

American Friends of Neve Shalom/Wahat al-Salam

PRIMARY SCHOOL REPORT

A new school year starts

The school opened its doors on September 1st to 250 children (about 30 more than last year) ranging from 6th grade through kindergarten and nursery. Children continue to arrive from a radius range of 30 miles, thanks to the bus transportation system that the school implements, widely funded by American donors.



First graders on their first day at the Primary School

The school is now a recognized “Green School,” as caring for the environment, adopting recycling measures and conserving resources. In addition, the curriculum continues to include special programs such as the Zoo Lab, the Computer classes or the Healthy School.

Looking back at 2008/2009

Last school year has seen extra challenges with the situation in Gaza in January straining relations between Jews and Arabs in Israel, and the global financial crisis directly impacting the school’s funding. Nevertheless, the school graduated another group of 6th-graders last June who have studied in an environment unlike anything in Israel. Through the course of their education, they have learned in Arabic and Hebrew, celebrated each other’s holidays and learned to respect differing historical narratives. At the same time, they learned to dance, play soccer, perform in school plays, study music, dig for archaeological treasures, work to clean the environment, build a zoo and so much more as some of the only Jewish and Arab children in the region who have had the chance to go to school together.

Maintaining a bilingual, binational and multicultural environment

The Ministry of Education recently passed a law preventing schools from teaching students about Al-Nakba, the Palestinian Catastrophe. In spite of this unfortunate decision, the school, as a binational, multicultural school, will continue to maintain its joint framework for Jews and Arabs of various backgrounds and will commemorate their national events. Parents and students are engaged in those celebrations in the classrooms and school assemblies.

For two years now, and with support from the Annenberg Foundation, the staff has been developing written curricula for the school. With support from Haifa University experts, the pedagogical team worked on curricula for language and culture. The syllabus for the first grade is now ready, and the ones for the other grades are well advanced. Again, parents have been associated to the process and about half of them submitted positive feedback.

Summer camps at Neve Shalom/Wahat al-Salam

This summer again, the village welcomed children Jewish and Arab children from Israel and the West Bank. Two camps ran in tandem in the village. One was organized in partnership with the Open House in Ramle, sharing the philosophy of bilingual co-education, for the children of Neve Shalom/Wahat al-Salam and the surrounding area of Lod-Ramle. The second bringing children from the Tulkarm refugee camp in the West Bank.



This year, 140 children (half Jewish, half Palestinian) took part in the camp. The program included sports and swimming, music, art and activities about science, technology, ecology and nature. The children visited the neighboring Latrun Monastery, and its olive press site. They were also taught about insects and butterflies, their habitats, eating habits and life cycles.

Teacher Training

Investment in ongoing training for teachers is a critical component to maintaining a healthy environment and quality education program for the school, particularly in areas that are unique to binational schooling. In April, sixteen teachers participated in a four-day workshop in Turkey facilitated by the School for Peace. The workshop focused on special needs and interests facing teachers dealing with a binational, bilingual environment and addressed issues as how to teach national holidays, cope with parents' interests and handle periods of extreme tension in the wider region, such as January's Gaza war.



Science Class

The school's interest in addressing the daily challenges for the teachers is an example of the important work that Neve Shalom/Wahat al-Salam is doing to directly impact relations in the region positively. By placing teacher's concerns on the table and troubleshooting resolutions, the school is strengthened and the teachers are more deeply invested in the program.

Cooperation with other schools

On May 31, the Primary School at Neve Shalom/Wahat al-Salam partners with the Hand-in-Hand bilingual schools, which were built on the model of the NSWAS School, to launch a conference entitled "Bilingualism and Multiculturalism in Early Childhood Education" at the Van Leer Institute in Jerusalem. This coming spring, the two programs intend to organize a follow-up conference.

Special activities

The teachers organize special activities outside the school on a regular basis. Last June, the first and second graders took a trip to the mixed Jewish-Arab City of Jaffa. They visited the Old City with guides, and learned about the significance of this timeless town, a site that has been inhabited for over 5,000 years. The children took in the various civilizations that supplanted one another over the centuries. They also got to visit the city's central mosque,

where they were able to discuss different religions with the guide. The day ended with a boat ride. Similar activities will be organized again this school year.



