



Congregation
Beth Am

בית אֵם



Jewish Learning Center

FACULTY HANDBOOK

2020-2021/5781

Rabbi Matthew Earne

Congregation Beth Am
5050 Del Mar Heights Road, San Diego, CA 92130
(858) 481-2869 | rabbie@betham.com | www.betham.com

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Dear Students and Parents:

It is a great honor to welcome you to our JLC program!

This past summer I had a chance to begin my learning at the Shalom Hartman Institute in Israel as part of the Rabbinic Leadership Initiative. It is a three year program that will require me to travel to Israel to study in the summer and in the winter. One of our speakers was Deborah Lipstadt, the author of “Antisemitism” and the heroine who stood up to Holocaust denier David Irving. She is a preeminent scholar on the Holocaust and has recently become a scholar on the history and challenges of Antisemitism. During her lecture to my cohort she shared with us her greatest concern facing the Jewish community in the wake of recent acts of antisemitism such as the shooting at Poway. She worried that our children’s Judaism would be defined more as a response to antisemitism, as opposed to a religion that defines itself internally. In summary she argued, Judaism needs to focus on the “joy” and not the “oy.”

Our task this year is to engage your children through authentic Jewish experiences, not in the face of antisemitism, but rather because they are a part of a people with great stories, ideas and values to share. We are launching a new midot initiative, expanding our madrichim program, and we will have our own shinshin from Israel, Michal Kalimi who will be infusing our program with Israeli culture. I am so happy that all of you will be a part of this fantastic year.

We could not do it without you!

Baruch Haba, blessed are all who enter!

Rabbi Matthew Earne
Education Rabbi
E-mail: rabbie@betham.com
Phone: (858) 481-8454
Rabbi Matthew Earne

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JLC MISSION AND VISION STATEMENT

The mission of the Jewish Learning Center (“JLC”) is to engage our children with passion in a lifelong love of and personal connection to Jewish values, experiences, and traditions that enable our students to keep Judaism relevant in a modern world.

We are committed to teaching Jewish values that will instill Jewish pride and to navigate and balance those values within the Jewish community as well as the world at large, in partnership with family and home. Managing this balance stems from having a foundation including knowledge of the Jewish language, Jewish customs, Jewish culture, and Jewish values. As our students grow older, they will draw on this education and knowledge to make ethical decisions.

Students at Congregation Beth Am (“Beth Am”) Jewish Learning Center are provided engaging learning opportunities inspiring them to lifelong involvement in their Jewish community. The Beth Am JLC is a warm, welcoming environment for students to create positive memories instilling a love of Judaism.

FRAMEWORK FOR EXCELLENCE

The Congregation Beth Am Jewish Learning Center of San Diego has been recognized by United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism as a “Framework for Excellence School”. This certification marks the fact that the Beth Am JLC has met rigorous standards in professional development, curriculum development, and family education. The JLC has demonstrated that it has met all of the goals, aims and benchmarks necessary to be considered a school of exceptional academic quality. It is noteworthy that the JLC was the first in the state and second in the nation to be accepted into the Framework for Excellence.

SCHOOL HOURS

Kindergarten and 1st Grade:

Sunday, 9:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.

2nd Grade through 6th Grade:

Sunday, 9:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.

AND

Wednesday OR Thursday, 4:00 p.m. – 6:30 p.m.

EXPECTATIONS OF OUR TEACHERS

As a member of the JLC teaching staff, you are expected to follow these daily routines and procedures:

Teacher Hours



Please report to the office, **sign in** and pick up materials at least fifteen minutes prior to the start of class. All teachers are expected to be in their classrooms and **ready to go** at least ten minutes prior to the start of class. Check your box and read all memos and notices before and after class.



Teachers must remain with their classes until the last student is picked up.



Keep your clipboards with you at all times.



You must be at your assigned area during break.

Attendance



Teachers should be present for all class sessions. If you cannot avoid an absence, you must notify the Education Rabbi at least two weeks in advance.

Substitutes



The Education Rabbi will supply teachers with an **approved substitute list**, and it is the teacher's responsibility to secure a substitute. It is imperative that you notify the Education Rabbi as soon as you know that you will be absent AND when you have secured a substitute. If you are feeling ill but are not sure whether you will be attending class, please call the JLC Office at (858) 481-2869 regardless. You will be responsible for providing the substitute and Education Rabbi with a lesson plan. All lesson plans must be received 1 week prior to your absence. If the office is closed, please be sure to call the Education Rabbi at home (858) 444-7692.

Remember, good attendance on the part of the teacher sets an ideal example for the students. Please arrange for the success of your students and the substitute.

Student Safety



When you are with your students, you are responsible for their safety. Teachers must supervise the children at all times, including during their break, music and Tefilah, and during transition times.



