

JRC Religious School Handbook
08/2018
Rabbi David Eber

Essential Question: *What do people at every age need to be able to do, to know and to feel in order to make Judaism an active part of their lives right now?*

The JRC Religious School curriculum is designed to help students and families to answer the question, “How is Judaism relevant to me?” This is a question that will guide each and every aspect of their educational experience and one that will be revisited yearly by each student. Learners will engage with contemporary conversations, experiential projects, and ancient texts woven together to create a rich and living picture of what it means to live and act as a Jew in the 21st Century.

The goal of the Religious School program is for students to become active agents in their own Jewish learning, and to inspire them to become lifelong Jewish learners. Jewish education occurs in partnership between JRC and its members. Teachers, clergy, and staff will work together with families to raise children with a deep appreciation and enjoyment of Jewish life and learning.

Assistant Rabbi for Education David Eber, who directs JRC’s religious school, works closely with Rabbi Weiss, Cantor Howard Friedland, as well as with faculty and lay leadership on our various dynamic religious school committees.

Leadership Contact Information:

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Overall Goals:

- 1. Students will understand that Judaism has always been an evolving religious civilization of which they are the inheritors, and they will also become empowered to be its creators.**

They will:

- celebrate Jewish holidays, Shabbat, lifecycle events and will acquire an appropriate foundation in the various ritual practices and themes associated with these holidays and events.
 - be able to participate in essential aspects of Shabbat, holidays, and prayer services. They will be competent in reading Hebrew with phonetic fluency, and understand key words and themes of the prayers.
 - acquire a basic repertoire of Jewish songs, dances, and creative art experiences in order to participate in the full range of Jewish cultural expression and communal life.
 - have an overview of the major styles of Jewish literature (Bible, stories, law, commentaries, feminist works) and a basic knowledge of their contents.
- 2. Students will be able to use “Jewish tools” to make moral and ethical decisions in their own lives. They will:**
 - work on forming habits of generosity and of engaging respectfully and fully in solving the problems within their classrooms, in the school, and in the entire JRC community.
 - have a deep awareness, rooted in tradition, of the mandate to care for strangers and the needy.
 - identify positively with, and act with a sense of responsibility for, their own Jewish community and other Jewish communities in the United States and around the world.
 - have Jewish language for talking about resilience and self-reflection as important tools for personal growth and social interactions. .

Behavior Covenant:

As a Jewish school, it is important that Jewish wisdom provides the basic underlying philosophy of our school's behavior covenant. The language of covenant is intentional, in that it is a sacred partnership undertaken by Assistant Rabbi David, the faculty and staff of the school, and each family. This helps us ensure that each child feels safe, that we create a productive learning environment for all, and so there is clarity regarding our expectations for your family, and, equally, that you know what we are committing to you.

At JRC we strive to guide children to develop appropriate self-behavior modification and social skills based on the following principles:

1. ***Makom (Place)***: A place of learning is sacred and special. We respect the belongings of the school and the building. We also honor our classrooms and the covenants that each class will create together regarding their classroom rules and norms.
2. ***B'tzelm Elohim (In the Image of God)***: Each individual is created *B'tzelem Elohim*. Each individual therefore is deserving of respect, kindness, and compassion.
3. ***Lashon Tov (Righteous Speech)***: Words have tremendous power. At JRC we strive to always use language to heal and to praise, and not to hurt or to destroy.
4. ***Hachnasat Orchim (Welcoming)***: Everyone at some point has been an outsider to a new community. We are therefore called to care for others because we know what it is like to be "a stranger in a strange land."
5. ***Din and Rachamin (Justice and Mercy)***: The world was created with a balance of justice and compassion. In dealing with one another we too must balance these values.
6. ***Achraut (Responsibility)***: Each individual has responsibility for their own actions. Each person contains within themselves the potential for growth and change.
7. ***Tshuvah***: We can all do *tshuvah* (change). We can acknowledge the mistakes we make and apologize for them, make a sincere commitment to do better in the future, and to act on those commitments.

