

A lot of people don't like the morning. I'm one of them. Getting out of bed at an early hour can be difficult for children and adults alike. It's hard to wake up when it's still dark outside, get dressed, go to synagogue for morning minyan and arrive at school on time.

Once I arrive at school, though, my feelings seem to change. I am usually able to shed the morning blues. I don't think it's the coffee or the exercise. It might be the smiles on the faces of the children that I'm privileged to see as I walk the halls from classroom to classroom raising my spirits. It might be the sounds I hear of students singing joyfully and enthusiastically during the morning tefillot (prayers). In the classrooms I hear children speaking to each other, working in groups to discuss how to solve a math equation. I can find pairs of students in the hallways and stairwells analyzing the text of a Mishna- what it says, what it means and what it means to them. Youngsters share the plots of the books they're reading, they discuss their feelings that day and they catch each other up on the after school activities from the day before- the soccer game, the track meet, the band rehearsal or the games they played in aftercare.

There is academic rigor everywhere. Academic rigor is a good thing. But what is it?

Teaching students to perform well on tests? Read, write and compute accurately and quickly? Is it developing a large bank of cultural and academic knowledge or efficiently retrieving information from memory?

The answer is surprising. Harvard professor Tony Wagner recently interviewed hundreds of business leaders and asked what they look for in key employees. They said that the most important predictors of academic and career success are none of the above. What they found instead to be crucial are, critical thinking, problem solving, collaboration and leadership, curiosity, imagination, and the ability to access and analyze new information.

In the 21st century, academic rigor has been redefined. It's not what our teachers told us when we were in school but rather a new set of skills very different from what used to be thought of as academic rigor. At Bet Shraga, we are proud to be producing students that have the qualities at a premium in today's world. Stop by for a visit, especially if you need to lift your spirits in the morning.

Shabbat Shalom,