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**AMY MELTZER, LANDER-GRINSPOON ACADEMY
KINDERGARTEN TEACHER
IS NAMED A 2015 AWARD RECIPIENT FOR
EXCELLENCE IN JEWISH EDUCATION
BY THE COVENANT FOUNDATION**

**The Covenant Award to Three Jewish Educators Creating Change
Across Venues**

Northampton, MA – June 3, 2015 – Amy Meltzer, Lead Kindergarten teacher at Lander-Grinspoon Academy, one of three visionary educators demonstrating the power of inspired Jewish education to create change and drive impact, is a 2015 recipient of The Covenant Award for excellence in the field of Jewish education, The Covenant Foundation announced today.

Eli N. Evans, Chairman of the Board of Directors of The Covenant Foundation, said the three recipients individually and collectively represent the power of inspired Jewish education to transform students, institutions, communities, and the Jewish future.

“Each of the 2015 Covenant Award recipients is a model of excellence and impact in Jewish education,” he said. “They elevate and inspire the field with unwavering devotion, strong leadership, sacred obligation to the future, and dynamic approaches that fuel individual and community enrichment, cohesion and growth.”

“These dynamic Jewish educators reflect intense talent and dedication, and their inspired teaching makes an impact along the entire Jewish educational spectrum - from the classroom to summer camps to public space,” said Harlene Winnick Appelman, Executive Director of The Covenant Foundation. “By practice and by example, they are moving the field forward and strengthening the Jewish present and future.”

Amy, the lead Kindergarten teacher at Lander-Grinspoon Academy (LGA) in Northampton, MA, is proving that a small classroom in a small school in a small town can be a nucleus of inspired Jewish education and a model for the entire field.

Leading nine kindergarteners in a school of 77 students this year, Meltzer started teaching at LGA in 1997 and immediately began to draw on her own journey toward a meaningful relationship with Judaism. She designed programs and project-based experiences for her students that are tangible, unique and exciting, and that reflect her standing at the corner where education, community building, family engagement, the arts, and Jewish identity and Jewish values meet.

She labels herself a “constructivist” Jew. “Humans build our understanding of the world by experiencing things; we make meaning through action,” she said. “Not only do I believe this is true about learning, but I believe that it’s true about Judaism.”

Her approach is applied to her classroom in myriad ways. She created a popular, resource-rich blog at the school as a two-way mode of communication with parents and offering information about children’s learning and resources and ideas to bring lessons and traditions into homes and the community.

She also pioneered family programming for the kindergarten class to actively engage parents in the curriculum and Jewish life, and to offer a portal for their own immersion into Jewish knowledge and practices. Meltzer, believing that children at the youngest ages should practice Jewish values, fostered relationships with surrounding social service agencies such as the Northampton Survival Center, to engage students in community life and *gemilut chasadim*, acts of lovingkindness.

One of the biggest manifestations of her engaging and integrated approach is the annual *Gan* (Kindergarten) Opera, an original production and an initiative cited as an exemplary model of arts-based education by the Eric Carle Museum of Picture Book Art in Amherst, MA. The annual project, said Debbie Krivoy, Executive Director of Avoda Arts in Northampton and the parent of a LGA student, “cements a sense of camaraderie, rigor, art, music, joy and Jewish learning,” and reflects Meltzer’s belief that “artistic expression raises the *kavanah*, or focus and intention, of learning to a whole new level, and boosts a child’s ability to find greater meaning in his or her actions.”

The kindergarten classroom at LGA may not have been Meltzer’s intentional destination, but it is the logical one after an early adulthood seeking Jewish identity and an early career creating impact.

She has envisioned, designed and led numerous programs for families with young children in the Northampton area and nationally, oversees a monthly program for pre-school families in partnership with PJ Library (a program of the Harold Grinspoon Foundation), and has led tot and family Shabbat and High Holiday services at local synagogues. She travels to schools, synagogues and JCC’s throughout the country to lead programs based on her two children’s books, *The Shabbat Princess* and *A Mezuzah on the Door*.

Meltzer is a founder of the Teva Learning Center, where she imagined, designed and directed environmental education experiences for day school students.

“Amy exemplifies the power of one educator matching her deep gladness to the world’s deep need,” said Nili Simhai, a current LGA parent, former Director of the Teva Learning Alliance,

and a 2009 Covenant Award recipient, who nominated Meltzer for a 2015 Award. “She brings no big titles to the table – just solid Jewish education, and no fear.”

Meltzer said that her recognition by The Covenant Foundation is one for all Jewish educators teaching in classrooms across the country.

“The Covenant Foundation is affirming that the value of our work as Jewish educators is measured not by how many students we reach but by how we reach each individual student. I’m humbled to represent the many classroom teachers who are taking risks and refining their practice on a daily basis, and who collectively deserve this honor. I hope that by sharing both my greatest successes and my wildest failures, I can further and deepen the conversation about best practices in all our classrooms.”

The two other 2015 recipients of the Award, which is among the highest honors in the field of Jewish education are; Michelle Shapiro Abraham, Director of Program Development for the Campaign for Youth Engagement at the Union for Reform Judaism, as well as a consultant for the Foundation for Jewish Camp, and a clinical faculty member in the HUC-Jewish Institute of Religion Executive MAJE Program; and, Dr. Sandra Ostrowicz Lilienthal, Curriculum Developer and Instructor at the Orloff Central Agency for Jewish Education of Broward County in Coral Springs, FL.

The three recipients join 72 other Jewish educators honored with a Covenant Award since the Foundation established it in 1991. Along with the honor, each will receive \$36,000, and each of their institutions will receive \$5,000.

The Foundation and the Jewish community will honor them at an awards dinner in Washington, DC on Nov. 8, during the General Assembly of The Jewish Federations of North America.

For guidelines on nominating an educator for a 2016 Covenant Award, and to read biographies of past recipients, visit www.covenantfn.org/awards.

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