

Handbook for Parents

Arnold H. Feldman Religious School
Congregations of Shaare Shamayim
9768 Verree Road
Philadelphia, PA 19115

JEAN CLAUD KLEIN

Rabbi

BARRY DOV LERNER

Associate Rabbi

DON SAMUELS

Cantor

MICHAEL BITTON

Associate Cantor

JACQUES A. LURIE

Executive Director

Educational Director

JUDI SHAPIRO

Teen Learning Community Director

"For he shall be as a tree planted by the waters sending forth its roots by a stream. " - Jeremiah 17:8

Mission Statement of Congregations of Shaare Shamayim Religious School :

To provide an active and creative educational environment that incorporates traditional values of Judaism while developing in students a lifelong Jewish commitment. The family, the synagogue community, the clergy and the educational staff work together to nurture an appreciation for Jewish heritage while developing Jewish identity inextricably connected to Israel, and perpetuate the values of Judaism into adulthood.

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FORWARD

This handbook has been prepared for your guidance and provides information about Congregations of Shaare Shamayim Religious School and the policies under which the school and synagogue operate.

Your child's progress in religious school depends upon your enthusiasm, interest and cooperation, as well as the concern and instruction of our teachers and staff. With complete cooperation between home and school, your child's progress and growth will be more evident. The goal of our religious school is to provide a positive Jewish education in a warm, nurturing and fun environment for the children of the membership. Congregations of Shaare Shamayim Religious School is extremely interested in your child and his/her needs. We encourage you to exchange information with us about your child and our school so that together we can work together to ensure that your child's religious school experience is a positive one. If we can be of any assistance to you, please do not hesitate to contact us.

Phone: 215-677-1600

PHILOSOPHY

Congregations of Shaare Shamayim is committed to providing quality Jewish education in the most **creative, exciting, and intellectually stimulating** manner possible. The school attempts to provide a variety of learning experiences to accommodate a variety of learning styles. Our chief interest is to prepare Jewish youth to take an active role in the future of the larger Jewish Community. We also wish to provide them with the tools necessary to build a fulfilling Jewish life, to foster a love of Israel, and to instill a sense of great pride in their Jewish identity.

The Religious School exists for the membership of the Congregations of Shaare Shamayim. To this end, its facilities and activities are available for adults and children who are interested in any offerings. Family education and parental involvement are also included in the curriculum at different levels. Naturally, your involvement enhances the importance of our goals, and sets you, the parent, as the best role model for your child. We are grateful for your involvement and we acknowledge the tremendous contribution of parents to the religious school .

If you have any special skills or abilities that you would like to share with our students, please contact the school office so that we can tap all of the Congregations of Shaare Shamayim's resources. If you would like to participate in a particular class or event, or want to make suggestions about our program, please call us at 215-677-1600 so we can pursue your ideas.

SCHOOL HOURS

Hebrew School:	Sunday	9:00 AM to 12:30 PM
	Wednesday	4:30 PM to 7:00 PM
Sunday School/Mechina	Sunday	9:00 AM to 12:30 PM

TEFILOT

Junior Congregation:	Each Shabbat and Yom Tov
	10:45 AM (in the Chapel)
	(times for specific Holidays listed on School
	Calendar.)

Please join us for bagels and cream cheese, served at 10:30 AM before the 10:45 AM service.

LIBRARY

Our library offers a selection of books on a variety of Jewish topics. We encourage the children to seek books for their reading enjoyment. Mrs. Rosalie Cohen, our librarian, will be happy to help your child find books of interest and at the appropriate level for him or her. Parents are also welcome to borrow books and videos from our library.

All classes are assigned library visits on a regular basis. Your child should be encouraged at home to read the books he or she has borrowed and return them on time. **(Please return library books or videos in a timely fashion so that others will have the opportunity to enjoy these items.)** Failure to return library books or videos may result in the withholding of your child's report card.

TZDEDAKAH

Every Wednesday and Sunday, teachers collect Tzedakah in their classes. Giving of Tzedakah is an important lesson for our children. The translation of the word "Tzedakah" is righteousness, not charity. This concept teaches our children that helping the needy is an act of justice. The amount that is given does not matter, but rather the understanding that it is our duty as Jews to help the less fortunate as well as to give to worthy causes. Each class decides where the Tzedakah that they have collected is donated.

