Akiva School has long been admired for many reasons. This K-6 coeducational Jewish day school of over 300 students is often described as a family. Its warmth, its tradition of excellence in both secular and Judaic studies, the quality of its faculty and staff, its no-debt financial strength, and its pluralistic approach to welcoming families from the full spectrum of Jewish life and observance make it unique and highly desirable.

Often described as North America’s most “European” metropolitan area, Montreal is a bilingual mecca of many cultures. A large and diverse Jewish community of over 90,000 people supports a broad array of Jewish organizations from day schools, to synagogues, to kosher delis and restaurants, to arts and social services organizations and more.

Like Montreal, Akiva School thrives on its diversity. Akiva is located in the tree-lined Westmount neighborhood on a campus it shares with the Shaar Hashomayim synagogue, a thriving congregation founded in 1846. While separate entities, the school is able to use the many and varied facilities of the congregation. From meeting rooms, to a recently-built gymnasium, to worship spaces, to a fully-staffed, full-time kosher kitchen, to an underground parking lot, Akiva enjoys facilities that would be the envy of many schools.

One way to describe the identity, the “secret sauce” that makes the culture of Akiva work, might be:

“Eschewing labels and committed to pluralism, this warm community welcomes the broadest array of Jewish students and their families. Informed by laws of traditional Judaism and study of text, Jews of all persuasions are united by their commitment to academic excellence and their shared joy in learning together the values and culture that bring richness and meaning to Jewish, Canadian lives. Akiva celebrates its diversity in family backgrounds, in religious practice, and in a differentiated learning environment.”
Akiva is a strong school. With balanced budgets, no debt, excellent facilities, a tradition of educational innovation, and a clear sense of who it is, Akiva has been described as a “slice of heaven” and the job of Head of School as a real gem. The school is currently led on an interim basis by Cooki Levy, the former Head who moved to Toronto five years ago. It seeks a new permanent Head to begin July 1, 2018 or sooner if mutually agreeable. A skillful Board has been thoughtful about the school’s future and is eager for a new Head to join them in a best-practices partnership to celebrate and build on Akiva’s past and present, and create an exciting future.

THE JEWISH COMMUNITY OF MONTREAL

Every community has its uniqueness, and candidates must bring cultural sensitivity and an eagerness to learn about and adapt to the local culture. The Jewish community in Montreal, approximately 90,000 strong, comes from all walks of Jewish life and defies comparison and conventional categorizations. Like many communities, more observant families are the fastest growing part of the population. Sephardim, particularly those from French-speaking countries such as Morocco, are an important and growing segment of the community. Thriving Judaism in Montreal is trilingual: English, French, and Hebrew. Major streams of affiliation are well-represented in the community and even orthodox congregations welcome families from a range of personal observance. In short, this is a wonderful, rich, vibrant Jewish community, but it doesn’t necessarily conform to the “labels” or patterns one might find elsewhere.

Likewise, it is not easy to put conventional labels on Akiva’s program or its population of families. What does unite its pluralistic community, however, is a passion for and love of Jewish study, learning, knowledge, and Jewish values and culture, as well as a commitment to excellence in secular and Jewish academics. The next Head of Akiva, similarly, could come from any of a number of Jewish backgrounds, but should be eager to learn about and embrace the unique Jewish community of Montreal, and share the knowledge and passion and love for the “essence of Judaism” to which the school is committed.
SCHOOL HISTORY

Founded in 1968, Akiva School began when Rabbi Dr. David Hartman z"l and a group of passionate parents set out to create a school community that would meet the academic, religious, and social-emotional needs of its students. Their mission was reaffirmed by the school’s first two administrators and continues to be central in all aspects of the school.

In 1988, Akiva moved to the school building of the Shaar Hashomayim, a warm and inviting synagogue in a much larger facility with greater resources. Soon thereafter Akiva experienced its largest growth in enrollment in its history.

After many members of the Jewish community encouraged Akiva to make access to the school’s unique experience more readily available, in 2002 the school began accepting two incoming classes to start the process of doubling enrollment as a two-stream school. The expansion was completed in 2009 with 350 students in grades K-6.

