

At last year's annual meeting, I reported to you that we expected to begin the year with remote learning, but we certainly would be back in our classrooms by November. That turned out to be optimistic. We spent the entire year in Zoom sessions. With the support and assistance of our education committee, Bill Rutherford, Dana Kramaroff and Larry Zelson, the technology was mastered, the students were registered, and the teachers rose to the challenge of teaching interesting classes to students who really were tired of looking at screens. I became aware of the powerful advantage of having college students on the faculty: when it comes to internet resources and computer connectivity, they tend to be miles ahead of the rest of us. Dana had coaching sessions with the teachers, which were extremely helpful. With few exceptions, attendance was very good all year.

We even managed an innovation during the pandemic. In December, we invited young children ages 4-7 to join Mazel Tots – a monthly series of holiday-themed sessions with Shari Gluskin, who told stories, played games, sang songs, and led art activities, all via Zoom. This was somewhat labor-intensive, as each of the eight young participants had to receive art supplies every month in the mail. However, Mazel Tots was extremely successful, and everyone was happy. Whether Mazel Tots continues in the coming year depends on how many of the participants join the religious school program.

Other bright spots were our families' participation in the JCC's very creative Purim event, in which cars were dressed up instead of people, and our confirmation service on Shavuot last month, in which limited in-person attendees witnessed our two confirmands read and interpret Torah in the sanctuary.

Registration for this fall will be opened within the next two weeks. Next year's school calendar begins on Sunday, Sep. 12, and includes 28 sessions. Acting on advice from our health and safety committee, we anticipate having in-person classes with appropriate social distancing and masking, until otherwise advised. Our latest information is that children ages 2-12 will not begin getting vaccinated until October at the earliest.

Faculty. Some participants in last year's Mazel Tots program will be enrolling in our K-1 class, taught by Shari Gluskin. Steffa Burke will continue teaching our 2nd/3rd grade, and a new teacher, Matan Dolev, will teach our fifth grade. (Our lone fourth grader will be in a specially tailored program overseen by Steffa Burke. Aevyn Barnett will move from fourth to sixth grade, and Alan Salinger will continue as our 7th grade teacher. Jacob Lader will move from sixth grade to teach a combined 8th/9th grade class, and Mollie Hantman-Weill will teach our confirmation class.

A new song-leader, Sam Brown of Muhlenberg College, will be teaching Jewish songs to our students and also running our music hug or club. A rotating schedule has been set up of class visits to our library and art studio, and visits from our music teacher. I am especially enthusiastic about the potential for enhanced library resources, with the unexpected gift of the services of local Jewish book expert Sean Boyle.

A limited-run Hebrew boot camp will begin early in the fall, in order to bring all students up to grade level in Hebrew reading. Assisting in this program will be our two 2021 confirmands, Keller Pooley and Tatyana Ulman.

We're resuming our successful 2019-2020 hugeem sessions, which occupy the last 45 minutes of our Sunday sessions. Those include studio art, music, krav maga, drama and book club. There's a special addition coming to our program of hugeem, or creative clubs. Tatyana and Keller will coordinate a teen service project. It's our hope that the post-b'nai mitsva in this group, besides giving back to the congregation, will start planning social activities outside of school time, and perhaps eventually affiliating with a national Jewish youth organization. The group's advisor will be Mollie Hantman-Weill.

Families of upcoming b'nai mitsva will meet with Rabbi Seth, Vikki Dunn, and myself on October 3 for an introductory session. We plan to re-institute the tradition of the mitsva project, and to that end, we will invite the b'nai mitsva candidates and the entire community to a Mitsva Fair, to familiarize students with practical opportunities for tikkun olam. (Any KI member who has a connection with a likely mitsva project or organization, is strongly invited to contact me.)

The 2021-22 calendar also includes a learning event in which our RS families will create individualized books that record their life-cycle ceremonies. We also plan an Israel Fair, and, at long last, we'll enjoy an actual model seder with food and a community Purim carnival.

KI joined a consortium of synagogues in southeastern Pennsylvania to brainstorm together about the challenge of family engagement particularly during Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur, in this fraught period of cautious normalization. At the present moment, an ad-hoc committee of school and family-engagement volunteers is evaluating when, how, and what High Holiday programs will be meaningful and inspiring to our families. Any ideas you may have will be welcome.

A detailed description of each grade's learning goals can be seen on KI's website. Look under "learning" then "religious school" then "curriculum."

I am so grateful to KI's education committee, teachers, senior staff, and all the congregants who have been generous with their time and resources during this challenging, difficult, unprecedented year.