

ALL YOU NEED IS... "JOTIT AND YOUR LUNCHBOX"

**Epstein Hillel School selected to pilot
innovative Israeli technology**



Jotit is working to change that paradigm and help students with their executive functioning skills. Jotit has selected Epstein Hillel School as one of only six schools in the United States to pilot their innovative e-notebook technology. Since December, students and faculty in grades five through seven at EHS have been using the Jotits and have been instrumental in helping the Jotit developers beta-test this new technology for entry into the U.S. market.

The Jotit e-notebook uses e-ink (like you would find in a Kindle book reader), enabling students to do assignments just as if they were writing on paper— but without having to juggle multiple notebooks, binders, worksheets, and textbooks. Students can send their completed work directly to their teachers, and it is all contained within the Jotit. This technology provides students with the efficiencies of learning in a digital world while preserving the physical paper-and-pen components of learning, such as writing (and erasing), handwritten note-taking, paging through texts, and working through a problem on graph paper.

Almost as important as what Jotit *is*, is what it is not. The e-ink technology does not emit blue light, the damaging light that is found in computers, tablets, and

Back-to-school shopping is big business. Every summer, parents across the nation hit the stores to fulfill their children's school supply lists, purchasing notebooks, binders, pens, pencils, paper, and more. The supplies are meant to help students organize their schoolwork and maximize their learning potential, but often within weeks of the start of school, students' backpacks are filled with crumpled up worksheets, pen caps are missing, and students are lugging heavy textbooks back and forth from school to home. An Israeli start-up company called

cell phones. Additionally, the Jotit does not connect to websites, apps, games, or social media. It cannot message or text a friend. Students are not tapping, clicking, or typing their assignments. In other words, it doesn't contain distractions from the schoolwork at hand. It is not another device in the arsenal of connectivity that makes it so difficult for students to stay focused while doing schoolwork in a digital environment.

Jotit is the brainchild of two Israeli entrepreneurs, engineer David Bleicher and investor Yuval Chomski. The two business partners previously worked together on a software product that they eventually sold to Nike. After years of working for Nike, they decided to start something new, something that would be more personally fulfilling. "I mainly was helping big companies make a lot of money," said Bleicher. "But I think if you are privileged enough to do something deeper, I think it is your responsibility to that." The pair chose the field of education after they each witnessed their own children doing schoolwork at home during the COVID-19 crisis. They saw first-hand some of the challenges that students faced with regard to executive functioning. Bleicher explained, "By solving the organizational aspects of school, students will feel more capable, more confident, and have



less anxiety, which correlates very much to the wellbeing of a kid. For many kids the barrier was around executive functioning and not around the educational material itself."

During development and beta testing in Israel, Bleicher and Chomski evaluated many aspects of schooling including how students learn, how many pages they typically write, what age groups get the most instruction using handwritten work, and other considerations. They also listened to teachers' input about what would help them and their students. For example, said Bleicher, teachers suggested that Jotit integrate seamlessly with Google Classroom. "Teachers said, 'We've gotten used to something. We want to continue to use it this way. We want to preserve the good things.'" After making adjustments based on feedback from teachers, students, and parents, the Jotits were deployed in schools in Israel. The United States is their second market.

EHS Head of School, Amy Gold, first learned about Jotit on a Jewish National Fund (JNF) educational leadership trip to Israel last summer. JNF introduced her group to several educational startups in Israel, and

Gold was impressed by the Jotit team and their product. She signed up to learn more without knowing if anything would come of it and was pleased when Bleicher and Chomski reached out. They set up several initial Zoom meetings at the start of the school year. "Then David and Yuval visited EHS and really got to understand our school," said Gold. "They visited a lot of schools in the Northeast corridor, but in the end they chose us."

