



**Shaare Torah Early Childhood Center  
Shaare Torah Kindergarten  
PARENT HANDBOOK**

**As of 6/27/23, subject to change per public health guidance**

1409 Main Street  
Gaithersburg, MD 20878  
301.869.9842  
301-869-9846 FAX

<https://www.shaaretorah.org/stecc>

<https://www.shaaretorah.org/shaaretorahkindergarten>

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# Shaare Torah Early Childhood Center & Kindergarten PARENT HANDBOOK

**Allison Colker**, Director of Early Childhood Education and Engagement

**Beth Ann Katz**, ECC/K School Administrator

**Matt Oziel**, Executive Director

**Annie Lewis**, Rabbi

**Yosef Goldman**, Rabbi

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# WELCOME!

## A Letter from Allison Colker

Dear Parents,

Welcome to the Shaare Torah Early Childhood Center and Shaare Torah Kindergarten. I am very pleased you have chosen our school for your child, and look forward to a year filled with creative, meaningful and fun learning experiences. At Shaare Torah Early Childhood Center and Shaare Torah Kindergarten, we believe that successful early childhood Jewish education is based on a child-centered, developmental approach to learning and a partnership between the staff and parents. Our goal is to provide a safe, warm, nurturing and accepting environment for your child.

I welcome and value your comments, questions and suggestions throughout the year. This Parent Handbook was compiled for your information and reference. Please read it carefully as it includes school policies and procedures. If you have any questions, please contact me at 301-869- 9842, ext. 117, [acolker@shaaretorah.org](mailto:acolker@shaaretorah.org), .

B'shalom,  
*Allison Colker*

## **SHAARE TORAH EARLY CHILDHOOD CENTER (STECC) PHILOSOPHY STATEMENT**

### **Our Goals Are To:**

- Welcome children of all abilities
- Provoke curiosity and encourage creative and critical thinking
- Provide learning through inquiry-based play, and in-depth exploration
- Foster strong collaborative skills as well as independence and self confidence
- Tie all learning together with a Jewish lens

### **Our Philosophy Statement:**

At Shaare Torah, we believe children learn best through:

- Relationships with responsive caring adults, who are co-learners committed to their own development as excellent educators.
- Active hands-on and minds-on learning experiences which engage children's thinking processes and encourage them to investigate, question, and problem solve.
- Meaningful experiences when information and concepts are connected to what they already know and understand.
- Dynamic construction of their understanding of the world. Through exploration children are continually working to figure things out and understand their world on their own terms.
- A caring and nurturing environment that respects their competency and sees them as capable and confident with a voice.
- At the STECC, we use children's interests to guide them through the process of learning how to learn: learning how to ask questions, how to form theories, how to conduct research, and how to integrate information. This foundation will carry our young learners through their academic careers. Children construct knowledge through direct experience with the world around them.
- Our teachers provide those direct experiences through the lens of subjects that are of interest to each particular class of children. We integrate literacy, numeracy, science, and creativity all into the daily learning that takes place in our classrooms.
- One of the core values of our school is that children are competent and capable. Perhaps the most important role we play is to foster young children's social emotional development. This takes many forms: helping children to understand and manage their feelings; teaching children to self soothe; fostering children's self care; and facilitating social skills. We use information from families on their cultures, backgrounds, and primary languages to integrate within the program as to promote children' self-awareness and appreciation of oneself. Kindergarten and first grade teachers report that these skills are more important for success beyond preschool than any specific academics.
- We work with even our youngest children to identify their feelings, read facial cues to understand how others are feeling, and develop strategies to manage those feelings. When children are upset, we provide them techniques to calm themselves. We teach our children self care both for their bodies and their belongings. Last but not least, we work with children to understand and follow rules, have appropriate interactions with their peers, and solve their own

problems. Through careful facilitation with our teachers, our older children can learn how to choose and implement solutions to many conflicts that arise during social interactions.

- Throughout our preschool program, and particularly in our Pre-K (4s class), we are preparing our children for Kindergarten and beyond. We have a dedicated STREAM (Science, Technology, Relationships, Engineering, Art, and Mathematics) room, where the children go weekly in small groups to solve challenges based on scientific principles. We do not simply read books with the children, we ask them to answer comprehension questions and to make predictions. When we cook, garden, or paint, we integrate literacy and numeracy by writing recipes and instructions and by learning fractions and measurements.
- Just as a Kindergarten or 1st grade class is structured, our Pre-K class has center-based learning. At these centers children are working in small groups with limited teacher supervision to complete discrete learning tasks, such as pattern-making and sorting. During center time, each teacher will work with one or two students at a time on a more in-depth project. In the Pre-K class, we teach children how to write uppercase letters, lowercase letters, and numbers using Handwriting Without Tears, an occupational therapy-based program for teaching writing to young learners.