No teacher is to leave his or her classroom unattended at any time. In an emergency, send a Madrikh/a to the office, and someone will be sent to cover your class. If you do not have a Madrikh/a, send a student to the classroom next door.



Parents who need to pick up their children early must come to the school office **first**. No child will be allowed to leave class until parents present a dismissal form from the office to the teacher. For safety reasons, children will not be allowed to wait outside.

 **Every teacher is on duty at all times on campus.** A severe accident, while only taking a moment, can change your life forever. Not only will the school be held liable, but also the teacher on duty will share responsibility.

 Teachers are expected to instruct and review common safety procedures, rules, and regulations with students. Fire and earthquake drills will be held randomly throughout the school year. Please post and study the special Fire and Earthquake Drill instruction sheets you receive.

 Teachers are asked to be alert to strangers or unattended packages in and around the building. Report any suspicious behavior to the office immediately. Please secure your personal belongings at all times.

 When JLC is in session, please respect the office area. Other Synagogue business is being conducted until 5:00 p.m. on Mondays through Thursdays. This consideration extends to use of copy room.

Classroom Decorum

 Snacks and drinks are provided to students during breaks and are to be consumed outside. Students may also bring their own snacks and drinks so long as these items are stored and do not remain on students' desks during class. Snacks must follow Kashrut policy.

 Students are not to sit on tables, lean back in their chairs, or use tables as footrests.

 Please discuss additional class rules with your students, which will help foster your classroom community.

 On occasion, a student may have a friend or visitor accompany him or her to class. On those rare occasions, the JLC Office must receive a note from the friend or visitor's guardian including contact and emergency information and stating that Congregation Beth Am will not incur any liability as a result of the friend or visitor's attending JLC.

Student Attendance

 When a student is absent two times consecutively or is repeatedly missing classes, the teacher will notify the Education Rabbi, who will notify the parents and let them know we are thinking of them and we hope they are alright.

Communications with the Home

 At the beginning of the school year, each teacher is asked to write a letter introducing him or herself to parents and students alike. In addition, quarterly letters are to be written in accordance with the format provided by the Education Rabbi.

 At times, you may feel it is necessary to make contact with parents concerning their child's behavior, attendance, or need for additional practice. First, discuss the situation with the Education Rabbi. If a conversation ensues after a call has been made to a parent, notify the Education Rabbi in writing or by e-mail with the results of the conversation.



Progress Reports will be distributed twice per year at the conclusion of each semester. **It is essential that any problem areas be raised with the Education Rabbi prior to disclosing them in a Progress Report.** There must be **no surprises** on any Progress Reports. Progress report procedures and suggestions will be reviewed later in the year.

Lesson Plans

Teachers are required to turn in a monthly unit plan or weekly lesson plans. Each plan must include goals, objectives, activities, and an assessment of student learning.

School Programs



All classes will be participating in a Synagogue **Friday night Shabbat Tefilah** for their grade (except Kita Vav, which is on a Saturday morning). In addition to helping the children prepare for that service, you are expected to attend that Tefilah to be part of our Shabbat observance and to help guide the children through the service. In addition, as applicable, you are expected to participate in teacher meetings, training sessions, Family Education programming, field trips, and weekend retreats. Please note all of your class activities listed on the JLC Calendar found in your teachers' materials.



Teachers will be supplied with copies of their class songs for **Winterfestival** and are expected to practice with them in class.

Tefilah



JLC Tefilah allows students to apply the Hebrew skills they are learning in class to actually participating in prayer. Tefilah also allows time for us, as a community, to step back from our academic pursuits and reflect on the larger questions of why we come together as Jews and what makes Congregation Beth Am a community. Your participation is critical. Unless otherwise specified, please sit with your students. Remember that you are, at all times, a role model to your students; be sure to follow along in the Siddur.



All males are required to cover their heads in the synagogue, classroom, and office areas. Head covering is optional and encouraged for girls. Students (3rd-6th Grades) are requested to wear tallitot when they lead services. Post-B'nai Mitzvah students are expected to wear tallitot on Shabbat as well and are encouraged to wear tefillin on weekday mornings.

Beth Am is a Conservative Egalitarian synagogue. All teachers are expected to wear kippot and tallitot at services. Women who do not follow this practice must inform the Education Rabbi or Senior Rabbi, and their personal practice will be respected.

Field Trips



A field trip can be an important educational experience if it is carefully planned. Permission slips must be secured for each child before every field trip. Classroom teachers, together with the office, are responsible for detailed arrangements for any trip. Please find permission slips provided by the JLC Office on the Faculty Portal and complete all relevant portions of the forms with field trip details, including but not limited to, date, time, activity, and location.

Congregational Activities



As a teacher in our JLC, you are a welcome and integral part of our congregational family. While you are expected to attend activities during the year that specifically involve your students, we also hope you will feel free to join in other congregational activities. JLC faculty are entitled to complimentary High Holy Day tickets for your immediate family. Please ask the Education Rabbi for tickets a minimum of one week before Rosh Hashanah.

