

Knesset Israel Hebrew School Handbook

2023-24



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Families Together

KIHS – Knesset Israel Hebrew School

Please read through this entire handbook so that your family will understand how our program operates. We appreciate your support and cooperation in following the guidelines in this handbook. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact Rabbi David Weiner or Rabbi Becca Walker.

Mission Statement

The Knesset Israel Hebrew School welcomes students from preschool through 12th grade to dynamic classes where they learn Hebrew, Torah, Jewish Studies, history and culture. The school prides itself on its intimate classes and extraordinary faculty. In addition to teaching skills for meaningful Jewish living, the school also incorporates a 'hidden curriculum' helping students learn to value and prioritize their own involvement in Jewish life.

Curriculum & Teachers

All programs follow the same school calendar. (Any exceptions are noted below and will be communicated to parents in advance of the school year.) Age & grade ranges are approximate – KI is committed to making sure each student enjoys the most appropriate learning environment possible. We routinely have multi-age classrooms, so the curriculum varies from year to year to avoid repetition.

Tot Shabbat – all children up to kindergarten age

Shabbat morning, 10-10:30

Parents and teachers lead monthly programs for our very youngest students and their families. These Shabbat morning programs include prayer, music, a craft, purposeful play time and a Kiddush & challah snack.

Ages 3-PreK (Shabbat Only)

Some Shabbat mornings, 10:30-11:30am

Tot Shabbat programs invite young children and their parents and caregivers into joyous experiences of Shabbat and prayer.

Grades K-1 (Shabbat only)

Shabbat morning, 9-10:30am

Students' play and learning center around early Hebrew literacy, holiday themes, Jewish values and biblical stories, with an emphasis on experiential learning. Students begin to learn select prayers from the Shabbat morning service. Each day will end with "purposeful play", which gives our youngest pupils a chance to learn creatively and experientially. Some weeks include participation in Tot Shabbat.

Teacher: Dana Siegel

Grades 2-3 (Shabbat and Wednesday)

Shabbat morning, 9-noon

Wednesday afternoon, 4:15pm-6:15pm

Classroom Studies: Over the course of a 2-3 year cycle, curriculum elements include an overview of themes, characters and plot from the books of Genesis, Exodus & Numbers; social studies themes like Jewish Heroes or Jews around the World; attention to mitzvot like Shabbat, tzedaka, kashrut and/or blessings over food; Modern Israel; God; lifecycle; and the early prophets. Folklore is also incorporated. We teach Hebrew decoding on Wednesday afternoons over the course of two years, then move forward from there.

Tefilla/Jr. Congregation: Learners become familiar with the liturgy and eventually reach the point where they can chant and sing many of the prayers of the Shabbat morning service. Families are always welcome to join Junior Congregation, 10:45-noon.

This program will move students forward in their studies of Hebrew reading, incorporating both traditional classroom elements and introducing a more informal approach through games, song and music. Several times throughout the year, parents will join their children for special programs around holidays.

Jewish Studies: Ellen Masters, Rabbi Becca Walker, Rabbi David Weiner

Hebrew: Rabbi Becca Walker, Rabbi David Weiner, Elisa Snowise, Molly Souede, Amy Abramovich, Joseph Weiner (small groups)

Jr. Congregation: Rebecca Cook-Dubin

Grade 4-5 (Shabbat & Wednesday)

Shabbat morning, 9-noon

Wednesday afternoon, 4:15pm-6:15pm

Classroom Studies: Over the course of a two-year cycle, students' study of Torah will deepen, with discussions focusing on themes found in the books of Genesis, Exodus & Numbers. Bible study continues with the stories of David, Solomon and associated folklore. Students will learn about medieval, modern European, Israeli, and American Jewish history focusing on immigration and religion as well as influential people and events. Study of mitzvot continues. Once they can decode Hebrew accurately, students improve their reading, using books that focus on Hebrew for prayer.