### **Jewish Values**

We are a Jewish preschool with diverse children and teachers. We value and respect each and every child's backgrounds, cultures, and primary languages. The highlight of the week for all of us is celebrating Shabbat as a community on Friday morning. Our entire school joins together for a spirited Shabbat Sing. Then each class heads back to their room for a Taste of Shabbat, where they say the blessings, light the candles, drink grape juice, and eat challah. We say blessings before we eat snack and lunch, as a way to express our thanks for our food. Throughout the year, we study and celebrate each holiday as it occurs. We teach the story of the holiday and customs in a way that is age appropriate for Toddlers, 2s, 3s, and 4s. We approach each holiday through the lens of Jewish values.

### **STECC Curriculum Statement**

At STECC, we refer to the 38 objectives in the Creative Curriculum and play-based learning to guide the lesson planning process for all the ages we serve, including toddler/two's, threes, and fours. At the STECC, we use children's interests to guide them through the process of learning how to learn: learning how to ask questions, how to form theories, how to conduct research, and how to integrate information. This foundation will carry our young learners through their academic careers. Children construct knowledge through direct experience with the world around them. Our teachers provide those direct experiences through the lens of subjects that are of interest to each particular class of children. We integrate literacy, numeracy, science, and creativity all into the daily learning that takes place in our classrooms. Our approach to learning is structured around four major components, each equally important and all interrelated: Inquiry- and Play-Based Learning; Social Emotional Learning; Kindergarten Readiness; and Jewish Values.

# **ABOUT SHAARE TORAH KINDERGARTEN (STK)**

Shaare Torah Kindergarten (STK) is a private kindergarten program that provides kindergarten curriculum in a warm, nurturing environment tailored to each child's individual learning and development. STK prepares students for 1st grade using the same curriculum and benchmarks as Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS). STK teachers guide their small classes through their kindergarten journey by scaffolding each child's learning according to their own unique pace and learning style, supporting and challenging each student to succeed to their full potential.

STK is a private school licensed by the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) Nonpublic Schools Approval Branch. STK is a separate school from Shaare Torah Early Childhood Center (STECC). STK is a secular kindergarten program, not a Judaic or Hebrew immersion kindergarten.

## **Our Program**

Our teachers have degrees in early childhood education (preschool-3rd grade) or elementary education (Kindergarten-5th grade) with experience teaching Pre-K, Kindergarten, 1st grade, and 2nd grade.

We follow MCPS Kindergarten benchmarks. We use the same math curriculum as MCPS, Eureka Math. For English Language Arts (ELA), we use the Learning A-Z curriculum, which uses the same reading levels and assessments as MCPS.

We group students into ELA groups and math groups that optimize their learning while providing opportunities for social-emotional learning. Teachers provide guided reading and guided math in addition to independent work.

In addition to ELA and math, our curriculum includes science, social studies, art, music, physical education, and more. Small class sizes and individualized instruction means that we meet each learner where they are, provide all of the support needed, and challenge them to learn and grow.

We foster independence and responsible citizenship in the way the children care for themselves, their belongings, their materials, their classroom, and each other. We emphasize teamwork and collaboration. Much of our learning is driven by playing games together.

# POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

## **STECC Admission, Registration and Tuition Policies**

STECC does not discriminate by race, religion, national origin or gender in its admission policies. Members of Shaare Torah congregation receive priority within a designated registration period for all our programs.

A non-refundable application fee is required at the time of registration. Upon acceptance to our program, the tuition deposit cannot be refunded.

In the 2023-2024 school year, tuition is based on a school year, beginning in September and ending in the following mid-June. If two children in the same family are registered, there is a 10 percent reduction in tuition for the child whose tuition is lower. All synagogue and school financial obligations must be kept current in order for:

- Your child to enter school.
- Continuation in our program throughout the school year.
- Applications for the next school year to be processed.
- Transcripts to be completed and forwarded to other schools.

To keep your account current, please make your payments according to the fee and payment schedule provided by our accounting department.

## **STK Admission, Registration and Tuition Policies**

STK does not discriminate by race, religion, national origin or gender in its admission policies. Members of Shaare Torah congregation receive priority within a designated registration period for all our programs.

A non-refundable application fee and 5% tuition deposit is required at the time of registration. Upon acceptance to our program, the tuition deposit cannot be refunded.