Class Visitation/Teacher Evaluation



We want students and teachers to be comfortable with the Education Rabbi and Senior Rabbi dropping into class, as we will do so regularly! Evaluation of our programs, classes, teachers, and curriculum is an ongoing process. We do not want to interrupt the lesson; we just want to be part of the class for a brief time. You will be notified prior to any formal evaluation that may take place.

Supplies



Each teacher will receive basic supplies at the beginning of the year. Please do not wait until class has started to sharpen pencils or realize that you need supplies for your art project!



The JLC will not reimburse you for supplies you purchase without the express permission of the Education Rabbi beforehand.



JLC supplies are kept in cabinets in the JLC storage closet. Please return all items to the appropriate place after each class use. Please ensure Madrikhim follow the same directions if they are responsible for retrieving and returning supplies.

Laminating Materials



Laminating requests must go to the JLC Office one week prior to the day and time needed. Please plan accordingly, and we are happy to do the laminating for you.

Audio Visual



Using audio and visual media as an integral part of your lesson is important. Please use these resources only as an enhancement to a specific subject. It is not appropriate to use videos as “filler material.”



To ensure that you will have access to the TV/DVD or projector, you will need to schedule with the JLC Office a minimum of one week in advance of your needs.

Teacher Boxes



Every teacher has a box and clipboard in the JLC storage room. Please check your box every session before and after class for notices, announcements and other communication, and please read any included materials.



We will e-mail weekly reminders and updates, so please **check your e-mail regularly for important information**.



Return your clipboard to your box at the end of each class session.

Kitchen



Cooking is a wonderful way to enhance your curriculum. It is also a good way for you your students to see different sides of one another. Our kitchen is completely kosher and available for use under careful supervision and with express permission from the Education Rabbi.



Teachers are responsible for cleaning the kitchen after use.



Please make reservations at least two weeks in advance with the Education Rabbi.



Be aware students with allergies!! Share recipes with your parents prior to cooking to ensure the health and safety of your students.

Bulletin Boards



A room that looks interesting and exciting is a better environment for teaching and learning. Please plan to incorporate your lesson plan into your bulletin board and include student work. We encourage teachers to update their bulletin boards throughout the year.

Each month, a different class is scheduled to install student work on a bulletin board in the hallway of that JLC building. Work should be put up on the first Sunday of the month. JLC Admin will take down and clear board at the end of each month and return work to class.

Care of the Building



JLC classrooms are shared with other congregational departments. Please work to keep the facilities clean and orderly and respect the belongings of others.



Teachers are responsible for the condition of furniture, books, and supplies during their use. Special care must be taken of all office equipment, including prompt return to the office; copy room supplies are not to be removed.



Teachers are required to report to the JLC Office any unidentified items, security questions, building hazards, or needed repairs. We, in turn, will inform the relevant personnel.



We share a few of our rooms with the Preschool. From the very first day of classes, caution students that the toys and bulletin boards (except for yours) belong to the Preschool and are NOT to be touched. You can make the best of this situation by setting rules immediately and constantly reinforcing them.



If you are doing a project that includes the use of paints, paint pens, or any other messy supplies, you must cover the tables. You will be given plastic table covers for your classrooms. Please reuse these as many times as possible. If you need to replace them, please ask the Education Rabbi to reorder more for you. Tables must be wiped down at the end of each school day.



Leave your room clean and put all of your books and supplies into your cabinet.



Kindergarten and 1st Grade students play on the Preschool playground.



2nd-6th Grade students may not use or play with any of the Preschool equipment at any time.

Break Time



Students are scheduled for a break in the middle of each day. Teachers will take their students outside (Hassman Family Social Hall on rainy days) for a **15-minute recess** at a designated time. Please be sure to follow the schedule and assignments, take your clipboard with you, and supervise all of your students. A snack will be serviced prior to the start of break on weekdays.

Tuition for Children of Faculty



Congregation Beth Am employees receive the following discounts on tuition:

- 50% discount for all JLC employees for JLC tuition
- 5% discount for JLC part-time employees for Preschool tuition
- Membership dues discount proportional to hours worked

Drop-Off and Pick-Up

The safety of our children is a very real concern for us, particularly when they are being picked up and dropped off at JLC. Please observe the following procedures so that we can provide supervision and a safe means to control traffic. In addition, please **take the time to review this policy with your students**. It is important that they follow the person who is directing traffic and refrain from running or playing in the waiting area. Please do not release children until you have the verbal confirmation of a parent or guardian.



All **Kindergarten and 1st Grade** students must be escorted to their classrooms by their parent or driver. Pick-up will be in the Lizerbram Family Sanctuary lobby. Please wait ten minutes before bringing any students to the JLC office.