EHS was selected to be in the first cohort of schools to test the Jotit in the United States. Bleicher shared why they wanted EHS to be part of the pilot. "We wanted a small enough school that is flexible. We also saw that the staff at EHS were willing to be risk takers and were a little bit entrepreneurial themselves. They want to help shape this product. The earlier on in the process you are, the more you get to shape how this is going to look for you. The inventors are the students, and the students here have a very unique opportunity to become part of this process."

Throughout the pilot program at EHS, Bleicher and Chomski and their team have visited EHS frequently. The students have gotten to know

them and have seen first-hand the process of a startup company in action. As the Jotit team collects anonymous quantitative usage data as well as ongoing anecdotal feedback from students and teachers, they are making real-time changes and improvements to the e-notebooks. It is exciting for the students to witness and be part of the innovation.

"I think that my friends and I are very lucky to see this type of technology being developed," said sixth grade student Bo Pica. "The Jotit is very helpful for me to be more focused and organized."

EHS teachers also play a huge role in this pilot. "It is always interesting and exciting to try new technologies and see how we can bring 21st century skills to students in the classroom. Jotit has done a great job guiding us through the pilot," said Lauren Zoerhoff, EHS's upper school science teacher.

Parent feedback is equally important to the Jotit team. Parents see first-hand what happens with homework and with their children's preparation for school. "I love that my child can work through a problem, maybe write a note to her teacher in the margins of the page, and then submit it as soon as she's done," said one fifth grade parent. "Since she started using the Jotit, my daughter doesn't have loose paper falling out of her backpack every day, yet she's still doing just as much writing by hand as she was before."

The future for the Jotit company is bright. "We are not afraid to dream big," said Chomski. "We believe that e-notebooks will transform learning in a way that laptops and iPads failed in doing. Just look at the amount of paper still used in schools. As pioneers in this field, we hope to be the leader in the U.S. education market."

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Bleicher agrees that they have their sights on big long term goals, hoping to have one million students using the Jotit technology in schools over the next few years. And their goals are not just numbers. "At this time, we're only just scratching the surface of how we can impact students. For example, we could analyze the handwriting [through the Jotits], so very early on you could help identify signs of dyslexia or dysgraphia." The Jotit founders also recognize the global reach that this kind of digital platform can have. It has the potential to offer open source curricula. "The teachers are the best creators of content anywhere in the world," said Bleicher. "So once a teacher has the tool, if they made an amazing lesson plan around some subject, why not share it with the world?" Furthermore, there is a huge environmental advantage to the Jotit e-notebook. Schools are some of the biggest consumers of paper in the world, with a staggering impact on trees, water consumption, and waste. Even on a small scale, a single school's use of the Jotit could save hundreds of pages of paper per day.

EHS is looking forward to seeing what the next steps are for Jotit. In the meantime, EHS students, faculty, administration, and even parents are benefitting from being part of the evolution of the Jotit and from collaborating with Bleicher, Chomski, and their Israeli and U.S. staff. The Jotit team has become part of the Epstein Hillel School community. "It has been amazing working with Jotit," said Gold. "David and Yuval have been so responsive, flexible, and attentive to details. They are invested not only in their own product, but also in the way this is going to help children. They have been great partners—and it is so



David Bleicher, Jotit Co-Founder, doing a Jotit training at EHS

impressive that they keep coming from Israel to be here with us!"

Bleicher and Chomski, too, love this partnership. "The feeling at EHS is incredible," said Chomski. "It's like no other school we've partnered with. You can feel it just by walking around the school. What is amazing is that I felt this immediately on our first visit when Amy gave us a tour of the school. In many classes, the doors were open and teachers and students greeted us with smiles without even knowing who we were. Fast forward six months, EHS feels like home to us. We know each student in the Jotit classes and sometimes even in other grades. When I walk the halls, I get high fives from the younger kids as they pass by. Back home in Israel, everyone has heard all about Kabbalat Shabbat at Epstein Hillel School. You just have to join the dancing!"

EHS is proud to have made its mark on these innovative entrepreneurs. They have indeed made their mark on EHS as well.