In the 2023-2024 school year, tuition is based on a school year, beginning in September and ending in the following mid-June. If two children in the same family are registered, there is a 10 percent reduction in tuition for the child whose tuition is lower. All synagogue and school financial obligations must be kept current in order for:

- Your child to enter school.
- Continuation in our program throughout the school year.
- Applications for the next school year to be processed.
- Transcripts to be completed and forwarded to other schools.

To keep your account current, please make your payments according to the fee and payment schedule provided by our accounting department.

### **STECC School Hours**

**Half-Day:**

9:15am-1pm

**Full-Day:**

8:30am-4pm

**Complete Day:**

7am-6pm

### **STK School Hours**

**Kindergarten:**

9am-3pm

**Extended Day:**

7am-6pm

### **On-Time Arrival and Dismissal**

Being on time for arrival and dismissal is very important. This is your child's first education experience. On time arrival helps set the tone for your child for the rest of the day and stresses the importance of education in their life. Late pick-up may be upsetting and/or confusing for your child, who sees the rest of their classmates going home.

### **Drop-off and Pick-up Procedures**

If someone other than a parent is picking up a child, a written note or email must be given to the teacher, director, or school administrator, in advance, clearly identifying the authorized individual. No child will be released to a person who has not been authorized in advance and in writing or email by a parent, and that individual must be prepared to show proper identification if requested. Additionally, parents must provide written authorization for any change in the normal pick-up routine.

We would also like to remind parents that it is illegal in the state of Maryland to leave a child unattended in a motor vehicle. We are obligated to report any instances of this that we witness. We encourage parents who have children that they feel must be left in the car to request another parent to watch the child.

### **Building Security**

Each family will be provided with fingerprint access and/or a fob to use during drop-off and pick-up.



### **Dress for Success**

Students should wear clothing that allows them to participate fully and safely in the class activities at school. Please remember it's preschool, where we expect children to get messy and dirty, as painting, playing outside, and cooking are all regular parts of our day. Children should wear appropriate shoes (closed-toed shoes) in order to participate in the day's activities. No sandals, crocs, flip-flops or other open-toed shoes are permitted. Children will have daily outdoor play as long as there is no inclement weather (snow, ice, freezing rain, sleet, hail, polar vortex, heat advisory, air quality advisory). At teachers' discretion and with parent authorization, classes may go out to play in the rain, as long as they have appropriate gear and there is no thunder or lightning.

Please make sure that children have the appropriate outdoor clothing, including hats and gloves during the winter. Please label all clothing, including outerwear, as well as lunch bags and backpacks with your child's name.

## **SCHOOL CLOSING POLICY**

### **Inclement Weather and Emergency Situations**

The STECC/STK inclement weather policy reflects our school's core values of keeping all of our families and teachers safe and being working parent friendly.

- On the first day of a weather event:
  - If MCPS closes childcare programs in school buildings, then STECC/STK will be closed.
  - If MCPS states that child care programs in school buildings may open, then STECC/STK will make an independent determination.
  - If MCPS has a 2-hour delay, then STECC/STK will open at 9:15am.
  - If MCPS has a 1-hour delay, then STECC/STK will open at 8:30am.
  - If MCPS closes 2.5 hours early, STECC and STK will close at 1pm.
  - If MCPS cancels after-school activities, STECC and STK will close at 3pm.
- On subsequent days of a weather event, STECC/STK will make an independent determination.

Regardless of any decision STECC/STK makes to open school, please make your own independent decisions regarding road safety for your individual family.

STECC/STK will send emails and text messages via the Remini app. All ECC parents are automatically subscribed to email and text reminders via the Remini app. The decision concerning closings or delayed opening will be made by 6am and concerning early dismissals by 11am. An email will be sent out by 6am.

In the instance of sudden inclement weather or other emergency (i.e. power outages, hurricanes, no heat, etc.), the Director may close the school at her discretion before MCPS has made its formal decision. In this case, you will be notified by email and text as soon as the decision has been made. Someone from the school will follow-up with a phone call to let each family know the nature of the problem.

Please use your discretion regarding the condition of the roads and the safety of your children in determining whether to venture out in the morning or to pick up your child early even if we have not closed the school.

## **HEALTH, WELLNESS AND SAFETY**

### **Health and Safety**

Your child's health is a matter of major importance. As members of a school community, each child's health impacts the public health of the other children and staff. STECC/STK has an obligation to enforce our health policies in order to keep all children in our care safe and well. Thank you for your partnership in keeping everyone in the STECC/STK community healthy and safe.