All dismissals for **2nd-6th Grade students** will be from the Arch Courtyard. Teachers are to keep the class together and remain in the Courtyard until the last student is picked up. In the event of rain, remain in the Beit Midrash on weekdays and in the classrooms on Sundays, and parents will meet students inside.

EMERGENCY PROCEDURES

EMERGENCY PROCEDURES ARE POSTED IN EACH CLASSROOM.

Procedures

Please be familiar with these instructions for the JLC:



California State law and OSHA require emergency drills. You will be notified of the date of the drill.



During emergencies, you must ensure your class remains together at all times. Be prepared to take roll once you reach the evacuation site.



Take your roster (to account for all students) and emergency backpack when evacuating.

Fire



When the alarm sounds, everybody is to vacate the building (this protocol might change).



Do not run.



Collect your clipboard and backpack, and take your class to the south parking lot next to guard booth, line up, and take roll.

Earthquake



Everybody is to drop to the fetal position and remain under desks/tables until the all-clear sign is given. A JLC representative will enter your classroom to announce the “all-clear.”



Collect your clipboard and backpack and take your class to the south parking lot next to guard booth, line up, and take roll.

Sickness, Accidents, and Emergencies



If immediate attention is required, call 911. If an injury or sickness occurs in your classroom, inform the Education Rabbi and the JLC Office immediately. We have emergency telephone numbers and medical release forms for each child. The JLC Office and each classroom backpack have first aid supplies.



No matter how trivial an injury, you must report it to protect the child, yourself, and the school by completing an **Accident Report Form** in the JLC Office. The health and safety of our students is our first priority, and we want to know about every cut and scrape.

Child Abuse Reporting Obligations



Under California law, teachers are expected to immediately report to law enforcement any reasonable suspicion of child abuse in all cases, including personal injury, sexual assault or abuse, neglect, and emotional maltreatment.

STUDENT EXPECTATIONS

Dress Code (Modesty Code)

Congregation Beth Am supports and celebrates the inherent Jewish value that all people have inner worth. In light of this, we encourage all who join us for prayer or learning to dress and act in ways that enable and support our members to focus on spiritual values while honoring uniqueness and self-expression.

The Mishnah teaches us to enter prayer and houses of learning with great mindfulness; we, as a community, must work together to help enable a setting that encourages such focus. As a result, all students at our JLC and Sabra program are to dress modestly and respectfully.

In particular and as the Synagogue is a place of sacred learning, we request that the students show respect and *tzniuit* (modesty) in their presentation.

1. Hats may be worn to school but must be removed upon entering the buildings. Males must wear a *kippah* at all times, and females may choose to do so.
2. Shirts need to cover the shoulders, back, chest, and the midriff – no tank tops, spaghetti straps, halters, open backs, low-cut shirts, or strapless shirts.
3. Clothing that advertises or promotes drugs, alcohol, tobacco, or illegal activities, gangs, or contains profane or suggestive language may not be worn.
4. Pants, shorts, or skirts must be worn up around the waist. Saggy pants (shorts and skirts included) displaying a low crotch or exposing underwear is not allowed.
5. Dresses, skirts, and shorts must be fingertip length.
6. Shoes must be appropriate for safe play at break time and weather appropriate.
7. Wheelies (any shoes with wheels on the soles) are not allowed at the JLC unless the wheels are removed. They are considered a safety hazard.

Students are to dress appropriately and respectfully for Shabbat and Holiday Tefilah. Boys must wear nice slacks and a button-down shirt, and girls must wear a dress, skirt, or nice pants suit, adhering to the above dress code (#5). Jeans and shorts are not appropriate.

BEHAVIORAL EXPECTATIONS

In order to create a safe environment that allows us to successfully fulfill our mission, we have adopted the following policies, which apply to every student in our school. **Please read these policies with your child.**

