Welcome

Ezra-Habonim, the Niles Township Jewish Congregation (EHNTJC) is an egalitarian Conservative/Reconstructionist Synagogue affiliated with the United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism.

The role of Jewish education is to provide students with the fundamental skills, information, and values of our tradition that will enable them to create a meaningful place for themselves in the Jewish world and communities. Our teachers offer students a variety of viewpoints and perspectives on important religious issues.

We understand preparation is crucial to any instructional lesson, and require our faculty members to prepare lesson plans to suit the needs of their individual classes. The success of your child’s experience depends on a working partnership between the school and parents and guardians, as the family has always been the strength to help reinforce what is taught in the Religious School.

Our school includes children in Kindergarten through grade 10. Students in Kindergarten through grade 2 come one day a week on Shabbat, from 9:00-12:00pm. Students in grades 3-7 attend 2 days a week, Tuesday 4:15-6:15 and Shabbat from 9:00-12:15pm. Our Lehrhaus Program for students in grades 8 through 10 meets on Tuesday evenings from 7:00 p.m. – 8:30 p.m. The curriculum includes age appropriate instruction in Hebrew, Jewish values, Torah, prayers, Jewish texts, Israel, holidays and various other Judaic studies topics.

This handbook is designed to provide an overview of our Religious School policies and procedures. We are focused on assisting our students in developing a love for Jewish learning and Jewish identity.

At EHNTJC Religious School, our students engage in meaningful Jewish learning and living. Students develop a strong Jewish identity, a sense of community, and the skills and knowledge to practice Judaism through the study of Torah, tradition, Mitzvot and the study of Hebrew. We provide a concerned, caring, compassionate community that infuses our children with spirituality and a positive Jewish identity.

September 2017
MISSION

It is the mission of the EHNTJC Religious School to provide an engaging, nurturing environment for children and their families that fosters a life-long love of Jewish learning, Jewish identity, and spiritual growth.

Committed to excellence in Judaic study, ritual, and responsibility, the EHNTJC Religious School incorporates traditional and innovative educational experiences designed to encourage students to actively participate in Jewish life in the home, synagogue, and community.

POLICIES AND GENERAL INFORMATION

(The policies contained in this handbook have been approved by the Religious Education Committee and are effective as of the date of this publication. The Committee reviews and revises these policies on a regular basis.)

Attendance

In order for your child to achieve the best experience s/he should come to school ready to learn. We encourage parents and guardians to ensure that their children get the most out of their learning experience and attend school regularly. Consistent attendance is essential to the success of our program and a primary factor in determining promotion to the next grade. The EHNTJC Religious Education Committee requires that students in Grades 3-7 attend at least 80% of weekdays and Saturdays, in order to advance to the next grade level. Students who are absent for any reason are responsible for making up class work. Irregular attendance interrupts class progress and cohesion.

We understand that there are activities and circumstances in our students' lives that necessitate them missing school from time to time. When a student misses several classes, the teacher will contact the parents or guardian to set up a way that the student can stay current in his/her class. If a student needs to miss a significant number of classes, the parents or guardian should meet with the Director of Education to set up alternative arrangements for their child. If tutoring is required, tutorial sessions will be scheduled outside during regular Religious School hours.

Graduation from Religious School is contingent upon successful completion of five consecutive years (or equivalency) of Religious School including attendance in the entire 7th grade year. This policy is intended to promote students' success and confidence, not only at their B'nai Mitzvah, but also as educated Jews.

Late Arrival

Religious School begins at 9:00 a.m. on Shabbat, at 4:15 p.m. on weekdays. Students should be in their classrooms when school begins.
Signing Out Early

We recognize there may be situations when a student may have to leave school early. Students will need to bring a note from home requesting early dismissal, or a parent may notify a teacher in advance. For their own safety and well-being, students will not be allowed to wait outside. Parents and guardians picking up their children early may do so directly from the classroom.

