ours.

Rabbi Hershy Novack

Chabad on Campus
Washington University in St. Louis



Dr. Allen Selis has been blessed with the ability to listen, and indeed to profoundly hear the voices of many. He combines a broad perspective with a focus on details. Dr. Selis is a thoughtful leader who exudes *mentchlichkeit* though all of his actions. May his vision and wisdom bring you much *hatzlochah* in your work to strengthen K'lal Yisrael.