Consistent with these values and guidelines, the following expectations and responsibilities will apply:

The JRC faculty and the Assistant Rabbi for Education are responsible for:

- Treating all students with dignity, compassion and respect; being a *dugma ishit*, a personal example
- Providing a safe learning environment, physically and emotionally.
- Providing clear behavior expectations
- Promoting the development of positive behaviors
- Providing consistent and fair consequences which motivate students towards improved behavior.
- Informing students and their guardians of behavior concerns and appropriate discipline in a timely and respectful manner

Guardians are responsible for:

- Working with the school and the child to understand and comply with the behavior expectations
- Allowing children to be responsible for their own actions
- Encouraging children to resolve their own problems
- Encouraging children to include all of their classmates
- Communicating concerns to the teacher and to the Assistant Rabbi for Education
- Reinforcing a Jewish philosophy of behavior inside and outside of JRC

Students are responsible for:

- Their own actions
- Speaking and acting respectfully towards adults and their peers
- Conducting themselves in such a way that does not interfere with the classroom learning process or with the rights of the other students
- Respecting the physical space of peers and of adults
- Respecting and caring for synagogue property and the property of others

All students need some guidance from time to time regarding decisions and consequences. In developing appropriate self-discipline and social skills, the following types of behaviors will require disciplinary action:

Behaviors handled by classroom teachers include:

- Excluding people
- Not sharing or taking turns
- Using threatening or otherwise inappropriate language toward any person
- disruptive behavior in class, such as talking excessively
- Leaving class or group without permission

Note: A student who engages in habitual misbehavior of these types will be referred to the Assistant Rabbi for Education for further intervention.

Behaviors handled by the Assistant Rabbi for Education include:

- Any physical abuse, including hitting, kicking, spitting, biting, etc.
- Willful destruction of property
- Direct disobedience or willful disrespect of teachers, madrichim or other adults
- Threatening or abusive language or gestures
- Possession of banned or dangerous items

In order to help students learn appropriate behavior, the following procedures may be followed if behavior problems continue despite clear and constructive communication from the teachers and the Assistant Rabbi:

- Removal from the classroom to the office of the Assistant Rabbi
- The teacher and the Assistant Rabbi will speak to the student privately
- The teacher and the Assistant Rabbi will notify the parents
- If behavior is deemed extreme or is repeated, the Assistant Rabbi will again notify the parents and will require an in person meeting.

If, after the above procedures have been followed, and the Assistant Rabbi and the teacher still have concerns about a student's behavior, a formal conference will be held involving the teachers, the Assistant Rabbi, the student, parent/guardians, and the Religious School Committee Chair. In this conference a behavioral contract for the student will be co-created and agreed upon. It is expected that parents will support the student in the effort to uphold this contract.

The following consequences may be instituted if the procedure above does not improve student behavior. It will be instituted immediately in cases of physical violence, destruction of property, or other behavior that constitutes a clear danger to the student or to others:

- Parental accompaniment. A parent must come with the student at all times during religious school
- Suspension. The student will be asked to leave the school for a period of time as determined by the Assistant Rabbi for Education, the Senior Rabbi and the Religious School Committee Chair.
- Expulsion. The student will be removed from the school after consultation by the Assistant Rabbi for Education, the Senior Rabbi, and the Religious School Committee Chair.
- Restitution. Monetary restitution will be made for willful destruction of property. For other behavior infractions, restitution may take the form of apologies and/or making up missed work.

As outlined above, all measures will be taken to avoid such extremes. It is our policy and belief that part of raising a Jewish person isn't simply a matter of learning a set body of material or learning how to lead a service. Our aim is for students to show the Jewish values of kindness and respect, both academically and socially.

Diversity in our school:

One of the core values at JRC is *B'Tzelem Elohim* – the idea that every human was created in the Divine Image as unique and holy individuals. At JRC, diversity is reflected in the age, race, religious backgrounds, gender, sexual orientation, family constellation, ability, and class of our member families. We consider this one of the greatest strengths of our community.

In our school, we aim to honor the diversity of our students and their families. We encourage our students to think broadly about what it looks like to be Jewish or to be a family. Towards this end we commit to:

- Work with teachers to understand the diversity of our community
- Offer resources to our teachers for addressing diversity within the classroom, both as an explicit component of our curriculum and as an aspect of everything that we teach
- Be sensitive and inclusive with the images we use to represent who and what Jews, Jewish families, and Jewish communities are
- Seek out materials, books, and projects that reflect these values

Welcoming all students:

It is the goal of JRC's Religious School to provide a Jewish education to every child, regardless of special needs, disabilities, or health challenges. We are committed to making accommodations and modifications to create a welcoming learning environment for all learners. We have one staff person specifically dedicated to working with children with special needs, who, in partnership with the Assistant Rabbi for Education and the room teacher, will coordinate to ensure the success of all students..