### **Medical Forms**

The Health Department requires a completed health form for each child, identifying immunizations and including a tuberculin clearance and evidence of lead poison screening. In addition, an emergency form must be completed and submitted by a parent that identifies at least two individuals, with current addresses and telephone numbers, who are to be contacted in the event of an emergency. These forms must be on file with the school before your child may attend class. It is the parents' responsibility to notify the school of any changes in this information that may occur during the school year.

It is also the parents' responsibility to notify the school of any medical conditions or allergies that might be relevant to your child's attendance at the ECC and any changes to that condition or allergy that may occur during the school year. All such medical conditions and allergies must be addressed by a statement from your child's physician that identifies the nature of the medical condition or allergy and what steps (if any) the STECC/STK staff may have to take in the event a related problem occurs.

## **Vaccination Policy**

As a preschool with Jewish values, we follow Pikuach Nefesh which states it is a person's duty as members of society to protect all of its members. The Maryland immunization schedule must be met. In cases where a delayed schedule is recommended by the physician, a note from the physician is required, along with a projected schedule of immunization. In cases where a physician has determined that a child cannot receive one or vaccinations for medical reasons only, we require a doctor's note confirming this.

## **Illnesses**

A child should not be sent to STECC/STK when they are not feeling well. Germs are shared quickly in a school environment. You can help all our children stay healthier by keeping your sick child at home.

**Please notify the school when your child is not attending by sending a message in the Remini app.**

These are circumstances that would exclude your child from school:

- **COVID-19**

Please inform the school director, school administrator, and teachers via Remini direct message immediately if:

- **Your child tests positive for COVID-19, or**
- **Your child has symptoms of COVID-19:**
  - *Exclusionary:*
    - Fever or chills
    - Cough
    - Shortness of breath or difficulty breathing
    - New loss of taste or smell
    - Nausea or vomiting
    - Diarrhea
  - *Not exclusionary by itself, contextual:*
    - Fatigue
    - Muscle or body aches
    - Headache
    - Sore throat
    - Congestion or runny nose

**All persons who have symptoms of COVID-19, regardless of vaccination status, should do as follows:**

- Test for COVID-19;
- Check with your healthcare provider to determine if a medical examination and/or further testing is necessary; **AND**

- Stay home from school if symptoms are exclusionary.
- If we have cases of COVID-19, Influenza, Strep, and/or RSV in school, we will require those tests as well.
- If the individual has a fever of 100.4 degrees or higher, they may not return to school until they have gone at least 24 hours with no fever without taking medications that reduce fever.
- If the individual has vomiting, they may not return to school until they have gone at least 24 hours with no vomiting without taking medications that suppress vomiting.
- If the individual has diarrhea, they may not return to school until they have gone at least 24 hours with no diarrhea without taking medications that suppress diarrhea.
- **Other Exclusionary Illnesses**  
If your child is diagnosed with, or tests positive for, one of the following exclusionary illnesses, they cannot return to school until cleared by a physician to return and you must provide a doctor's note.
  - Respiratory Syncytial Virus (RSV)
  - Strep
  - Influenza A or Influenza B ("Flu")
  - Norovirus ("Stomach Virus")
  - Hand, Foot & Mouth Disease
  - Conjunctivitis ("Pink Eye")
  - Impetigo
  - Croup
  - Lice. If your child has lice, they need to be treated and lice-free before returning to school.
- **Symptoms to look for in your decision to keep your child home**
  - Has a cold that began less than 4 days ago
  - Red, pink, or crusted eyes
  - Stomach ache
  - Nausea
  - Ear ache
  - Rash/skin infection
  - Headache
  - Thick or greenish mucus from the nose

We reserve the right to request a doctor's note when there is any doubt about whether or not your child has recovered. Please notify the school at once if your child has a communicable disease (i.e. COVID-19, lice, conjunctivitis/pink eye, Hand Foot and

Mouth Disease, strep throat, flu, chicken pox, etc.), so that we can inform the parent body. We will not identify your child in that communication.

If we are concerned about your child's health, we will call you to either discuss our concerns or ask you to pick up your child.

### **COVID-19 Isolation**

**All persons who test positive for COVID-19, regardless of vaccination status, complete isolation as follows:**

- Stay home for at least 5 full days from the date of symptom onset if symptomatic or from the date of the positive test if no symptoms.
  - Day 0 is considered the day symptoms started in symptomatic persons or the day of the positive test if asymptomatic.

**2 and Over: After they have ended isolation, when they are feeling better** (no fever without the use of fever-reducing medications and symptoms improving),

- Wear their mask through Day 10.

**OR**

- With two sequential negative tests 48 hours apart, they may remove their mask sooner than Day 10. For example, negative tests the mornings of Day 6 and Day 8 would mean that the person could stop masking on Day 8.

