

Temple Beth David Religious School Enhancements and Additions for 2017-18

Background

This year the members of the Religious School Committee along with our Co-Rabbis/Educators decided to focus on Hebrew education in our religious school and the engagement of families with young children. The process included:

- Evaluating the strengths and areas for improvement in our current program
- Reading articles and viewing a webinar about best principles and techniques for Hebrew instruction
- Researching 10 other local congregational schools by viewing website materials and in some cases speaking with members
- Visiting 3 congregational schools in person, observing Hebrew classes and meeting with educators (Temple Chayei Shalom in Easton, Temple Shalom in Newton, and Temple Beth Shalom in Needham)
- Discussion among committee, Board and recommendations for Temple Beth David

Additionally, this year we went through the process of applying for a grant for our religious school from “Gateways – access to Jewish education” (<https://www.jgateways.org/Home>). Through the application process, we were able to clarify a significant number of students whose learning needs especially with regard to Hebrew are not currently being met in our program. We learned of local resources to help students with different learning needs. Fortunately, we received news that Temple Beth David will receive a Gateways grant, which will include funding and professional development for the 2017-18 year. We are excited to partner with Gateways to shape an inclusive educational environment at TBD.

This year our K-6 teachers participated in a professional development session about multiple intelligences. It was informative in terms of recognizing teachers’ own learning styles and the diversity of learning styles among our students.

Over the past years, we have engaged in conversations with parents, those who have children in our religious school and others who have left for other temples or education programs. These conversations have been helpful in assessing what we are doing well and areas for growth. The Rabbis/Educators have also observed our classes this year.

Findings

The current structure of our religious school program for Grades 3-6 includes a Judaic and a Hebrew class on both Sunday mornings and Wednesday afternoons. It is challenging to find teachers who can teach the same class on both days. There is no scheduling flexibility for families, and it is difficult to integrate students with special learning needs or to address different learning styles, abilities and backgrounds especially around Hebrew.

Most congregations (all but one congregation that we researched) have separate designated time for Judaic classes and a Hebrew class. Many congregations are offering more individualized or smaller group Hebrew instruction. Religious Schools using this model embody a more individualized and focused approach that maximizes the time students have in the classroom. Teachers can better address diverse learning styles and pace of learning. Families have more choice and flexibility regarding schedule. Committee members observed the educational benefits of this structure at the three site visits. Our Rabbis/Educators have experience with this approach to Hebrew learning, as well.

More congregations are introducing Hebrew in the younger grades (K-2). Congregations are also offering more Judaic experiences, projects, and electives as enrichment to regular classes, which helps keep students interested especially as they move into the older grades.

While some congregations have moved to a one-day a week program, we did not feel this change would be beneficial at TBD at this time. As a small congregation, we want to be able to maximize our staffing resources and the times we are able to bring students together.

Educational Structure for the 2017-18 School Year

Judaic Learning on Sundays:

All K-6 students will continue to meet on **Sunday mornings 9:30-11:30 a.m.**, with everyone beginning together in the sanctuary for opening songs and prayers. All students will study a variety of Judaic topics and themes by grade, consistent with the curriculum currently in place.

NEW THIS YEAR:

- Grades K-2 will experience a more comprehensive introduction to the Hebrew letters and basic Hebrew vocabulary. They will hear Hebrew while at Temple and during designated music time.
- Grades 3-6, in addition to their Judaic class, will experience enrichment through Jewish music, arts and technology, social action projects and field trips. At times students will be able to choose from elective offerings. Grades 3-6 will also participate in an extended *tefilah* (prayer) time in the sanctuary to continue to reinforce Hebrew skills.

Hebrew on Tuesdays OR Wednesdays:

Grades 3-6 will participate in a weekly one-hour small group Hebrew class on Tuesday or Wednesday afternoons. Groups of approximately six students will be arranged according to schedule and a positive and productive learning environment. Some groups may consist of mixed grades depending on enrollment. See the separate scheduling form for days and times. We will also offer a Hebrew tutoring option at a higher fee for special circumstances; please be in touch if this option may be right for your student(s). The Hebrew curriculum will be consistent with what is currently in place (focus on reading

skills and prayer Hebrew in anticipation of students becoming bar/bat mitzvah). To enable enhanced Hebrew teacher/student ratio, the 3rd-6th Grade tuition fee will be raised from \$795 to \$895 per student. To assist with afternoon pick up/drop off needs, we will also offer an optional supervised homework room if there is enough interest.

NEW THIS YEAR:

- More individualized and focused Hebrew instruction through small group Hebrew
- Increased scheduling flexibility with choice of two weekday afternoons
- Inclusion of students with special learning needs and diverse learning styles and abilities

Communal Connections

Coming together in community is an important value at Temple Beth David. Our students come from a variety of towns and we seek to find ways to strengthen connections among students and families. Building on this year, our K-6 program will include communal connections such as holiday celebrations, Shabbat dinners and services, retreats, social gatherings, and overnights for older students. There will also be several communal Hebrew game days for all 3rd-6th Grade students on Tuesday and Wednesday afternoons.

Engagement of Families with Young Children

While the committee learned about different opportunities for engaging families with young children, we decided to focus our efforts this year on 3rd-6th grade Hebrew education. We hope to create a task force to focus more on families with young children in the coming year with a scope that is earlier than religious school age. In an effort to attract more students in the younger grades next year, the K-1 tuition fee will be reduced from \$650 to \$360 per student. We will continue to offer Mazel Tots and Tot Shabbat, and will experiment with other experiences geared for families with young children.

Double Chai Teens

Due to increased interest among our High School students, next year we are expanding our teen program to include 11th and 12th graders. Hopefully this is a trend that will continue!

The Religious School Committee will continue to assess our program and students' Jewish education experience in all grades. Look out for a parent survey next year to help us address further questions. You are welcome to let us know any feedback or suggestions. Please let us know if you are interested in becoming more involved with the committee.

Members of the 2016-17 Religious School Committee:

Paul Greenberg, Vice President of Education, Leslie Forman, Chair
Wendy Berliner, Dara Borto, Cori Lapp, Julie Locke, Phoebe Peabody, Rachel Preti, Leigh Wasserman, Dr. Roseli Weiss
Rabbi Karen and Rabbi Micah Citrin