Tefilla/Jr. Congregation: Together with the younger students, learners master the Shabbat liturgy and prepare to lead the congregation in prayer. Students will practice chanting Torah several times this year. The 'Chanting Torah' class is offered every other year to students in grades 4-5 and is next scheduled for the winter of 2025. Families are always welcome to join Junior Congregation.

This program will move students forward in their studies of Hebrew reading and fluency, incorporating both traditional classroom elements and introducing a more informal approach through games, song, music and the arts. Several times throughout the year, parents will join their children for special programs around holidays.

Teachers:

Jewish Studies: Amy Abramovich, Rabbi David Weiner, Rabbi Becca Walker

Hebrew: Rabbi Becca Walker, Rabbi David Weiner, Elisa Snowise, Amy Abramovich, Molly Souede, Joseph Weiner (small groups)

Jr. Congregation: Rebecca Cook-Dubin

Grade 6*-7 (*2023-24 only), Bar/Bat Mitzvah Program

Shabbat morning, 9-noon

Wednesday afternoon, 4:15pm-6:15pm

This program presents a wonderful opportunity for learning, growth, celebration and involvement with the Knesset Israel community. In addition to a continuing focus on the development of prayer and synagogue skills, studies include *tallit*, *tefillin*, *mitzvah*, *tikkun olam*, and a broad overview of Jewish history.

Families have an opportunity to find personal meaning in this significant passage as your child begins a life-long journey as a Jewish adult. More details are available in the bar/bat mitzvah handbook, available at www.knessetisrael.org.

Teachers

Tefillah Skills: Elisa Snowise and Jeff Cook

Jewish Studies: Jilly Lederman, Rabbi David Weiner, Rabbi Becca Walker

Hebrew High – Grades 8-12

We offer a program that supports teens as they follow their passions and continue their Jewish education. Students are encouraged to choose any or all of the following opportunities.

Goldblum Tefilla Institute: Furthering knowledge of the services of weekdays, Shabbat, holidays and High Holidays with expert teachers, coordinated and assigned by Rabbi David Weiner and the Service Assignment Committee. Some students study to become *shlihei tzibbur*, the congregation's emissaries for prayer.

Torah Reading: Students who excel at cantillation will be offered regular opportunities to make use of and develop their skills.

Hebrew School & Bar/Bat Mitzvah Teaching Assistants: Some students choose to teach as a part of their journey of learning. Opportunities are available on Shabbat morning, Wednesday afternoon and as a part of the bar/bat mitzvah program. While many students choose to volunteer to teach (and receive credit for volunteer hours for school honor societies and the Jewish Federation of the Berkshires), KI may offer a stipend to bar/bat mitzvah tutors and teen teaching assistants who are 16+.

Congregational Programming: All adult education programs are open to ages 13+. In addition, any student who would like to participate in independent study of Torah, synagogue skills, or Hebrew should reach out to Rabbi Weiner to develop a plan.

KI Hebrew School Schedule

Tot Shabbat: Sat, 10:30-11:30 (dates as scheduled – consult synagogue or Hebrew School calendar)
 (Mike Duffy)

Grades K-1: Sat: 9-10:30
 (Dana Siegel)

Grades 2-5:

Sat: 9:00-12:00

9-10:30 – Jewish Studies
 (2/3 – Ellen Masters)
 (4/5 – Amy Abramovich)
 10:30-10:45 – Snack
 10:45-noon – Junior Congregation
 (Rebecca Cook-Dubin)

Weds: 4:15-6:15

3:50-4:15 – Snack available
 4:15-5:10 – Hebrew – small groups
 (Beginners: Amy Abramovich & Joe Weiner)
 (Other groups: Molly Souede, Elisa Snowise,
 Rabbi Becca Walker, Rabbi David Weiner)
 5:10-5:20 – Recess
 5:20-6:15 – Jewish Studies
 (Rabbi Becca Walker & David Weiner +)

Grades 6-7:

Sat: 9:00-12:00

Tefilla, History classes, and time in services
 (Elisa Snowise, Jilly Lederman, Jeff Cook, +)

Weds, 4:15-6:15

4:15-5:10 – Rabbis' Class
 (Rabbi David Weiner & Becca Walker)
 5:10-5:20 – Recess
 5:20-6:15 – Tefilla
 (Elisa Snowise)

Temple Anshe Amunim will hold programming for families on some Saturday mornings, 11-noon.

