

Nomination of Rabbi Erin Hirsh for Covenant Award

Submitted by Joy Goldstein, President of Gratz College, 2015

Rabbi Erin Hirsh is one of those lucky people who are able to weave their passion into their work. And the Jewish community is fortunate that Erin's passion is part-time Jewish education. While many people view part-time Jewish education as a fragile flower in a field of more bright blooms, Erin has tended it carefully and lovingly so that students in supplementary schools can develop personal and meaningful connections to the Jewish community. In an environment largely focused on re-envisioning supplementary education, Erin has created a professional development program that prepares educators to serve their students today, as well as to transition into new and more experiential models of supplementary education in the future.

Erin exemplifies the qualities of a master teacher: she has a passion for learning; starts where her students are and knows where they are going; fosters effective, respectful learning environments; inspires and supports her students to achieve their goals; uses feedback to positively facilitate improvement; and celebrates the triumphs and outcomes of learning. However, what makes Erin the rarest of teachers is her broad definition of who her students are: children and teens in K-12 part-time Jewish education; education directors who nurture programs in synagogues and community schools; synagogues that maintain schools for their communities; movements that support congregations' efforts to build Jewish communities; and publishers who provide engaging curricula for educators. Erin has the gift of understanding the interconnectedness of all of the structures within the system of part-time Jewish education, and she has dedicated her rabbinate to improving the environment in which the vast majority of Jewish children are educated.

Erin's impact on Jewish education is unique and extraordinary. As a teacher and school director in congregational and community schools, she has educated 2,275 students in pre-K to 12th grade. Erin has created programs that engaged 1,000 Jewish educators, rabbinical students and adult

learners through workshops, classes and conferences. As director of education for the Jewish Reconstructionist Movement, she served as a resource for 100+ congregations, helped them identify their values and objectives for their educational programs and provided individual and group training to facilitate the achievement of those goals. Erin has also authored many effective curricula for use in Jewish educational settings. *Etz Hayim We*, for adult text study on the *megillot*, was used by 40 congregations in its first year. *Next Year, Free!*, a curriculum on the Jewish response to modern slavery, includes Passover materials that were downloaded 2,000 times over the last two years.

Four years ago, Erin Hirsh's resume crossed my desk. I immediately knew that I had found the perfect person to envision and successfully launch an innovative professional development program for supplementary school teachers in greater Philadelphia! In her thoughtful, inspiring and effective manner, Erin created NEXT, Gratz College's New Excellent Teacher Training program, which offers online and in-person multi-session classes for supplementary school teachers across North America. She has built successful partnerships with numerous Jewish educational umbrella organizations, including 11 central agencies and federations. In four short years, NEXT has engaged almost 1,000 registrants - from 29 states and two Canadian provinces - in its online and in-person courses and workshops. While NEXT was initially geared to K-7 teachers, Erin has expanded the program to educators who work with teens as well. Today, there are 33 NEXT courses, on a diversity of topics from teaching specific content to contemporary instructional strategies to courses on how to work with children with special needs and with interfaith parents.

Rabbi Erin Hirsh is a tireless advocate for part-time Jewish education who has transformed professional development for teachers and education directors in supplementary schools. Along the way, she has influenced thousands of students, helping to create meaningful, life-long Jewish identity and connections. Her unstinting love of Judaism and the Jewish community is evident in everything she touches, and her efforts to polish every link in the chain of part-time Jewish education have resulted in a stronger and brighter chain for the whole community.