**Under 2: After they have ended isolation, when they are feeling better**, they may return to school if they have a negative test at Day 5 or later; otherwise, they should remain at home for Day 6 through Day 10. A negative test at Day 10 or after is not needed to return.

**After you have ended isolation, if their COVID-19 symptoms recur or worsen**, restart their isolation at Day 0. Talk to a healthcare provider if you have questions about their symptoms or when to end isolation.

### **COVID-19 Quarantine**

- **Staff and students/children who may be close contacts, regardless of their vaccination status**, can continue to attend school, mask optional, **as long as they remain asymptomatic**.

### **Allergies**

Shaare Torah Early Childhood Center is a nut free environment. Parents may not send any nut products to school. This includes personal lunches. Please remember that foods such as Bamba, Nutella, Reese's peanut butter cups, and Reese's Pieces contain nuts. Please be mindful that most granola bars contain nuts. All allergies must be documented with a statement from your child's physician and discussed with the School staff. Food allergies require very specific information including the following:

- What type of allergy, with specifics (i.e. if nuts, what type?)
- What reaction does the child have and what level of exposure is acceptable (i.e. eating, touching, in the room)

- What treatment, if any, is necessary after exposure

A detailed allergy list will be posted in each classroom that includes each child's name and all items to which they are allergic. Your child's health and well-being is of vital importance to us.

### **Medication Administration**

The administration of medication to children while they are attending school should be avoided. Treatment schedules which allow medicine to be given at times other than school hours are preferred. However, if in the opinion of your child's physician, it is necessary for medication to be given during school hours, a representative of the school will administer the medication in accordance with the following procedures:

- 24 hours of medication must be given before your child can return to school.
- Any medication brought to school must be checked in at the Director's office upon arrival.
- Staff members may not administer any medication, including over the counter drugs to any students, except as authorized by a parent and the child's physician.
- The parent is responsible for administering the first dose of the day at home to be certain there are no side effects.
- The parent is responsible for notifying the school in person or by telephone the first morning a new medication is brought to school.
- A physician statement and completed authorization form from the doctor are required to administer any medication.
- All prescription medications must be in the original container with your child's name, date, medication name and dosage instructions clearly affixed by the pharmacy. It is easier to ask the pharmacist to put the medication into two containers so that one can be at school while the other remains at home.

## **PLANNING FOR ALL LEARNERS IN THE CLASSROOM**

### **Behavior Management**

STECC/STK is dedicated to providing the best in early childhood education for young children. Positive, age-appropriate behavior management techniques are incorporated into our program and involve the children as active participants in the problem-solving process. Cooperation between parents and staff is vital in guiding the social and emotional development of our children.

Children learn that certain types of behavior are not acceptable. However, if undesirable behavior continues, the teacher will contact the parents to discuss joint methods of addressing the problem. For example, biting or other forms of physical aggression.

Any discussions with staff will be strictly confidential. If a behavior problem becomes severe or potentially dangerous, and until a plan of action is decided upon, parents may be required to remove the child from school. Please understand that STECC/STK has complete discretion to remove a child on the recommendation of the staff.

### **Special Needs and Inclusion Policy**

The staff of STECC/STK will work in partnership with families to find innovative solutions to best meet the individual needs of each child.

- Our classes offer an age-appropriate student to teacher ratio.
- Where necessary, modifications may be made in schedules, programs, materials, etc. to meet an individual child's needs.
- STECC/STK collaborates with Maryland State and Montgomery County programs such as ChildLink, Infants and Toddlers, and Child Find.
- If it is necessary to go beyond the public resources to private resources, STECC/STK has consultancy with Amy Egan of Child Development Consultants, Orly Zimmerman Leizerov of Growing Minds Therapy, Claire Lerner of Lerner Child Development, and Meredith Polsky of MATAN. If needed, an interdisciplinary team of special needs consultants (occupational therapy, speech and language, and behavioral) is available through the Child Development Consultants, LLC. They provide support and help to parents and teachers, conduct classroom observations, give consultations to staff and parents, and provide recommendations for professional referrals. In addition, they provide training for staff to support children with special needs.
- At the parents' expense, and as deemed necessary by the Director, the school may require additional professional support (i.e., para-educators, facilitators, shadows, resources, etc.) in the classroom.
- We will serve as a resource and support to families on referrals to Child Find and other services available in the community.
- Children in the PEP program can split their time between STECC and PEP, receive services from an itinerant PEP educator in an STECC classroom, or attend STECC in the morning and be bussed to PEP in the afternoon.
- Our Director and teachers attend IEP meetings.