PARENT-SCHOOL COMMUNICATIONS

Communication between home and school is essential to your child's success in Religious School. Formal communication from teachers can be expected twice a year in the form of report cards. Parents are requested to sign, comment on and return these report cards at the following class session.

In our scheduling, much information is communicated by flyers and e-mail. The students will receive many notices over the course of the school year. Please ask your child for these announcements on a regular basis. **Also, please check your child's schoolbag and sign their folder weekly.** In this way, you will be informed about what is happening at the school. Individual parent conferences may be initiated by either the parent or the teacher. Appointments may be made by calling the School office.

Our staff is a group of hard-working teachers who involve the family in the education of their students. You will be invited to many exciting programs during the course of the school year. **Your attendance at these events sends an invaluable message to your child about the importance of Religious School and certainly enhances our programs.**

Congregations of Shaare Shamayim offers a variety of Holiday-related family educational events. Some programs, like the Purim Carnival, are both fun and educational, while others are workshop nights wherein families learn together and make crafts too. Invitation to these events and workshops is school-wide. Your participation as a family, including as an extended one, is encouraged.

BAR/BAT MITZVAH

Our goal of the Religious School at the Congregations of Shaare Shamayim is the preparation of our children for active participation in Jewish life. Bar/Bat Mitzvah is an important step in this process, in addition to being a milestone in the life of the child and his/her family. The school undertakes to enhance and add meaning to the entire process. For this reason, the 7th grade year centers on the Bar/Bat Mitzvah in terms of its meaning and significance, its ceremony and rituals, and the implications of becoming an adult member of the Jewish Community.

It is anticipated that pupils will be ready to undertake preparations for Bar/Bat Mitzvah approximately six months prior to their Bar/Bat Mitzvah date. **Attendance at Junior Congregation Services (or in the Main Sanctuary or Egalitarian services)** during this six month period on a regular basis is considered an essential ingredient in the process for preparation. **Parents should accompany their child to underscore the familial nature of this important event.** Of course, good attendance at Religious School during the Hei year is vital at all times. For any questions regarding Bar/Bat Mitzvah at Congregations of Shaare Shamayim, please contact Cantor Don Samuels.

CONTRIBUTIONS & DONATIONS

Families who wish to contribute more than just their time and energy to help ensure the success of their child's Hebrew School experience may choose to donate funds which directly benefit their children. Here are some ideas:

Jr. Congregation Siddur \$15
Donation to PTA or Library

Jr. Cong. Tallit \$30
Establishment of a Scholarship

SHABBATONS, RETREATS, AND TRIPS

The school provides exciting learning opportunities through a variety of avenues including Shabbatons and trips. Shabbatons create a sense of belonging at the synagogue and provide bonding experiences for students with their classmates. In the past, we have traveled to the Holocaust Museum in Washington, D.C., attended retreats at the beautiful Pearlstone Conference Center in Reisterstown, Maryland, and visited residents at the Goldstein House. **These programs are an integral component of the Religious School curriculum. Attendance is required. If a child does not attend, significant homework is assigned.**

TEEN LEARNING COMMUNITY (TLC)

Our TLC program provides a safe and loving environment within which our teens can personally explore their Judaism, to learn and question and also to gain the tools and desire for life-long Jewish learning. We encourage exploration of their Jewish identity - a pride in our past, a commitment to our future and the willingness to experience an enriched, vibrant Jewish present and to be able to internalize their Judaism as something uniquely theirs. TLC provides a teen community and presence at Shaare Shamayim through a combination of formal and informal learning through a variety of programs, projects, trips, classes and family activities. Regular attendance at TLC activities enables students to be eligible for Gratz credits, Confirmation with Honors, and letters of recommendation for school files.

RELIGIOUS SERVICES

It is crucial that your child attend **Junior Congregation Services** on a regular basis-both as a requisite to Bar/Bat Mitzvah training and as an enhancement of what is taught in class. All Shabbat and most Holiday Services last about 1 and 1/4 hours, and are held in the Shaare Yitzhak Chapel. Students in Bet and Gimel classes are required to attend a minimum of 50% of services, while Daled and Hei students are obligated to attend 75% of the time. Parents are cordially invited to attend services and other **Junior Congregation programs with their children**. Appropriate dress is required.

During the school year, various classes will lead a **Junior Congregation Service**. Other classes may participate in a Saturday afternoon Mincha program or Friday night service. Your attendance at these class-led functions, as well as with all our special school events, is most appreciated. As there are catering concerns, prompt response to the flyer and/or e-mail is necessary.