We ask parents to serve as our partners by sharing information about, and strategies for, engaging their children. If your child has a learning or medical need that may impact their participation in our school, the Assistant Rabbi is happy to speak with you at any time to help co-create the best possible situation for your child.

Family and School Communication:

Your child's Jewish education is a partnership between JRC and your family, therefore clear communication is essential.

This is what you can expect from us:

Email

- Weekly all-school emails letting you know about upcoming events and important reminders
- Teacher reports on classroom learning and special moments. This email will come either from the Assistant Rabbi or from the teacher

- Occasional additional email reminders or requests - on an as needed basis
- Mailings of fliers as appropriate and necessary
- Phone calls and meetings, by request of families or staff, to discuss special concerns or issues.

What we need from you:

- At least one working email address that you read regularly
- Information regarding your child's learning strengths and areas of difficulty. If your child has special educational or behavioral support needs, please communicate these to the Assistant Rabbi as soon as possible.
- Notification of major changes in family circumstances, e.g. move, job loss, new job, new school, illness, etc., so that we can support your family during these times.
- Honest, thoughtful, and constructive feedback about what is working for your family and what is not.

Please be assured that all information you provide about your child is held in the strictest confidence and in accordance with the law. Contact the Assistant Rabbi if you have any concerns.

Attendance:

Please email or call the school office if your child is going to be absent. **When a student is absent, it is the responsibility of the student and parent to inquire about any missed classroom work or materials.** The teacher and/or the Assistant Rabbi, in consultation with the parent, will deal with excessive absences on an individual basis.

School Closings:

In case of inclement weather or other potential school closures:

- Call JRC office at (847) 328-7678 for information OR

Snacks:

JRC provides a light snack during every session, such as Challah and juice on Sundays, and apples and pretzels on Tuesdays. We make every effort to accommodate the specific food restrictions of each child, and when that isn't possible we notify those individual parents. Parents may also send a separate/additional snack for their child. **We ask that you NOT send your children with foods containing nuts or nut products into the building.** Also, only vegetarian food and snacks are allowed. Children are not allowed to share snacks brought from home with other students. If a student is having a birthday and wishes to provide a treat for the class, that family needs to contact the school to verify allergies and provide enough snack for the entire class.

Books and Supplies:

All books and materials that are required for class will be provided by the school and given out in class. If a student loses a book and it needs to be replaced, the family will be charged for the replacement at cost. Students are allowed and encouraged to have bags in which to transport any materials or projects between home and JRC.

Pick-up and Drop-Off:

We are committed to the safety and well-being of our students. Please follow the guidelines below to ensure that our children are safe as they arrive and depart:

- Help us start our day on time by arriving 5 minutes early when possible. This allows time to use the bathroom, get settled in, and keeps us on schedule for the day.
- Students are expected to remain in class until dismissal. Should special circumstances require you to pick up your child before the end of class, you or the designated caregiver must come to pick up your child's classroom to collect them.
- Parents, teachers or other synagogue staff will be outside during arrival and dismissal times to help manage the flow of traffic and children.
- Drivers can park on Dodge or Mulford, or pull up in front of the building on the north side of Mulford. When picking up, please don't park on the south side of Mulford, unless you plan to park and walk your child across the street; it is not safe for students to cross Mulford unaccompanied during the busy drop-off and pick-up times.

Parent Participation:

JRC provides a broad range of opportunities for you to participate in your child's Jewish education. We offer an array of formal programs, ranging from our Circle Time program during the first fifteen minutes of school on Sundays for pre-k – second graders, our community Shabbat programs and holiday services, supervising and encouraging Hebrew practice, taking advantage of our parent coffee lounges, and more. Parents are regularly requested to work with their child outside of class on family homework that could range from collecting supplies for a project, participating in family learning days, to modeling Jewish values and living in your home. We also strongly encourage interested parties to inquire about how they could volunteer to be a room parent, or to become involved on the Religious School Committees.

There are many informal avenues for participation as well. Parents are encouraged to support their child's learning through volunteering in the classrooms or chaperoning field trips.

Family involvement is the cornerstone of our school and community. Parents organize grade level dinners, holiday celebrations and other social activities with assistance from JRC staff.

Class Prayer Services:

Each grade will have the opportunity to participate in one or more Shabbat services during the year by grade. Students are expected to prepare for and attend their class service. Families enjoy a potluck Shabbat dinner at JRC before the Friday evening service, or a potluck luncheon following a Saturday morning service.

JuniorChoir and Family Choir:

JRC kids in grades 2 -6 are eligible to join the Junior Choir, led by Danny Wallenberg.