If a child has been observed by a special needs consultant and an evaluation has been recommended, it is expected that families will make the appropriate arrangements for testing and/or assessment. Any relevant information, such as reports, assessments, evaluations, IEPs, etc. prepared by other professionals must be provided to us in a timely manner, so that we can best address the needs of the child. All information will be held in the strictest confidence.

We will do our best to meet each child's needs, but we recognize our limitations. Although we will make every attempt to make accommodations in our classrooms,

parents should understand that, if we feel that we cannot properly address your child's needs, we will make every attempt to work with you to find an alternative placement.

### **Special Health Care Needs**

The developmental needs are always taken into account when creating lesson plans. We welcome all children, including those with developmental delays/disabilities and special healthcare needs. The staff of STECC will work in partnership with families to find innovative solutions to best meet the individual needs of each child.

- Our classes offer an age-appropriate student to teacher ratio.
- Where necessary, modifications may be made in schedules, programs, materials, etc. to meet an individual child's needs.
- STECC collaborates with Maryland State and Montgomery County programs such as ChildLink, Infants and Toddlers, and Child Find.
- If it is necessary to go beyond the public resources to private resources, STECC has consultancy with an interdisciplinary team of special needs consultants (occupational therapy, speech and language, and behavioral) at Child Development Consultants, LLC. They provide support and help to parents and teachers, conduct classroom observations, give consultations to staff and parents, and provide recommendations for professional referrals. In addition, they provide training for staff to support children with special needs.
- At the parents' expense, and as deemed necessary by the Director, the school may require additional professional support (i.e., para-educators, facilitators, shadows, resources, etc.) in the classroom.
- We will serve as a resource and support to families on referrals to Child Find and other services available in the community.
- Children in the PEP program can split their time between STECC and PEP, receive services from an itinerant PEP educator in an STECC classroom, or attend STECC in the morning and be bussed to PEP in the afternoon.
- Our Director and teachers attend IEP meetings. If a child has been observed by a special needs consultant and an evaluation has been recommended, it is expected that families will make the appropriate arrangements for testing and/or assessment. Therapists and service providers are welcome to interact with our program with parent permission. If your child has an existing plan, please share a copy of the IEP/IFSP so we can best serve your child. We request that you please share with us any relevant information, such as reports, assessments, evaluations, IEPs/IFSPs, etc. prepared by other professionals. Any information that you choose to share, please provide it in a timely manner, so that we can best address the needs of the child. All information will be held in the strictest confidence.

### **Developmental Progress**

At Shaare Torah, we do ongoing observations and assessments. Everyone in the center does observations. The staff, the direct teachers in the classroom, the director. We use anecdotal notes, where we write down what the children are doing and saying, during



our observations. This is done daily. We take pictures every day too to aide in our observations and then further, our assessments. We can observe a child drawing in the art center and take notes and take pictures and understand that we may need to work on their fine-motor skills. We use developmental checklists for this too. The checklists allow us to know where the child can be, developmentally and by domain, and helps us create goals which also aids in lesson planning. We keep portfolios for the children and also the classroom, and the teachers use their own self-reflection daily on what worked and what did not work. The portfolios help us in organizing the children's work, and seeing their potential progression over the school year. The observations that we do also aid in figuring out the children's interests, which helps in lesson planning. It also aids in seeing the children's skills and deciding what to do to help enhance those skills and reach higher goals, alongside what the families want to see for the child. Our observation and assessment of the children aligns to our curriculum, so we are intentionally creating a program for the kids and by the kids.

### **Lesson Planning**

To develop our lesson plans, we observe and then reflect on the children's interests, skills, ages and developmental domains, any special needs, family culture, and family input.

By using observations and assessment, we gather information on the children's interests and skills. If children are showing interest in specific themes, materials, etc. we follow their lead when lesson planning. If we observe that the children are reaching certain milestones and developing skills, we challenge them to increase and improve on them and we use small groups or one-on-one to hyper focus on this. Ongoing observations, informally using anecdotal notes, and assessments using checklists, portfolios, pictures, summaries, etc. are used to ensure that we are keeping track of each individual child both in their skill-set but also in where their interests lay.

We involve the families as much as we can in the lesson planning process. We have conferences twice a year to review children's strengths and create goals with the families. We use intake forms to learn about the child and family, their culture, their traditions at home, their values. If a child is doing something at home that is relevant at school, we incorporate that into our plans. For example, if a family's culture is to live with multiple generations in one household, we make sure to discuss different types of household makeups within the lesson plans instead of the typical father, mom, children home. We like to create relationships with the families enrolled here, so that we can learn from them and make sure that our lesson plans are culturally competent – we incorporate primary languages from a family, for example. We are a Jewish preschool with diverse children and teachers. We value and respect each and every child's backgrounds, cultures, and primary languages.