Students attending the Saturday morning/Holiday Services eighteen or more times (**CLUB CHAI**) will be invited to a special outing in June. PTA also regularly treats students with a minimum of twenty-five services (Friday evening, Saturday morning, Havdallah, etc.) to a special day at the end of the term.

There is no doubt that students who make attendance at Shabbat Services part of their routine, tend to be the best Hebrew students. In addition, their familiarity with the melodies and procedures is an asset to Bar/Bat Mitzvah training, and make that experience more meaningful.

Parents are asked to schedule Saturday appointments and participation in sports activities in such a way as to permit the children to attend services regularly, without conflicting interests.

PARENT-TEACHER ASSOCIATION

Our PTA is an active and vital organization. They are dedicated to providing for and supplementing religious and social needs of our students. Their caring proves to be very beneficial for our children. The dedication of our parents sets the best example for all our students. The activities of the PTA help raise funds for many of the Religious School programs, which wouldn't be possible without this support. In addition, the volunteers of the PTA provide much needed hands-on assistance with many activities at the Religious School. These parents play a critical role in the success of our Religious School. We welcome new members and encourage all parents to lend a hand, in whatever way they can to ensure the ongoing success of the school. The PTA meets monthly during Sunday School hours. ALL PARENTS are cordially invited to attend. Annual dues are only \$5.00 per family.

RELIGIOUS SCHOOL COMMITTEE

The Education Committee meets on a monthly basis to establish, expand, and reinforce religious school education at Shaare Shamayim. Operating within the structure of the synagogue, the group works to set and clarify objectives, develop policy, and act as educational advocates to insure that education remains a priority. The Committee is an outgrowth of the NESS Initiative (Nurturing Excellence in Synagogue Schools) sponsored by the Auerbach Central Agency for Jewish Education and the Jewish Federation of Philadelphia.

ATTENDANCE

Regular attendance is crucial in accomplishing the goals of our educational program. There is a direct correlation between attendance and achievement, interest and attitude. As stated earlier, no child can afford to be absent unnecessarily. In addition, arriving late and leaving early disrupts the entire class and hampers your child's classroom routine. If absence, tardiness, or early dismissal is necessary, please contact the school office to inform us. In order for your child to receive credit for the year, he or she must attend a minimum of 80% of the sessions. Exceptions are granted only by the School Committee, and only for extended illness or other serious matters. Religious School can only be as effective as the parents' commitment to Jewish education. Students are ultimately responsible for the information obtained in class. If there is an extended period of absence from class, parents should contact the teacher, so that a contingency plan may be developed that will allow your child to cover work he or she will have missed. Your endorsement of this attendance policy is essential to your child's education.

SCHOOL CLOSINGS

Should school be closed due to inclement weather, the school code number is **1001**, which will be announced on **KYW-1060 AM**. On Wednesday, efforts will be made to have the announcements made in the school your child attends.

KASHRUT

All snacks brought into the synagogue MUST BE KOSHER. For prepared foods, a Kosher Certification, such as U, or another recognized certification, on the package is necessary. This policy does not cast doubt on the possible Kashrut of other products, but is designed to enable identification of acceptable foods.

PIZZA DINNER

Every Wednesday at 5:50 PM, a pizza dinner is offered to students for the cost of \$4 which includes 2 slices of pizza and a drink. The pizza dinner is a fun and relaxed component of Religious School which builds community among the students. The dinner is also an informal, learning opportunity during which the students become experts at reciting the Birkat Hamazon. In addition, students, after eating dinner at Religious School, are ready to do their homework once they arrive home. Pizza is ordered in advance on a monthly basis. PTA parents provide much needed assistance at the pizza dinner. If you are interested in helping with this program, please contact the PTA Co-Presidents.

CODE OF BEHAVIOR

We believe that all people have the right to a safe and comfortable environment. In addition, we hope to create an atmosphere in our school that reflects our Jewish values. We believe that both can be accomplished when we treat each other with courtesy and respect. For these reasons, behavior such as fighting, loud or abusive language and treating others in a demeaning manner on the premises will not be acceptable. Further, defacing school and synagogue property (including Nursery School toys) **WILL NOT BE TOLERATED**. If your child is caught displaying any of the above behaviors, he or she may be suspended from school and school activities. This may also result in cancellation of Bar/Bat Mitzvah lessons.