Today, the school continues its founders’ mission of providing an exceptional educational experience to all families, regardless of their level of Jewish observance. The original vision of the school remains constant while it adapts to the changing times in order to best serve the community.

THE SCHOOL

As it completes its fifth decade, the school continues to be guided by the mission of its founders while evolving with the changing needs of families and students living in the 21st century. The
community values and celebrates the unique qualities of each student. The school prides itself in its comprehensive understanding of what its students need. It teaches to the whole child, paying close attention to the intellectual, social/emotional, and moral character development of each and every student. The school promotes independent, creative thinking anchored in Jewish values and a strong Jewish identity.

Staff members are skilled teachers and committed to their own professional development, are experts in creating authentic, engaging, real-life teaching and learning opportunities. Guided by Jewish values, the school provides a warm, caring environment that focuses on each child’s achievements and successes.

The school is accredited by Canadian Accredited Independent Schools (CAIS), and is a member of Quebec Association of Independent Schools (QAIS), Association of Jewish Day Schools (AJDS), Prizmah, and has been affiliated with the Lookstein Center for Jewish Education and Bar Ilan University, Israel, and partners with Federation CJA.

**Academics**

Akiva School takes a “whole child” approach to learning and teaching. Believing that every student can succeed, the academic program is rich, dynamic, and rigorous. At all grade levels, students are active participants in the construction of knowledge, engaging with the real world to build skills of questioning, action, and reflection across subject areas. Using varying instructional methods that meet the needs of each child, passionate teachers work to develop students into lifelong learners who are curious and confident in the classroom and responsible citizens at home and outside school. Often, subject areas are taught by a team of two qualified teachers or in a small group setting. Additionally, technology plays an important strategic role in the classroom, as all rooms are equipped
with SMART Boards to facilitate engaging and interactive learning experiences. During their tenure at the school, students become familiar with standard software programs while learning problem-solving and computational thinking skills. Robotics are offered starting in kindergarten and computer coding starts in grade 2.

The academic curriculum provides a “lifeworthy learning” experience. In all subjects, relevant and meaningful learning activities build decision-making, communication, and analytical skills—all key for success in the 21st century. The goal of the Mathematics program is to teach students lifelong skills, and it is designed to help students establish links between classroom learning and everyday life. Lessons lead to achievements through best practice in each strand of mathematics, and students are encouraged to be creative thinkers and collaborative problem solvers. Three hours of instruction each week are in English and two are in French. The curriculum is based on the Quebec Education Plan (QEP) competencies.

The English Language Arts curriculum is theme-based in order to provide a greater framework for learning and to heighten critical thinking and global awareness. Literacy is more than just reading and writing at Akiva, and these ever-changing themes (examples include outer space, inventions, children around the world, Shakespeare, art history, and more) help to contextualize how we communicate as readers, writers, and speakers in society. Students learn to use knowledge of words to read fluently; develop strategies to make connections between themselves, the texts, and the world around them; appreciate the power of words; and use language to become confident speakers and respectful listeners. The curriculum is based on the QEP competencies.

Students at Akiva receive 14.5 hours per week of French instruction, including arts and music, science, ethics and religious culture, social studies, and physical education specialties as mandated by the Ministry of Education. A team of dedicated, highly-qualified teachers offers a varied learning
The environment where students learn to read, write, and communicate daily in French. The school supports each student so he or she can fully master the French language.

The Judaic Studies curriculum promotes a commitment to Jewish life and practice through the acquisition of the Hebrew language, the study of Jewish texts, and the exploration of Jewish customs and traditions. The program is organized around concepts including self-awareness, connection to community, connection to the Land of Israel, and spirituality. Jewish values and concepts are emphasized through experiential learning activities and authentic celebrations of Jewish lifecycle events throughout the year. Akiva is proud of its Jewish heritage, committed to Halachah (Jewish law) while remaining inclusive and diverse in its approach to teaching. The Ethics and Religious Culture program, taught in French in all grades, familiarizes students with other religions and cultures around the world. Students are guided to question and evaluate how to be socially responsible and have constructive and open conversations.