Inclement Weather

In case of inclement weather, it may be necessary to cancel school. In the event that school is cancelled, a broadcast e-mail announcing the cancellation will be sent to teachers, parents, and guardians. Decisions regarding school cancellations in general will be made by 2:00 PM on weekdays and 8:00 AM on Saturdays.

Emergency and Safety

If your child sustains a minor injury while at school, appropriate first aid treatment will be administered. In a case of a more serious injury, parents/guardians or the emergency contact/s listed on your child's religious school registration will be notified immediately. If immediate medical attention is needed at any time, the paramedics will be called. If your child becomes ill at school, we will contact you or the emergency contact/s listed on your religious school registration form. Please notify the school if your child contracts a communicable disease, (e.g.: chicken pox, head lice, pink eye). If your child has, or develops, any unique health requirements, please inform the Religious School and Synagogue office. Please be sure all emergency contact information is up to date and accurate.

Parent/Grandparent Volunteers

In addition to the work of the Religious Education Committee, the school benefits from parent volunteers. All parents, guardians, and interested grandparents are encouraged to become involved. There are many opportunities to help out with small projects, fundraisers, programs, and more. If there is a particular way you would like to be involved, don’t hesitate to speak to a committee member or the Director of Education. It is precisely this active community involvement that gives our school its vibrant, participatory flavor.

Home School Connection

We strive to support all of our families, traditional and non-traditional alike. Throughout the year, we will offer educational opportunities for parents and guardians to attend with their student(s) to learn and make connections together. All families are encouraged to participate as you are able.
Homework

Homework, while minimal, is assigned with two goals in mind: to reinforce material learned in class, and to open a dialogue with children’s parents and guardians about what they are working on in class. Parents and guardians are encouraged to review their child’s assignment folder or planner (depending upon the age), and to reinforce the teacher expectations. In addition to short assignments, we encourage all children to practice their Hebrew reading daily for at least ten minutes -- even if it is not explicitly assigned. Your child’s teacher may also assign a long-term project that will be worked on both in and out of class. It is expected that all homework assignments will be completed when due. Failure to complete homework assignments will be reflected in a students’ report card.

Progress Reports

Progress Reports are a very important form of communication between the school and the home. Student evaluations will be distributed twice during the year – in January and at the end of the school year. Students are evaluated on attendance, class participation, completion of homework assignments, and knowledge of prayers, subject matter, etc. covered in their class. Parents and guardians are encouraged to communicate during the school year, and may request a conference with their child’s teacher and/or the Director of Education.

Attire

As a makom kadosh (holy place) devoted to the values of Torah, EHNTJC Religious School seeks to promote an atmosphere of kavod (respect) throughout our building. Students are required to wear kippot during school and when on the bimah on Shabbat. Appropriate kippot include traditional kippot and lace head coverings provided at the synagogue, hair bows, and wide headbands.

As we elevate ourselves to a more sacred time on Shabbat, we encourage the attire of our students to reflect this more intentional, thoughtful state. The following clothing is discouraged on Shabbat:

- See-through clothing
- Mini-skirts without leggings
- Graphic t-shirts with messages that may contain inappropriate language
- Flip-flops
- Outdoor jackets and coats

Sleeveless tops for boys and girls are acceptable when worn with a sweater or when bare shoulders are covered with a tallit.
Tzedakah

The giving of Tzedakah is a mitzvah, the obligation to support others less fortunate than ourselves. One way we try to teach our students the importance of Tzedakah is to collect contributions at the beginning of the school day. Children may contribute any amount they choose as often as they choose. Throughout the school year, classes select an organization to receive the proceeds of their Tzedakah collection. In addition to the Tzedakah collection at the beginning of the school day, other Tzedakah projects may be initiated.