1. School attendance is vital to the success of the student's progress. A student missing more than 25% of sessions during the school year may not be promoted to the next grade.
2. Students will be required to complete assignments missed during absences.
3. Students are expected to be on their best behavior at all times, apply themselves to the best of their abilities, arrive in class promptly, and complete assigned work in a timely manner. Students are expected to remain in designated supervised areas on the Beth Am premises.
4. Students are expected to behave with *kavod* (in a respectful manner) towards their teachers, Madrikhim, peers, and themselves.
5. Students are expected to follow the directions of the person in charge at all times, including Madrikhim, to ensure safety.
6. Students are not to use cell phones for any purpose during class time. Cell phones used during class time will be confiscated by the teacher and returned to parents after class.
7. Students are expected to care for their textbooks, materials, and school and personal property. Any damage done will be the financial responsibility of the family. Parents must pay said cost, if any, before re-enrollment or B'nai Mitzvah.
8. If these expectations are not met, every effort will be made to resolve the situation in the classroom. If a child continues to have behavioral problems and must be sent out of class, the following will occur:
 - FIRST TIME – A meeting between the student and the Education Rabbi will occur. The student will return to class at the discretion of the Education Rabbi.
 - SECOND TIME – A meeting between the student and the Education Rabbi will occur. The Education Rabbi will discuss the situation with the student's parents, and a written summary will be included in the student's cumulative file.
 - THIRD TIME – A meeting between the student and the Education Rabbi will occur, and a conference will be scheduled with the parents in an attempt to resolve the situation before the student is allowed to return to class.
 - FOURTH TIME – The student will be suspended and given an opportunity to do a *teshuvah* (making amends) project, which will be at the discretion of the Rabbi and determined in conference with the student and parents. The student will not be allowed to return to class until a second conference occurs with the Education Rabbi and Senior Rabbi. The Education Rabbi will write a behavior contract outlining the responsibilities of the student and the school. It will be signed by the student, parent,

and Education Rabbi. Teachers will receive a copy of the contract. The Education Committee Chairperson will be informed of the situation.

- **FIFTH TIME** – If the behavior does not change, the student may be expelled for the remainder of the school year by a committee consisting of the Education Rabbi, Senior Rabbi, and Education Committee Chairperson. The student’s return to school the following year will be at the discretion of the JLC. At this time, the Bar or Bat Mitzvah date will also be postponed or cancelled.

9. Bullying, fighting, foul language, sexual harassment, violent acts, and any behavior that may endanger any student or the facilities will **not** be tolerated.

10. The School does not tolerate the use or possession of weapons, alcohol, or drugs (other than those drugs prescribed by a physician), which must be held in the JLC Office. If a student is in possession of drugs, alcohol, cigarettes, or weapons, the result is an immediate expulsion from the JLC and B’nai Mitzvah privileges may be revoked. This policy is one of strict compliance. No exceptions will be made.

Every incident will be handled individually and at the discretion of the Education Rabbi and Senior Rabbi. Two Jewish values that guide our behavior policies are *pikuah nefesh* (saving a soul/safety and security) and *teshuvah* (repentance). The safety and integrity of the school, students, and staff are our first priority. We hope that with each incident, students learn the meaning of complete teshuvah by admitting wrongdoing, apologizing to those they have wronged, and demonstrating, in a sincere and genuine manner, the incident will not recur.

RELIGIOUS PRACTICES

Students learn blessings for Shabbat, festivals, holidays, and prayer services with the hope they will be comfortable and feel competent in any synagogue and celebration. Preparation for participation in congregational services is an important part of our curriculum. Students, families, and faculty are encouraged to participate in all religious services at Congregation Beth Am.

High Holy Days

 Teachers are highly encouraged to participate in the planning and leadership of High Holy Days Children’s Services. Compensation for this participation is arranged separately.

 In accordance with Congregation Beth Am policy, each teacher is allowed two High Holy Days tickets with the right to purchase additional tickets at the prevailing member rate. Teacher membership in the Congregation is encouraged.

Kashrut



We strengthen our ties to the Jewish tradition by maintaining the rules of Kashrut, which must be adhered to in the JLC. Please check with Rabbi Earne before having any function that requires food. Any food aside from uncut fruits and vegetables must have a Heksher (an

acceptable symbol) or be purchased in a recognized kosher bakery and have prior approval. Food and utensils may not be brought from home. Grape juice must be Kosher.

Any JLC-sponsored activity off premises must keep with the dietary laws. When a staff member officially represents the school at any public functions, he or she is asked to observe the dietary laws as well.

Rituals

Please recite all appropriate blessings when eating in class.

Tefilah



All JLC classes 2nd Grade and up attend services on weekdays, and all grades attend Tefilah on Sundays according to a schedule. Teachers are to participate and circulate, helping students to find the correct page and follow with their fingers.

Tzedakah (Righteous Giving)



The concept of doing mitzvot is an integral part of each grade's curriculum. One mitzvah that we as Jews are obligated to do is giving to those less fortunate than us. Tzedakah (money) is collected each class session. Please encourage your students to bring tzedakah each time they attend JLC. Each year, a school-wide Tzedakah Project will be established, encouraging the students to set goals and work together to attain them.

Hebrew Names



We encourage the use of Hebrew names in Hebrew classrooms. If nicknames have been provided, or students request the use of a nickname, confirm with the parents that they are aware and accepting of the nickname.

SPECIAL PROGRAMMING

Music, Tefilah, and Other School Programs



→ These programs are not free periods for teachers or Madrikhim. Teachers and Madrikhim are to spread out and participate in the programs and act as role models in their behavior and involvement in these programs. When necessary, teachers need to be involved with disciplining children.