Arts education is an important part of educating the “whole child.” The Drama program is taught in French, and students have opportunities to perform and express themselves publicly in a fun and engaging context. The Art program, also in French, is taught by an Art specialist and centers on nurturing students’ visual senses, creativity, and ability to communicate and express themselves through art. Instruction begins by introducing students to different artistic medium and techniques, then transitions to deeper study of themes that help inspire their own styles.

The Science program is taught in French at all levels. Three main themes are explored during the school year—the material world, Earth and space, and the living world—and divided into sub-themes which are taught using age-appropriate content to different grade levels. Teachers inspire students to think about the world from a scientific perspective by facilitating discussions and experiments that encourage exploration and problem-solving.
Social Studies at Akiva School includes geography, history, and global citizenship, all of which help students become more aware of their place in the world and of their social responsibilities. Classroom lessons impart awareness of social norms in different societies, compare the present with the past, and build an appreciation for differences represented currently and throughout history. Research skills are also developed and practiced as students begin to think of the greater context of the world around them.

In addition to focusing on intellectual growth, Akiva stresses the importance of a fit and healthy body. Research states the link between physical activity and the brain’s ability to learn, so physical fitness is an integral part of the educational experience. Both through the physical education program and extracurricular activities, which are offered both at lunch time and after school, the school provides opportunities for students to participate in a wide variety of group sports and tournament options including hockey, soccer, volleyball, basketball, flag football, gymnastics, and Kung Fu. Students also participate in community athletic events and competitions with other elementary schools in the city, such as the annual Montreal Halo Road race on Mount Royal, the GMAA soccer league, and the WESBL inter-school basketball league at the YM-YWHA.

**School Life**

School life is vibrant and familial at Akiva School, as home and school are tied closely together to provide a range of services, extracurriculars, and holiday celebrations for the whole community. The Akiva Parent Association (APA) works together with school administrators, teachers, and the Board to maintain a high-quality, thriving school environment through a variety of committees such as the Back to School Picnic Committee, School Play Committee, Jewish Life and Learning, and Classroom Volunteers.
Akiva fosters a strong sense of Jewish identity through the study of Jewish texts, celebration of holidays and traditions, and by living out Jewish values each day. The school seeks to serve the entire Jewish community in an environment where all positive Jewish religious expressions thrive. Learning opportunities, experiential and spiritual programming for families, and tangible acts of chesed (kindness) and tzedek (social justice) are all ways in which the school is a center of activity for Jewish living.

Just as important as what goes on inside the classroom is what takes place outside. Extracurricular activities empower students to be leaders and explore their interests and passions. Options include athletics, chess team, drumming, art classes, introduction to engineering, science with a bang class, and more. For those students interested in performance and drama, the Akiva School Players put on a full-scale production at the Segal Centre for Performing Arts each year.

**PhySicAl cAMPuS**

The school is located in the tree-lined Westmount residential neighborhood, not far from downtown Montreal. It enjoys bright classrooms, all with SMART Board technology, multi-configuration seating, bright natural light, and ample space. A new outdoor playground welcomes students to safe outdoor activities. Akiva’s first-class facilities help support students’ learning experiences. The athletics program utilizes a beautiful, full-size gymnasium for team and individual sports, as well as to teach teamwork, social skills, and healthy lifestyle habits, part of the school’s “whole child” approach. In grades four and five, the school is piloting new classroom designs to promote more active learning. These classrooms feature new furniture where, in line again with the school’s holistic approach to education, the student is at the center of the learning. Gone are the days of static rows of desks; new tables, seating arrangements, and modular design will allow for more free movement and
collaboration among students who will be able to get up, move around, and explore different learning environments while taking an active lead in their learning.

The Akiva School Learning Center provides resources that help support students in their learning. Reading and literacy are skills crucial to a student’s success, and the comprehensive library in the Learning Center augments the school’s language programs by offering a large selection of age-appropriate fiction, non-fiction, and educational reading. The Learning Center has private rooms for students to work individually with Center for Learning specialists. A full computer lab is also available in the Center.