School trip to Jaffa

Zoo Lab project

The Zoo Lab is a well-loved corner of the school, and is stocked with small animals, reptiles and birds. It is both an educational and therapeutic environment that encourages students to learn about, interact with, and care for some of the animal species who share our world. The Lab provides is a natural enrichment for environmental and science classes. The animals are taken care of by a team of volunteer students, teachers and parents. As soon as possible, the goal is to expand the zoo to an adjoining room.

Language Lab

The Language Lab, which was developed in earlier years together with an expert from the Hebrew University, is being used for children from kindergarten to third grade. Each class spends one weekly session there. It's a unique environment where children are able to develop bilingual, language skills through games, computers, and a facilitated play environment. The goal is to extend the lab environment to older children, but in order to do so new teaching materials and equipment are required.

Environmental studies

The School prides itself on a variety of special subjects, which are absent from many other local schools. This year the school has been developing environmental awareness among the students. Besides the already existing green house and zoo lab, attention has been given to the subject of recycling. Michal Litvak-Moses, a teacher with expertise in producing art from garbage and materials that would normally be thrown away, has been central to this effort. The highlight came recently with a whole-school event, which brought pupils, par-

ents and teachers together for an exhibition of work produced by the children and activity sessions, all around the subject of environmental awareness.

A “Green Day” was organized in May 2009 presenting the children’s artwork made from recycled materials. The students and parents also participated in activities such as taking quiz about the environment, producing clocks, mobiles, etc. from thrown-away materials.



“Green Day” in Neve Shalom/Wabat al-Salam.

The School has secured formal recognition as an environmentally aware school. One of the requirements is to adopt another school and help it to move in the same direction. As such, the School has entered into a relationship with the El Manar, an Arab School in the nearby town of Ramle, whose teachers and students joined the Green Day event.

Multi-Media Resource Lab

The Multi-Media Resource Lab is stocked with computers children use both in the framework of a dedicated weekly class, as well as individual subjects. The students learn how to use word-processors, spreadsheets, presentation software and drawing programs and learn to use the internet in order to do research for their subject material. There is a constant need to upgrade computer equipment due to natural wear and tear and aging of the equipment. Currently, the school needs another four computers.

Relations with Parents

Any school is a community of not only students and teachers, but also parents. This has special meaning in the case of a mixed Jewish-Arab school impacted by an ongoing regional conflict. There are times when conditions in the region exacerbate the relationships between the two groups of parents, whose concerns are manifested in the form of anxiety about their children's welfare. The anxiety is actually more common to the parents than to the children themselves, who relate to each other in a very normal way.

The current calendar year began with the Gaza war and strained relations also between Jewish and Arab citizens of Israel. Yet, the parents at the Neve Shalom/Wahat al-Salam school have expressed satisfaction with the Primary School and in the last months, the school has been strengthened by the relationships between parents as many volunteer their time. But in order to continue to nurture a healthy environment, the School for Peace has been invited to facilitate a workshop for the parents in June.



Parents attending an event with their children.

Relations with the State

Over the past years, Israel's Ministry of Education has made a number of budgetary cuts specifically directed at the Neve Shalom/Wahat al-Salam Primary School. The cuts have greatly dwindled anticipated income from the State and leave the school in limbo. This year, additional budgetary cuts in education are also impacting most other schools in Israel, as well. There are plans by the Ministry of Education to lay off 5,300 teachers. It is very unclear how this impending layoff may affect the village's school. However, other recent cuts have particularly affected schools in the "recognized, independent" category of schools in Israel, where the NSWAS school holds its status from the state.

Additionally, in the past the school had succeeded in receiving small sums of funding for special activities. The Israeli Ministry of Education recently decided that it would be cutting enrichment programs that were previously conducted with the participation of the Karev Foundation. This will directly impact programs such as the zoo, the ongoing archeology project and other programs.

Finally, the school is also struggling to receive previous allocations that have long been due from the Ministry, such as the promised stipend for transportation of students. Notwithstanding previous practices and agreements, the Ministry is now claiming that transportation should only be paid to religious schools in this school category. A number of meetings with officials have been held in order to try to resolve the dispute, but so far without success.