

Student-to-Student

September 2009

Program goals

The Student-to-Student Program of the Jewish Community Relations Council reaches out to area high schools to:

- Impart information
- Foster understanding
- Counter stereotypes

Facts 2009-2010

Number of Jewish participants.....154

Number of groups of participants.....38

Projected number of presentations.....152

Approximate number of students who will receive presentations.....4,000

Number of volunteer advisors.....12

Building Bridges of Understanding

Prejudice often results from a lack of knowledge and familiarity. As a response, the Jewish Community Relations Council, JCRC, a beneficiary agency of the Jewish Federation of St. Louis, developed Student-to-Student, a program that seeks to reduce stereotypes and prejudice in the students it reaches. Initially funded in 1992 by a planning grant of the Jewish Federation, Student-to-Student has reached thousands of students in area schools that lack a Jewish presence. These young people can now put a “human face” to Judaism—the best antidote to bigotry and intolerance.



A Student-to-Student participant shares matzoh with a classroom member

Student-to-Student participants have given presentations throughout the metropolitan St. Louis region in public schools for world history, speech, journalism, and literature classes; and in parochial schools, in conjunction with world religion classes.

Participants

Presentations are given by Jewish 11th and 12th grade students who have received special training from the JCRC. A volunteer advisor attends each presentation. Traits required of participants include:

- A high level of commitment to prejudice-reduction
- An interest in Jewish history and tradition
- An understanding of the connection between the Jewish people and Israel

Presentations

Each presentation is given by a group of three or four students, members of the Conservative, Orthodox, and Reform branches of Judaism. Since this is a presentation by students for students, it is not perceived as "just another boring lecture." The style of presentation is more like that of an informal discussion.

The presenters' introduction of themselves usually flows into a description of the branches of Judaism, their similarities and differences. The group encourages the class to ask questions. The subsequent discussions are a vital element of the program.

Presenters discuss a range of topics, including the following:

- A description of a typical day in the presenters' lives
- The Jewish calendar, including holidays
- The Sabbath
- The Jewish life cycle from birth to Bar/Bat Mitzvah to marriage to death
- Jewish dietary practices
- The Hebrew language
- The Holocaust
- Israel



A participant blows a shofar during a presentation

Presentations are enhanced by concrete demonstrations. Instead of just describing a shofar, an actual shofar may be passed around and, when possible, blown by one of the presenters; instead of just describing challah, the Sabbath bread may be passed around for sampling!

Responses

From teachers:

"[The presenters] were honest, articulate and provided an interactive environment for questions: excellent.... After listening to them it made me hope even more for a civic community that can respect and dialogue with all members of our diverse community."

"I can't tell you how much we enjoyed the students who gave us such an insightful presentation on Judaism. It is so meaningful to hear 'one of their own.' The impact was tremendous...."

"It is through programs such as this that our communities learn to understand each other better so that we can live in mutual respect and peace."

"My students always learn so much from these presentations and have the edges of their world pushed out."

From students:

"I would like to thank you so much for coming to my school....I learned so much about Judaism. You cleared up misconceptions that I had and really made me think."

"Thank you for joining our class. It was interesting to learn the similarities and differences between all faiths. It was also great that all four of you could come so that we could look at different family traditions. It was a pleasure having you."

"It is through programs such as this that our communities learn to understand each other better so that we can live in mutual respect and peace.."

From participants:

"I always leave presentations with an incredible sense of accomplishment, realizing that through this program, I really could change some of the problems in the world today."

"I truly learn from presentations and feel the power of education as a tool against anti-Semitism. I also learn so much from

my awesome group members! Student-to-Student has been an exciting, fun, and rewarding experience."

Information

For information or to schedule a presentation, please call Fawn Chapel, JCRC Student-to-Student Coordinator, 314-721-0391 or email Fawn.Chapel@gmail.com.



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