While completely independent, the school is co-located with Congregation Shaar Hashomayim, a leading Montreal synagogue founded in 1846. Of particular note, the school benefits from frequent use of the synagogue’s many facilities from the main sanctuary used for graduation, to meeting rooms for celebrations and community events, and the gymnasium. There is an on-site complete kosher kitchen which provides daily meal options for Akiva students (delivered to their classrooms) as well as catering for all Akiva events and activities. The longstanding, wonderful relationship with The Shaar is a unique and significant positive aspect of Akiva School.

Montreal, Quebec

Montreal, the second largest city in Canada and the largest in the province of Quebec, has a population of 4.1 million in its metropolitan area (including the city proper and adjacent suburbs). The official language is French, though English is also spoken in this cosmopolitan and multicultural city. Montrealers enthusiastically describe an increasingly pluralistic city and an exceptionally high quality of life. It offers a wealth of cultural attractions and events throughout the year. Affordable, safe and socially vibrant, Montreal is considered one of the world’s most livable cities.

Montreal’s diverse architecture juxtaposes elegant historic buildings with unique PostModern structures. The city boasts more than 50 National Historic Sites of Canada. In 2006, Montreal was named a UNESCO City of Design, sharing the worldwide designation with Berlin and Buenos Aires. The Port of Montreal, which lies at the end of the Saint Lawrence Seaway, is the largest inland port in the world. The climate is humid continental with four distinct seasons. Montrealers embrace winter weather by ice skating, hockey, skiing, and other activities.

Montreal is recognized for innovation and the city’s primary industries include finance (among other major institutions, the city hosts the Montreal Exchange, Canada’s sole financial derivatives exchange), aerospace, pharmaceuticals, and technology. The city is also a center of advanced learning and research with its four major universities including the world-renowned McGill University. The city is increasingly recognized for its expanding film industry, gaming software development, interactive entertainment, and, recently, artificial intelligence. Montreal is well served by an extensive network of city buses, bike paths, and by a clean and efficient underground Metro.
Strengths of the School

Among many strengths of the school, some of which have already been noted, the new Head will find:

- The school is guided by its Five Promises which are posted throughout the school and ingrained in the school’s values (see sidebar).
- Bright eager students from families who have a healthy level of involvement in and support of the school.
- Akiva’s pluralistic approach to welcoming an array of families from a broad spectrum of Jewish backgrounds and observance, enriching the community with its diversity.
- A skilled, committed faculty and staff who are known for taking a personal interest in the whole child for each student with whom they work.
- A belief in and support for continued professional development of faculty.
- Significant attention devoted to social-emotional learning and, for those students who need it, structured learning support not often found in an elementary school.
- A number of unique budget considerations enabling a balanced operating budget that is not dependent on fundraising to make up “the gap.”
- A combination of sources enabling need-blind admissions where approximately 23% of the student body receives some level of financial assistance.
- A school known for having a small-school sense of warmth and happiness, even though a 300-student school is hardly “small.”
- Annual parent satisfaction surveys consistently rating the school more highly than the norm in all categories.
- A school that has always prided itself on a commitment to academic excellence in all subjects and being an educational innovation leader.
- In Montreal, one of the strongest Jewish communities in North America and “a wonderful place to raise a Jewish family.”
- A Board that is strong and understands their role.
- A strong and mutually-beneficial relationship with congregation Shaar Hashomayim (“The Shaar”) providing Akiva with facilities that few similar schools enjoy.

Values

The core values that guide us are rooted in Jewish tradition. They are expressed for our community in the form of Five Promises...