Tutoring



→ Teachers are to remain vigilant as to children who need special assistance with Hebrew decoding. Do not hesitate to request extra help for a student from the Education Rabbi. Please be sure to give your recommendations for the goals of each student and monitor progress. You must **talk to the Education Rabbi before sending a student to tutoring.**

Inclusion



JLC serves the needs of all families of the Congregation. Through our Inclusion Program, we have students with special needs, some assisted by one-on-one shadows. Our Inclusion Coordinator can give you the tools to help modify your lessons and teaching style to facilitate learning for the child.

WORKING WITH MADRIKHIM AND ASSISTANT TEACHERS

Madrikhim are student aides who are in 8-12th Grades. Assistant Teachers and Shadows are college-aged and adults. They are all valuable assets, as assistant instructors and role models, to the JLC program. Teachers must make clear to the aides the responsibilities they wish them to assume, both for routine and special activities. Teachers must also provide guidance to help Madrikhim understand expectations of the JLC. Time invested in communication with Madrikhim and Assistant Teachers is time well spent.

Our Madrikhim Program is part of our Sabra curriculum for 8th Grade students and includes workshops on how to teach in the classroom. As part of these leadership sessions, students will learn such subjects as teacher-student-Madrikhim relations, role-modeling, and classroom management. The Madrikhim Coordinator, with guidance from Education Rabbi, will provide ongoing supervision and mentorship. Our hope is that you will utilize your Madrikhim to their fullest potential. Give them clear directions, and share your expectations with them. These workshops are designed to build a sense of professionalism among the Madrikhim. If you have any problems or concerns regarding your Madrikh or Madrikha please notify the Education Director. Madrikhim are expected to let both you and the Madrikhim Coordinator (Joanne Morgenthal) know when they will be absent.

Madrikhim will also be observed by the Madrikhim Coordinator and the Education Director throughout the school year. Please be advised that you may be asked to complete evaluations of your Madrikhim.

CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT

Judaism is a community-based religion. We are commanded to pray together, celebrate together, study together, and to take care of each other. This can be hard in an age where children are bombarded with the message that individual effort, competition, and self-reliance will lead them to achieving the American dream. Just think of how many of them have been entranced by the “survivor” television shows, the ultimate expression of looking out for number 1! We can meet this challenge, however, by transforming our classrooms into living Jewish communities. Merely teaching our students about Jewish communal concepts just won’t work. As Rabbi Simeon Ben Gamliel says, “Not learning but doing is the chief thing.” **In our classrooms, our children can practice the skills they need to become responsible members of the Jewish community.** As an added bonus, our students will enjoy their learning more, they will be better behaved, and teaching will be more pleasant for us. The following are some of the components essential to creating thriving Jewish communities in our classrooms: a caring teacher, structure, communication, and responsibility.

A Caring Teacher



We don't usually think of it this way, but we teach many at-risk children – they are at risk of losing their Judaism. The way we teachers, as community leaders, relate to our students can have a lifelong impact on their commitment to Judaism. There is a considerable body of research about at-risk children suggesting that **having a warm, caring relationship with a teacher can help those students become resilient and adapt successfully despite risk**. There are many ways we can convey a Jewish message of caring – a smile, a question about how they are doing, or sharing a newspaper clipping you think they might enjoy. While each of these actions takes just a moment, the effect can last for years.

Structure



The Talmud teaches that Joshua was deeply concerned with Israel's well-being, so he provided roads and highways for the people. Our classroom communities also need roads and highways for everyone's well-being. When we map space and time for our students, we facilitate cooperative living, thereby taking a major step in avoiding discipline problems. Students have a hard time getting anything accomplished if they are surrounded by chaos.

Schedules



Our Rabbis were very wise when they said, “Aseh toratkha keva” (Fix a time for your study of Torah). Schedules provide assurance that we will accomplish what we intend. They have a calming effect on the community because students know what to expect. Writing the schedule on the board can be helpful. Keep in mind that time has a different meaning for children. Children live in the present. They do not have experience with deadlines or the adult notion that time is limited. **The schedule contains five minute buffers for transitions and is not for extending lessons!** When possible, it is helpful to allow students a little more time than we think they will need to clean up their supplies or prepare to move to the next subject.