Our lesson plans reflect activities that are age-appropriate and domain-based for the

children. For the toddler and 2s, we focus on personal and social development, language development, cognitive development, and physical development. For the 3s and above, we focus on social foundations, language and literacy, math, science, social studies, physical/motor development, and the arts.

We do this by aiming for time in play-based, free centers learning where they can develop relationships with their peers and learn how to manage their own feelings, aiming to build in new vocabulary and create print-rich environments, having outside time on equipment, indoor gross-motor activities such as yoga, tumble mats, and more, asking open-ended questions, and using activities that promote academic learning. We cross domains in centers – for example, we could set up dramatic play as a restaurant with menus for language and literacy and arts, math in the cash register toy, science for the measuring while baking, and social studies by having ideas of different foods from around the food. Our children are always learning and the learning is intentional, provided by our lesson planning process.

## **IMPORTANT INFORMATION**

### **Toilet Training**

Children do not need to be toilet trained in order to attend school. If your child is wearing diapers, you will need to send in a package of diapers and wipes at the beginning of the school year. As you begin to toilet train your child at home, please advise the staff. We are very willing to work as partners with you, but please understand that sometimes, even when children are successful at home, it may take longer for them to feel comfortable in school.

### **Snacks**

We provide snacks which include whole grains, fresh fruits and/or vegetables at least four times a week, and limit fat, sugar and salt.

### **Lunch**

Students should bring their lunch in a clearly labeled lunch bag. Please keep good nutrition in mind as you plan lunchtime menus and include a beverage, napkin and necessary utensils. We monitor the meals from home and only as necessary, will add on to make sure children are eating balanced meals that are nutritious.

Please send in only what your child will eat. No foods containing nut products may be brought to school. The school follows the congregational rules for kashrut. Only dairy or parve (foods with no dairy or meat ingredients) are permitted in the school. The lunches will be refrigerated.

Food items brought to school for class use must be approved in advance by the teacher or Director. Please refer to the synagogue's website ([www.shaaretorah.org](http://www.shaaretorah.org)) for a downloadable document labeled "kashrut symbols" for guidance in your selections. Because of different home standards for kashrut, foods prepared at home may not be brought to school for class use.

### **Physical Fitness**

Per the recommendation from the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP), "Participating in physical activity is an essential component of a healthy lifestyle and ideally begins in infancy and extends throughout adulthood. Regular physical activity increases lean body mass, muscle, and bone strength and promotes physical health. It fosters psychological well-being, can increase self-esteem and capacity for learning, and can help children and adolescents handle stress. Parents should emphasize physical activity, beginning early in a child's life."

We also follow the reasoning from American Academy of Pediatrics on how physical fitness is "to help young children master basic motor skills. Physical activity can promote mastery of these skills, all of which are important developmental milestones. In addition, physical activity can improve physical and mental health and is fun for children."

At Shaare Torah, we promote physical fitness **daily**, outside on the playground and in incremental weather, we move to gross-motor activities indoors. We use materials and equipment including basketballs, soccer balls, bouncy balls, softballs, soft bats, frisbees, and more. If you would like to donate extra toys children can play with during their gross motor activities, please send it in. Please make sure your children are wearing comfortable clothing and sneakers (no flip flops or crocs) so they can run, jump, climb, etc.

Source: [https://downloads.aap.org/AAP/PDF/Bright%20Futures/BF4\\_PhysicalActivity.pdf](https://downloads.aap.org/AAP/PDF/Bright%20Futures/BF4_PhysicalActivity.pdf)

### **Celebrating Birthdays and Holidays**

Children enjoy sharing their birthdays with friends. It is a wonderful opportunity for children to be generous and gracious. Taking turns at being the focus of attention is an important opportunity for emotional growth.

Birthday celebrations in school are a special time for the class as a community to come together to honor a friend. The class will come together at the beginning of the year to decide on a way to commemorate the birthdays, for instance with a book, canvas, sculpture, or frame. The parents are invited to join the class for the birthday celebration. This is usually early in the day (around 9:30 or 10:00) or after lunch at 12:30. We can work with parents to schedule the time that works best for the family and the class. Parents should send a new or used book to read to the class and then give as a gift to the class on the occasion of your child's birthday.

You may distribute birthday invitations through the school only if every child in the class is invited. No presents/notices/invitations can be delivered to school or the classrooms unless every child in the intended classroom receives one.

When planning your child's birthday party, please be sensitive to the fact that some children may not be able to attend parties scheduled on Shabbat (Friday night and Saturday) and Jewish Holidays.