I promise:

To respect myself and others
To treat others with kindness
To respect my property and the property of others
To be responsible
To give my best
OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES

While there is much to be excited about at Akiva, like any school there is always work to be done. Among the challenges and opportunities the new Head will find are:

• It is constant hard work to effectively balance the many program needs of a trilingual, tri-cultural program within the constraints of normal hours of a school day. The school’s strategic plan calls for efforts to “Enhance and Communicate the Akiva School French Learning Experience,” for example.
• All private schools receive much-appreciated per-student financial support from the Province of Quebec. They are also bound by a number of regulations from the provincial Ministry of Education with which they must comply. The school must always work hard to fulfill its unique mission while meeting the requirements of the provincial government.
• Religious plurality, as has been successfully implemented at Akiva, has an inherent tension and it takes great skill and constant work to strike the right balance.
• While healthy, the school is not at full capacity. The Jewish community of Montreal is not growing. In a competitive educational landscape, Akiva must work hard to articulate clearly its “unique selling proposition” (as one observer put it) in order to maintain and hopefully grow its enrollment of mission-appropriate students and families.
• While the school knows its mission and identity, it can benefit from better branding and marketing of that identity led by a charismatic and engaging new Head.
• As the nature of the Montreal Jewish community continues to evolve, Akiva must proactively assure that its own Jewish identity is relevant, consistently reflected in the program of the school, and clearly communicated.
• Despite good efforts and the best of intentions, Akiva has had recent turnover in the Head position. It is important that the school move past the effects of that turnover and reaffirm its mission and identity, continue to strengthen both internal and external relationships, and solidify its Jewish identity.
• The school would benefit from clearly articulated and uniformly enforced policies and procedures in areas such as student behavior, parental boundaries, and clarity of roles and responsibilities within the staff of the school.
• The school needs to provide a menu of opportunities for constructive parental engagement in the life of the school that recognizes the realities of societal and demographic changes in the current and future generations of parents.
• As the school is proud of being an educational innovation leader, it is important to keep current with emerging trends and thought leadership and, with the faculty, to find the right balance between new ideas and the school’s capacity for change.
• The areas of greatest strength and interest of a new Head provide the opportunity to structure the administration of the school to take advantage of those strengths and leverage the skills of the rest of the administrative team.
**Desired Skills and Characteristics of the Next Head of School**

The following skills and personal characteristics are among those desirable in a new Head.

- A proven leader with a track record of success leading and managing staff and “customers” in a multi-stakeholder organization.
- Someone with “collaborative backbone.” One who seeks to include others in the process of decision making when possible, but also has the ability to make decisions and even say “no” when necessary.
- Exceptionally high emotional intelligence as manifested in the ability to:
  - Relate well to all constituencies of the school.
  - Develop and manage personal and professional relationships with tact, sensitivity, respect, and openness.
  - Be firm and consistent as well as compassionate and caring.
  - Have a personal “presence” that is credible, authoritative, and persuasive; while also being open, consistent, charismatic, and authentic.
  - Have a genuine love of children and the ability to connect with them even while being an authority figure that they respect.
  - Embody cultural competency and sensitivity that will seek to understand and embrace the unique character of Montreal and the Montreal Jewish community.
- A leadership style of “Une main de fer dans un gant de velours”—A hand of iron in a velvet glove. The ability to be both firm and warm and nurturing.
- Passion for and knowledge of the Jewish life, learning, culture, and values that are central to the mission of Akiva school. A strong, knowledgeable Jewish role model for the school.
- An educator who knows what is going on in the classroom and can provide guidance, support, evaluation, and direction to a wonderful faculty.
- Financial literacy in order to partner with a strong Assistant Head for Operations and Finance to assure fiscally prudent school operations.
- English language fluency is required. French and Hebrew language proficiency are highly desirable.
- An energetic, skillful communicator in writing and speaking to larger audiences, or one-on-one.
- An educator who knows and embraces the best in elementary school pedagogy.
- Eagerness to be a highly visible presence in the daily life of the school.
To Apply

There is no application deadline, but prompt submission of materials will be an indication of seriousness of interest. Please send via email the following documents, each as a separate PDF:

- A current résumé
- A list of at least five professional references, including email and phone contact information
- A statement of your philosophy of Jewish education
- A cover letter expressing your interest specifically in the Akiva position and what you believe you bring to bear vis a vis the information in this Position Description

Send your materials to skip.kotkins@carneysandoe.com

Ralph Davison
Senior Consultant

Skip Kotkins
Senior Consultant