Tefillah

Tefillah (prayer) offers us an opportunity to connect with ourselves, with the community, and with G-d. Each grade will have an opportunity to participate in communal Tefillah each week. Our goal is to offer students the experience of prayer both as Keva (the established prayers of our tradition and Kavanah (personal prayer with intention and meaning). The Tefillah experience will also provide opportunities for our students to practice and experiment with the prayers they are mastering in the classroom.

Kashrut/Snacks

EHNTJC is a kosher and nut-free environment. We recognize the kashrut symbols (U) and (CRC) as acceptable kashrut endorsements. Students are permitted to bring water only unless a food health plan has been established with the Director of Education. Healthy, kosher snacks are provided each day of class.

Electronics, Toys & Miscellaneous Equipment

The use of cell phones and other electronic equipment is prohibited during school time, unless requested by the teacher for the purpose of learning. Please contact the Director of Education or synagogue office should you need to speak with your child during school hours. Gum chewing is not permitted in the religious school. Any item extraneous to our purpose, including fidget spinners may be confiscated by the teacher or Director of Education for the duration of the school day. After the second incident, parents/guardians will be required to come in and retrieve the confiscated item.

Classroom Expectations

Please review the following Behavior Expectations policy section with your child. This policy pertains to all students in Kindergarten through grade 10.
BEHAVIOR EXPECTATIONS AND STANDARDS

We strive to create an environment in which positive behaviors are encouraged and reinforced. While we do not expect to encounter inappropriate behavior often, the following procedures have been approved by the Religious Education Committee to support and maintain a strong Jewish learning environment:

- When a teacher feels that a child’s behavior is inappropriate (uncooperative, disruptive, bullying, teasing, physical altercation, etc.) and a hindrance to the other children in the class the child will be removed from the classroom. After a discussion among the teacher, student and Director of Education, the student will be allowed to return to class.
  *Please note that parents/guardians will be notified immediately of any type of physical altercation. They will be expected to pick up their child immediately.

- If the same student continues to behave inappropriately, or if the behavior becomes worse, the child will again be removed from the class. Following a discussion with the teacher and student, the parents/guardians will be called, advised of the situation and be required to pick up the student at the end of the school day and arrange to meet with the Director of Education. At that time, the Brit Kavod (Student Behavior Agreement) will be reviewed and a new copy will be signed by the student and parent.

- Should the behavior persist, the child will again be removed from the classroom and the parents/guardians will be required to pick up the student immediately. Prior to being allowed to return to the school the parents/guardians will meet with the Director of Education and a member(s) of the Education Committee to discuss the situation and come to a mutual solution to the problem. All efforts will be made to work with the student and his/her family to resolve the behavior issues. However, should a resolution not be achieved the school reserves the right to remove the student from the school.

Each student is required to sign a Brit Kavod, or Behavior Contract. This contract will be used in the event of disruptive or otherwise negative behavior. If it becomes necessary, the Director of Education will review the contract with the child. Often, this is all it takes to have children return to their ordinarily good behavior. While we do not expect that this contract will solve all behavior issues, we do believe that it can be a useful tool to remind students what is expected of them.
BRIT KAVOD (STUDENT BEHAVIOR AGREEMENT)

- I understand that every teacher has the right to teach and that every student has the right to learn.
- I understand that every student helps create a positive school environment and agrees to take responsibility for their own behavior, including
  - Attending class on time
  - Being courteous and respectful to other students and teachers. I will not use my words, actions, or objects as a distraction for myself or others during class
  - Honoring the synagogue and school property
  - Preparing for and participating in class
  - Attending Hebrew School programs
  - Refraining from using cell phones and other devices. (The school is not responsible for lost items.)

I have read the EHNTJC Religious School Handbook and agree to abide by the guidelines as stated.

NAME_______________________________________________DATE___________________

STUDENT

NAME_______________________________________________DATE___________________

PARENT/GUARDIAN

Please review the Brit Kavod with your child. Space is provided for your child’s signature as well as your signature. Parents and guardians should return this document to the synagogue office.