Rules

Children need limits to help them feel safe and secure and to help them adjust to the needs of others and the community. Limits teach them how to behave like *mentschen* – good, decent human beings. Rabbi Nathan warns us: “Once the wall of a vineyard collapses, the vineyard is as good as destroyed.” If our rules and limits collapse when the slightest pressure is placed upon them, our classroom community can fall apart. So, how can we decide, with confidence, what limits and rules to set down? First, try to categorize the rules as follows:

- Rules that protect mental health (e.g., name calling, teasing, bullying not allowed)
- Rules that protect physical safety (e.g., place books in desks so people won't trip on them)
- Rules that protect property (e.g., return supplies to the proper location)
- Rules that encourage cooperative living (e.g., one person talks at a time, avoid distracting others)

Suggestions for Setting Limits and Rules

- **Clear:** If we want students to follow directions, we must be very clear about our expectations. “Be neat” can be interpreted in many different ways. “Place your book bags on the hooks” states very clearly what is expected.
- **Follow-Through:** No matter how clear your directions are, if you do not make sure that students follow your rules and requests, they will not listen to your next directions. You must wait for them to complete what you ask before you proceed.
- **Necessary:** Limit classroom rules to those necessary to assure behavior that makes learning possible and safe for all. Keep in mind that the *midrash* that warns us: “Do not make a fence that is more important than what is fenced in.” Yet, Rabbi Yose reminds us that we need a strong fence: “Better a fence of ten handbreadths that stands firm than one of a hundred handbreadths that is sure to fall down.” One very successful approach for establishing rules is to engage students in the process of creating them during a class meeting.
- **Appropriate:** It is important to remember to adjust our rules and limits to students’ ages and stages of development. Some rules that are necessary in Kindergarten may be ridiculous in High School, and vice versa.
- **Questions to Ask Yourself:** Are there set rules in your classroom? Are they flexible? Who established the rules? How were they established? What happens when they are broken?)

Communication



How can students learn to function in a community if the only chance they have to interact with each other is when they’re off task and fooling around? Let’s explore how we can design classroom communities that give students the opportunity to communicate and cooperate with each other.

- **Working in Groups:** Teaching in the whole group is appropriate at times. However, it is also vital to the classroom community to find opportunities to regroup students so that they interact directly with each other. Cooperative learning is a very Jewish approach.
- **Chevruta:** “As one piece of iron sharpens another, so do two students sharpen each other when they study.” Our rabbis designed the concept of chavruta (study with a partner) because they knew that both partners would grow intellectually and interpersonally from such an experience.
- **Knesset (Class Meeting):** Sitting in a circle, facing each other, all at the same level (chairs or floor), teacher and students can share ideas, solve problems, and plan together. We can explain to our students that we are establishing this knesset because we treasure their ideas and their participation in decision-making is important for the successful functioning of our classroom.

STUDENT PROFILES

Kindergarten (The Five-Year Old)

Active and purposeful...consciousness of right and wrong is developing, but child cannot always distinguish between them or accept responsibility...family is the context for understanding relationships...great disparities among children’s learning skills and physical abilities...has a sense of God’s love and care through attention of loving and caring adults... short attention span...can learn from mistakes...appreciates help of others and wants to help...emerging wonder about life and death.

First Grade (The Six-Year Old)

Widening sense of world beyond home...eager to learn... asks many questions...great imagination...little concept of time and space...personal desires may conflict with sense of standards...sense of responsibility to the group...has questions about God...wants honest and immediate answers.

Second Grade (The Seven-Year Old)

More introspective...sensitive to adult approval...self-critical...richly imaginative but interested in here and now...looks for fair play and honesty...emerging feel for prayer...interest in bible heroes...growing sense of community beyond home and school...assimilates new information when presented in familiar examples.

Third Grade (The Eight-Year Old)

Aware of real physical and intellectual growth...impatient to get started on new projects but eager to finish...desire to do things “my way” but still craves adult approval and support...communication skills improving but sometimes talks for the sake of talking...enjoys collecting and swapping...interested in dramatics...time and space take on meaning...likes groups and upholds rules...can understand personal relationship to God as connected to God’s care for others.

Fourth Grade (The Nine-Year Old)

Longer attention span offers more independence...wants to be accepted as responsible yet recognizes need for help...likely to attach to role models...may not have a sense of personal limits...fair play and individual rights are crucial...clearer thinking about right and wrong...curious about the unknown and finds the past exciting...can build on previous knowledge...individual reading skills vary widely...teacher important as leader and opinion maker...moral development can be guided by Bible’s lessons...favors facts and people over fantasy and abstract ideas.

Fifth Grade (The Ten-Year Old)

Period of preadolescent adjustment...interests beginning to widen...may still have difficulty conceptualizing or generalizing but memorization skills are developing...sense of time has evolved enough for firmly rooted study of history...boys and girls separating in interests and activities...need reinforcement of “dos and don’ts” of living in society...can have deep religious feeling and a close relationship to God...questions may begin to trouble faith...knows and can use many facts of Jewish history and observance.

Sixth Grade (The Eleven-Year Old)

Preadolescence gradually gives way to adolescence...eager to discover secrets...wants to figure things out for self in ethical and religious matters...girls usually more physically and emotionally developed than boys...more sensitive to criticism...capable of great anger, fear, dejection and elation...growing ability of abstract thinking...relationships with peers can be both exciting and painful...critical of adults...open to ideas that will realize more mature values but must reach by themselves...sees connection between religious teaching and personal problems.