For the **Families Together** schedule, which includes weekday evening and weekend programs, please consult the school calendar.

Cooperation with Temple Anshe Amunim (2023-24)

In the summer of 2023, leaders of Temple Anshe Amunim and Kneset Israel decided to resume experimenting with cooperation for Jewish education. Students whose families are members of Anshe Amunim are welcome to participate in Families Together and Hebrew School programming. An Anshe Amunim member (Mike Duffy) has joined the Hebrew School faculty, and another (Josh Cutler) has joined the Families Together committee.

In addition to encouraging families and children to take part in KI's Hebrew School classes, Anshe Amunim is planning gatherings primarily for its members after 11 a.m. on many Shabbat mornings. As the year goes on, there may be opportunities for students from both synagogues to come together for music, prayer, and social opportunities.

Families who are affiliated with Anshe Amunim might opt into some Families Together and Hebrew School programs and out of others. Communication is key, however, so that teachers can prepare for class. Those who wish to develop a personal plan should reach out to Mike Duffy and/or Rabbi David Weiner.

Paying for Hebrew School

Hebrew School is a benefit of membership at KI, just like adult education programming. Families are encouraged to contribute generously to the congregation through their dues, High Holiday Appeal, and other donations and to volunteer their time and talents for community projects. Bar/Bat Mitzvah families will be solicited for a contribution to the congregation, on a sliding scale, the year of their celebration.

Knesset Israel funds its Hebrew School by pooling revenues from the Berkshire Jewish Film Festival, interest from the congregation's endowment, and donations from generous congregants. In 2023-24, the Jewish Federation of the Berkshires contributed \$20,000 towards Jewish education programming at Knesset Israel. We are deeply grateful for the ongoing support from JFB, and we encourage all school families to contribute to its annual campaign – www.jewishberkshires.org. Every gift matters.

Nonmembers may register for Hebrew School without first joining the synagogue. Nonmembers may not celebrate a Shabbat morning bar/bat mitzvah at KI. A portion of money initially paid as tuition may be applied towards the same year's membership dues. Annual tuition for nonmembers (2023-24):

- Grades Pre-K -2 - \$650
- Grades 3–7 (2 hr. Wednesday & 3 hr. Shabbat) – \$1150

All financial arrangements for Temple Anshe Amunim students are being handled directly by Temple Anshe Amunim.

Families Together

KI's Families Together programs invite parents and children to vibrant experiences of Jewish life and community. Most programs take place on Sunday mornings and Wednesday afternoons, and others coincide with holidays. Some engage parents and children together, while others offer programming for different age groups. Events are included on the Knesset Israel and school calendar, and advance RSVP is appreciated (www.knessetisrael.org/rsvp). School families should please reach out to other Jewish and interfaith families in the neighborhood, as members and nonmembers of KI are welcome to join in. Families Together is supported by a generous grant from the Harold Grinspoon Foundation.

Policies

Attendance: Regular attendance at all classes and programs is essential in order for students to make appropriate progress during the year and not become frustrated. Students are expected to arrive on time and remain in class for the entire session.

Planned Absence: Especially in small classes, every student's presence counts. Knowing about an absence gives the teachers a chance to plan their classes differently and optimize the experience for the students who will be present. Please provide advance notice of any planned absence to Rabbi Becca Walker – rabbib@knesetisrael.org.