Fortunately, most of the students of Congregations of Shaare Shamayim Religious School are very well behaved. On occasion, it may be necessary to notify parents of a particular “event.” Parents may be asked to attend a conference with the teacher and/or the Education Director. If the behavior problems persist, other courses of action will be taken. Your cooperation in supporting our Code of Behavior is greatly appreciated.

HOMEWORK

A reasonable amount of homework is usually given by a classroom teacher. Your child is expected to complete the assignment(s). Homework is given as a follow-up or extension of clearly defined school activities. If special projects or presentations are required, we urge you to participate with your child in this aspect of his or her education.

EXPECTATIONS

It is expected that students arrive to class on time and remain until the end of the session. Appointments, sports, music lessons, etc. **cannot** infringe on Religious School time. Students should come to school prepared, and with the proper textbooks. Needless to say, materials not pertinent to our curriculum (i.e. toys, cards, I-pods, etc.) may not be brought to school. Finally, **students are required to conduct themselves with respect towards their peers, their teachers, and the synagogue.**

Parents are expected to help provide the best learning environment for their children, by supporting the school's efforts. They should return forms promptly, and whenever possible participate in the Jewish education of their children. Your support of the policies and procedures in this handbook is important.

AFTER SCHOOL PICKUP

Parents may park in the upper parking lot to pick up their children. Parents are not permitted to drive and/or park in the lower parking lot, which is the lot closest to the back door.

If children need to leave early, the parent must first come to the office in order to pick up their child. Children may not wait outside for early pickup. They must wait either in the classroom or the office.

PASSPORT TO ISRAEL

“Passport to Israel is an easy and affordable incentive savings program which helps provide students with necessary funds to have a life-long, unforgettable educational Israel experience. Passport to Israel is administered by the The Jewish Federation of Greater Philadelphia. The Jewish Federation of Greater Philadelphia sets aside matching funds to be added to monies saved by Passport to Israel families to be used for approved Israel experiences.

Passport to Israel is a partnership of Jewish families with Jewish schools and the Jewish Federation of Greater Philadelphia. Students in grades three (3) through eight (8) are eligible for Passport to Israel membership if they are enrolled in formal Jewish education programs within the five county Philadelphia area; are members of a participating synagogue and attend formal Jewish education; or are active participants in approved informal Jewish education programs. For each year that a family sets aside the required minimum savings in their special Passport to Israel account, the Jewish Federation of Greater Philadelphia will set aside \$200 per year for seven years (up to \$1,400 in total) toward that child's future Israel experience.”*

For more information about Passport to Israel, please contact Pam Pearlmutter at ppearlmutter@philafederation.org. An application form may be downloaded from www.jewishphilly.org.

* Information provided by Jewish Federation of Greater Philadelphia , www.jewishphilly.org

HOW TO HELP YOUR CHILD

For our Religious School program to be most effective, the home and school must work in concert and promote a close partnership. Here are a few suggestions:

A growing child needs plenty of rest. Teachers report that often a sluggish, indifferent child in the classroom (especially on Sunday mornings) stayed up late the night before. Please set a reasonable bedtime for Saturday night so that your child will be well-rested for Religious School.

We can best help your child to maximize his or her learning potential if we are aware of his or her needs. If your child is experiencing difficulties in public school, he or she may experience similar difficulties in Religious School. Please inform the school of any physical, mental or emotional difficulty, or any other problems your child may be facing. Naturally, except for the teacher, total confidence will be assured.

The transition from public to Religious School on Wednesday afternoons can be hectic. Providing a snack before coming to Religious School may be beneficial for your child as he makes this transition.

Many of our students are involved in other extracurricular activities. Sports, music lessons, clubs, etc. are important, but please place a priority on your child's education. Parents who have spoken up, have found other institutions and arrangements yielding to the place and importance of religious instruction.

There is a correlation between attendance, attitude, and performance. Every time your child is absent, he or she loses ground. Please encourage your child to attend school regularly and help him or her to arrive promptly.

The place for criticism of the school or synagogue is with the Education Director, Rabbi or the school personnel directly concerned. Please do not discuss school negatively in front of your child. Negative attitudes at home are easily transmitted to your children.

Participation in synagogue services and celebration of Jewish Holidays will greatly enhance your child's interest in Judaism, and strengthen his or her Jewish identity. Please create a rich, Jewish home. School and synagogue are always available for your suggestions, as well as for your questions. Most importantly, our staff is ready to provide you with resources and to share their expertise.