Seventh Grade (The Twelve-Year Old)

Onset of adolescence...traits developing that will lead into maturity...girls are about a year ahead of boys in intellectual and physical development...with guidance, can see relationship between different events...resentful of repetitive, childish activity...beginning the search for philosophy of life...can be encouraged to express abstract values...receptive to social action projects...enjoys responsibility that gives a sense of achievement.

Eighth Grade (The Thirteen-Year Old)

Can be a difficult year of emotional imbalance...physical changes become more pronounced...leadership potential is emerging...receptive to learning from stories and courageous deeds...especially proud of new skills...can relate God and prayer to personal problems and harsh realities...insecurities manifest in complaining, withdrawal, sarcasm...some linguistic skills appear particularly strong...word games can be effective learning tools...judging religion by the examples of its representatives...greater interest and power in reasoning and discussion...language can be useful tool in expressing values.

Ninth Grade (The Fourteen-Year Old)

Feels many adult emotions and drives but struggling to integrate them to self...girls still developmentally ahead of boys, but growth among boys is marked...beginning to assert independence from parents but still wants them within rescue distance...often does not accept thing but insists on making own decision to do so...world of ideas beginning to make sense as abstractions take on reality...give-and-take with adults is valuable and enjoyable...senses need for authority beyond humanity, and open to ideas of God...moving toward independent ideas.

Tenth Grade (The Fifteen-Year Old)

Struggle for independence hits its peak...desperate to make own decisions...strongly influenced by home but brings own unique slant to things...sharing attire and behavior of group can disguise independent thought of individuals...can respond to adult guidance when directed gently and without pressure to conform to standards...group loyalty is especially strong...interested in difference between and within religions...more followers than leaders.

Eleventh Grade (The Sixteen-Year Old)

Struggles of adolescence approach resolution...often secure enough to welcome criticism...largely preoccupied by immediate problems rather than the future...seems mentally mature but sense of judgment still developing...religion can become part of philosophy of life...personal choice is at forefront of decision-making...open to discussion and contemplation of ethics...can see God's relationship to personal life...academic subjects must be made explicitly relevant to learner's life.

Twelfth Grade (The Seventeen-Year Old)

Seen by parents as still a child...seen by self, and by world, as increasingly responsible adult...occupied by driver's license, work, career, college, relationships, can think through complex problems, and generalize from concrete examples...sharing with friends crucial...awed by many life milestones that lie ahead...big questions take on immediate importance: Is there an absolute standard of right and wrong? What is God like? Anxiety and anticipation for the work that college or career will open.

ADDENDUM – INCLUSION PROGRAM

Mission: To offer a Jewish education for all the children of Congregation Beth Am congregants.

Philosophy: The primary purpose of the JLC is to develop values and knowledge that promote a meaningful Jewish life. The JLC is a nurturing community but is not therapy-based and thus has limited resources to assist children with special needs. However, in view of the Jewish concept that every person is created in God's image, the JLC offers the opportunity for a Jewish education to all the children in the Congregation. The concept of inclusion is not only an ethically appropriate approach, but it also promotes the elevation of the entire program.

Scope: Congregants' children with all levels of ability are invited to participate in the JLC educational program. Inclusion is offered for every child with special needs to the extent that it serves his or her own best interest as well as the best interest of the class. When JLC staff identifies a student who requires special assistance during JLC hours, parents will be notified of our concerns and recommendations (including the involvement of the Resource Specialist). This identification is based on observed student behaviors. Parental guidance and cooperation are integral features of this program. Without this necessary collaboration, the child realistically may not be able to have accommodations within the structure of the JLC. These restrictions apply to classroom settings as well as field trips, school retreats, and other JLC activities.

Goals:

1. To include all children of Congregants in the JLC to the best of our and their abilities
2. To foster a team approach, including the teacher, parent, Madrikhim, Resource Specialist, Education Rabbi, and Senior Rabbi, as needed; outside consultants may be involved with family permission
3. To allow students to remain in classrooms if and when possible according to the needs of the student and the larger group
4. To plan for students who must be removed from classes to meet their needs and minimize disruption of instruction to others
5. To modify curriculum as possible, using materials designed for younger grades when needed, or appealing to the individual interests of students
6. To provide teen Madrikhim for those students who could not attend without individual assistance
7. To provide on-the-job training for assigned Madrikhim from our Resource Specialist
8. To provide guidance and training to our teachers from our Resource Specialist
9. To provide Hebrew tutoring to the best of each child's ability
10. To encourage social interaction whenever realistically possible
11. To ensure efforts will be made, although success cannot be guaranteed
12. To celebrate the enrichment the JLC receives from the children with special needs

For information about the Inclusion Program, contact Rabbi Earne at (858) 481-8454.