Illness: Students are asked to only attend Hebrew School when they are feeling well and not exhibiting cold or flu symptoms. A child with a fever, Covid-19, or stomach bug should not be sent to Hebrew School. Loud congestion and coughing can prove distracting in the classroom. At parents' discretion, students with these symptoms may suppress them with medication or stay home for the day. Parents should please notify Rabbi Becca Walker of any absence (rabbib@knesetisrael.org).

Late Arrival and Early Release: Advance notice to Rabbi Becca Walker (rabbib@knesetisrael.org) – not just a word to the teacher at KI's front door - is very helpful. Parents may be asked to come into the KI building to drop off a student who is arriving late or pick up a student who is leaving early. Please keep in mind that the easiest, least disruptive time for late arrival or early dismissal is during a break between classes.

Drop-off, Pick-up and Dismissal: Parents should please park in the parking lot and use their keyfob to give their children access to the building at the canopy door to drop them off. If, as is often the case on Shabbat morning, there is a greeter present outside the door, s/he can also open the door for students and parents. On Saturdays, please come to the door of your child's classroom to pick up your child. On Wednesdays, please park around the circle in the front of the building and wait for dismissal.

Student Evaluation: Teachers will keep parents informed of what is happening in the classroom through periodic newsletters, organized by the school administrator. Midyear, or as needed, teachers may request a conference with parents to explore progress and concerns.

Behavior Standards and Discipline Policy: The faculty and staff of the KI religious school are committed to creating a safe learning environment where children develop a sense of respect for self, others and property. Faculty commit to communicating respectfully, honestly, and kindly with each other and with students and to maintaining high standards of dignity and professionalism. KI also maintains high expectations for students:

- Students will be ready to learn and participate in all class activities.
- Students will not disrupt any other student, will not touch any other student and will not mistreat Kneset Israel.
- Students will respect each other, the teachers and Rabbis, and behave in accordance to standards established by the teacher.

Should disciplinary action be necessary after several warnings, the following steps will be taken:

- Discussion with the teacher and Rabbi.
- Contact parents for participation and assistance in addressing the issue
- Create an individualized or class behavior plan
- Work to be done independently (outside of school) with tutor at parents' expense

Communication: A vital aspect of our community and a pillar of quality education is communication between parents and faculty. Therefore we encourage you to keep the lines of communication open. We will employ the following methods of communication with families:

- Weekly email newsletter specifically for families (Monday)
- Weekly email newsletter “KI E-News” (Thursday)
- Email notifications of all program changes and updates. We do not use flyers.
- An open invitation to dialogue.

KI will be asking families to identify clearly which parent(s) /guardian(s) KIHS should contact with weekly emails and time-sensitive communication. Should that change during the year, please notify Rabbi Becca Walker - (rabbib@knessetisrael.org).

Concerns: We encourage parents to communicate on a regular basis with their children’s teachers if they have any concerns or questions. Parents may also request conferences with the teacher and the rabbi. *Usually specific challenges do not resolve on their own, so, if an issue is developing, please get in touch quickly to begin the conversation.*

A parent with a concern about the classroom should please feel free to reach out to the teacher for a conversation. Rabbi Weiner is available to participate, at the request of either the teacher or parent. For broader questions, concerns, or problems, please reach out directly to Rabbi Weiner. If a conversation with Rabbi Weiner is not feasible for any reason, Knesset Israel’s Vice President for Youth and Education, Marcie Greenfield Simons (mgreenfieldsimons@gmail.com), will serve as ombudsman.

Kashrut: The Knesset Israel building is kosher. In years (like this one) where some students and teachers have serious nut allergies, the KI Hebrew School is also peanut- and tree nut- free.

Please do not send any food or drink with your child. All snacks will be provided. Please make sure that any relevant allergy information is included in your registration forms.

Shabbat: KI makes every effort to run a Shabbat-compatible program. Shabbat programming will avoid activities traditionally prohibited on Shabbat, including writing, coloring, cutting, and use of computers. Please refrain from communication by phone and email with the KIHS faculty from sundown on Friday night until nightfall on Saturday.