Throughout the year, we will celebrate many holidays in school. Periodically, parents will be invited to participate in events, such as Hanukkah and Purim celebrations. However, we do not celebrate Halloween, Valentine's Day, St. Patrick's Day, Christmas, or Easter in our school. Please do not distribute candy or cards at those times.

### **Toys from Home**

We ask that you leave your child's toys at home or in the car. We do not want toys from home broken or lost.

### **STECC Classroom Shabbat Celebration**

Although Shabbat does not begin until Friday evening, we prepare for its arrival by lighting the Shabbat candles and reciting the blessings with the children every Friday.

In our school program, we invite parents to join in their child's class in a Shabbat celebration. The sharing of Shabbat with others is a highlight of the week!

### **Communication with School**

Together, parents and teachers are partners in a child's development, and communication between parents and the school staff is vital. Teachers will meet both parents and children before school starts at outdoor class get-togethers and over Zoom parent meetings. Parent/teacher conferences will be scheduled twice a year. If you have questions or concerns about your child at any time during the school year, please make arrangements to speak to your teacher. All STECC/STK teachers have Shaare Torah email addresses for parent communications. If you wish to speak to the teacher by telephone, please call the school and leave a message, and your call will be returned in a timely manner. We will treat all communication as strictly confidential.

We have an app called Remini which will be your primary way of communicating with the teachers, and the teachers with you. You will receive regular updates and pictures regarding your child and their class, as well as be able to communicate privately with their teacher team through messaging. We request that any information that any teacher may need access to be put in Remini. Some examples are: an early pick up time, an absence, a request for a lost item of clothing, a need for more diapers.....

Please give any written correspondence directly to the teacher. Also, the Director is

always available to meet with you to discuss any questions or concerns that you have about your child, whether it directly relates to an issue at school or pertains to something at home. Please inform the school if a special family situation arises during the year. This could include illness, separation, divorce, loss of a loved one, an extended trip by one parent, or a new baby in the family. By informing the school, we will be prepared to help your child through a difficult or stressful situation.

Please note that the director and teachers do not respond to emails or phone calls during Shabbat (Friday evening through Saturday evening) and holidays with work prohibitions (Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, Sukkot, Sh'mini Atzeret, Simchat Torah, Passover, and Shavuot).

### **Donations/Early Childhood Center Fund**

The Shaare Torah Early Childhood Center Fund is a great way to support the School. Congregants, parents, friends and relatives have the opportunity to make a donation to the Early Childhood Center to honor a child for a birthday, graduation or other occasion.

The purpose of this fund is to enrich our children's school program by providing special resources and equipment. Checks should be made payable to Shaare Torah, with a note stating, "This donation is being made in honor of (child's name) for (occasion)."

These checks should then be sent to:  
Shaare Torah  
1409 Main Street,  
Gaithersburg, MD 20878

All donations are acknowledged in the synagogue weekly electronic newsletter. All donations are tax-deductible.

## **SHAARE TORAH COMMITTEES**

### **Shaare Torah Education Committee**

The Shaare Torah Education Committee welcomes you and hopes that your child's year is full of fun, learning and wonderful experiences. The mission is to be a liaison with the Early Childhood Center and the synagogue to ensure continuity within our programs and make the Early Childhood Center the best it can be. The Education Committee works with the Director on policies, procedures, facilities, and special programs.

### **STECC/STK Parent Committee**

Parents of current students who wish to take a more active role in volunteerism and serving as liaisons between the parent community and school staff comprise the

STECC/STK Parent Committee. The purpose of the Parent Committee is to encourage unity, cooperation and understanding among parents and school staff, to volunteer and recruit parents to volunteer at ECC functions, and to fundraise for the school. The Parent Committee is involved in many different activities including Parents' Night Out, parent programs and special programs for the children. Everyone is encouraged to take an active role in the Parent Committee.

## **SYNAGOGUE PROGRAMS FOR PRESCHOOL FAMILIES**

Shaare Torah runs several programs for preschool aged children and their families. These are great opportunities to meet other families with children, enjoy Shabbat, and spend time as a family in a Jewish environment. All are welcome and encouraged to participate!

### **Shabbat Services**

There are Shabbat services every Saturday at 9:30 am at the Synagogue. The Torah service starts at approximately 10:15 am when young children are invited to help open the ark.

### **Tot Shabbat**

Preschoolers and their families joyously celebrate Shabbat at our monthly "Tot Shabbat" service. Using short prayers, songs, stories and movement, preschoolers and parents celebrate Shabbat as a community. The "Tot Shabbat" service takes place on the first Saturday of each month at about 10:30 am.