



MercAZ Academy is excited to announce that Ms. Karen Leeper is joining our team of educators as Assistant Principal for General Studies. Ms. Leeper brings not only exemplary credentials to this position, but also talent, enthusiasm, and dedication to the growth of each student. Ms. Leeper will oversee the general studies program at MercAZ Academy, working collaboratively with Rabbi Fogel, as Principal, to ensure MercAZ establishes itself from the outset as a center of academic excellence.

Ms. Leeper decided to enter the field of education during a college linguistics course that placed her in a classroom.

That experience motivated her to obtain her Bachelor's Degree in Social Sciences from the University of Buffalo, with a concentration in Early Childhood. She furthered her own education in the field with a master's degree in Childhood Education, and completed a post-master's Certificate in Advanced Study in Educational Leadership and Administration at the College of Saint Rose.

Ms. Leeper now serves as Acting Principal and Middle School Director for grades Kindergarten through 10 at the Evergreen Charter School on Long Island, where Ms. Leeper has worked since 2011 and which has grown substantially during her tenure there. From 2013 through 2018, she served as the Assistant Principal for grades Kindergarten through 5. Notably, she began her career as a math coach and taught at all elementary grade levels. "My first love is being in the classroom. Working with children, supporting the students' progress through the year, is very rewarding," she explained.

After being promoted to assistant principal and then to acting principal, she realized that additional rewards could be gleaned from administrative roles. Ms. Leeper found that she now had the opportunity to work with a larger community. She said, "I could connect not only with one grade, but with all the school's students as they continue through the grades, and with their families as well." She looks forward to forging strong relationships with teachers, students, and parents at MercAZ Academy.

Ms. Leeper brings to her position at MercAZ Academy an extensive knowledge of curriculum, instruction, and assessment. She has both coordinated and led professional development on a wide array of topics. Her talents and experience were evident to the teachers and to the members of the MercAZ Academy Board of Education who met with her during the interview process. Second grade teacher Aileen Kirschenbaum praised Ms. Leeper's knowledge of elementary education, remarking that the meeting was so insightful as to serve effectively as professional development for the teachers who participated.

Although she is well versed in data-driven decision making, Ms. Leeper keeps a focus on the holistic needs of each student. Her educational philosophy stems from Aristotle's perspective that "educating the mind without educating the heart is no education at

all.” She observed that, “developing a school culture that strives to support children academically, socially, spiritually, and emotionally allows them to grow and thrive in an environment that has no bounds.”

And, whether she is mentoring teachers, conferring with regard to potentially introducing a new curriculum, or planning educational programs, her concern for each student as an individual is what motivates her. “Meeting the needs of students by providing differentiated supports leads to academic excellence. This is what drives me every day. Witnessing students overcome academic, social or emotional challenges given the proper supports is why I started working in the field of education and why I will continue.”

Rabbi Fogel and Ms. Leeper have begun consulting together as educational leaders of Mercaz Academy. Rabbi Fogel noted, “We are all excited to learn from Ms. Leeper’s experience and deep understanding of education. We can already see how her winning attitude, warmth and professionalism inspire a natural thirst for excellence in all areas. Our entire school community—students, teachers, and parents--will benefit with her as our assistant principal.”

Rabbi Fogel and Ms. Leeper will work closely through the summer to mold Mercaz Academy further into a center of academic excellence. Through this partnership, the Academy’s first day of classes will mark the launch of a school that serves well the hearts, minds, and souls of our students and enriches our entire school community.