Dress Code: Each student is expected to maintain a neat, clean and appropriate appearance at all times. Revealing clothing and inappropriate slogans are not allowed at Knesset Israel.

Kipa & Tallit: All students and teachers are welcome to wear a kipa as a traditional sign of reverence. Those who identify as male are required to do so. During Junior Congregation, all students are encouraged to wear a kipa and children’s size tallit.

Equipment: Cell phones must be turned off during school hours. All other electronic devices, toys, music players, balls, etc are not permitted at school. They may be held by the teacher and returned at the end of the school day.

Allergies and Special Medical Needs: In order to create a safe and healthy environment for all students, we ask the cooperation of all parents, students and staff to ensure that the policies of the school are carried out consistently. Please be sure to fill out the Medical Information on both the Personal Information and Emergency Contact Information registration forms. **It is the responsibility of the parents of children with allergies, especially anaphylactic allergies, to identify the student and the specific issues to the school**

office. We ask if you have a child with this medical condition, that you keep all emergency contact information current and ensure EpiPens have not expired. Teachers will be notified of children in their class who have an allergy or special medical concern, what their allergy or medical concern is and the preferred means of treatment or management for that child.

Field Trips: A permission slip will be sent home to be filled out in advance of any trips.

Fire, Evacuation & Lockdown Drills: In accordance with city fire codes and recommended security practice, fire, evacuation and lockdown drills will be conducted during the school year to prepare our students to act quickly and safely in the unlikely event of an emergency.

Security: The Knesset Israel building is locked at all times. Like all members of the congregation, Hebrew School parents are eligible for a key fob or keycard that will enable them to access the building through the canopy door. Either may be signed out from the synagogue office – it will have a unique serial number. Simple rules apply:

- Do not lend or give your key fob to anyone;
- Only allow people you know into the building.
- Do not write “Knesset Israel” or “16 Colt Rd.” on the key fob
- If your key fob goes missing, please contact the synagogue immediately so that it can be deactivated and replaced. No questions will be asked, nor will you be charged a fee.

School Cancellation Procedures: The Wednesday program will follow the Pittsfield Public Schools schedule. If the Pittsfield Public Schools are closed on a Wednesday for a weather-related concern, KIHS will also be closed. If the KI Hebrew School must cancel any classes on a Wednesday for another reason, parents will be reached via the primary contact information they provided. Check email and txt.

Shabbat classes at Knesset Israel are rarely cancelled. We will adjust programming around attendance on any given Shabbat morning. Please use common sense during inclement weather. An advance cancellation might take place on Friday afternoon. Notification as above.

Leadership Structure & Contact Information

Rabbi David Weiner (rabiweiner@outlook.com) is leading the KI Hebrew School. Contact him with questions about the program, learning needs, student issues and big-picture questions.

Rabbi Becca Walker (rabbib@knessetisrael.org), KI's Director of Lifelong Learning, will be serving as a lead teacher and programmer on Wednesdays, an occasional guest teacher on Shabbat mornings, and an advisor to other teachers. She is also the educator primarily responsible for Families Together. Rabbi Becca will handle Hebrew School emails and communication with parents, including snow cancellations. Contact her if your student will be absent/late/leaving early.

Diana Macfarlane (office@knessetisrael.org), KI office manager, provides administrative support to Rabbi Weiner.

Rabbi Weiner, Rabbi Becca, and Diana Macfarlane may be reached by phone at (413) 445-4872x10.

Marcie Greenfield Simons (mgreenfieldsimons@gmail.com), Knesset Israel's Vice President for Youth and Education, is Rabbi Weiner's partner in leading the school. She also serves as ombudsman, should a student, parent, or teacher concern arise that cannot be addressed to Rabbi Weiner.

Mike Duffy (mduffy1391@gmail.com) is the liaison between Anshe Amunim and Knesset Israel.