



FAMILY HANDBOOK

Last updated April 2022

Mercaz Academy is an Orthodox, co-educational, preschool through sixth grade Jewish day school located in Plainview, in the heart of Long Island.

MISSION STATEMENT

Mercaz Academy is passionately dedicated to academic excellence in Judaic and secular studies, and to inspiring each student to become committed to Torah, Zionism, and American ideals, with an enduring curiosity and determination to understand our world. Our emphasis on personal growth in an intimate and innovative environment cultivates tomorrow's leaders through building character in an inclusive and warm community atmosphere.

OUR VALUES

Academics and Beyond...

Developing Understanding and Enduring Curiosity

דעה בינה והשכל

Our commitment to academic excellence in Judaic and secular studies is enriched by an experienced, caring faculty, technology integrated at all grade levels, and a variety of extracurricular offerings. We reinforce our dual curriculum by interweaving Judaic and secular studies through engaging cross-curricular lessons and programs. Students are inspired to realize their individual potential by pursuing their curiosity and developing the critical thinking skills necessary for understanding and navigating our modern, complex world.

Individual Growth and Emotional Well-Being

אם אין אני לי, מי לי?

Our small-school environment, with a low student-teacher ratio, enables us to teach, challenge, and support each student according to his or her own learning level and style. Our program focuses on the development of the whole child in a stimulating and warm Jewish environment. We nurture our students' natural sense of wonder and inquiry in a vibrant and diverse educational experience that fosters their sense of self and an appreciation for the world around them.

Building Character and Leadership

וכשאני לעצמי מה אני? ואם לא עכשיו אימתי?

Mercaz Academy infuses the importance of Jewish values, derech erez (respect for others) and middot tovot (personal character) through formal and informal education. Students at all levels participate in a variety of acts of chesed (kindness) through community engagement. These experiences provide a firm foundation for finding meaning through service to others.

A Community School with an Inclusive Environment

כלנו כאחד באור פניך

We are dedicated to a responsive, community-centric ethic as we educate students from communities across Nassau and Suffolk Counties. We welcome students who reflect the Jewish cultural diversity throughout central Long Island. Our families span a wide spectrum of Jewish affiliations and levels of observance, whether of Ashkenazi or Sephardi heritage, and range from those with extensive or limited religious backgrounds--all are welcome. Each is an integral member in our Mercaz Academy family, as we engage the entire family through learning and cultural activities. At the Mercaz Academy, our teachers and parents forge a community partnership not only to promote an atmosphere of

exuberant education but to advance each student's creativity and self-confidence.

Contributing to Global Jewish Life

אחינו כל בית ישראל

Mercaz Academy establishes a strong and enduring relationship between our students and the expansive Jewish world. At Mercaz Academy, Ahavat Yisrael—love of Israel—encompasses not only the Jewish people, but the land of Israel, the State of Israel, and the Torah of Israel. We foster a close, personal connection to our brothers and sisters in Israel and world-wide through our curriculum, enhanced by speakers, programs, and celebrations, and our strong emphasis on Hebrew language, with an Ivrit (Hebrew) immersion program in all grades. As these relationships deepen, our students become more prepared for mature participation and leadership in the Jewish community.

Contributing Citizens of American and Global Society

בצלם אלוקים

We imbue our students with a love and appreciation of the United States of America. We instill American values in our students, including a recognition of each individual's freedoms, liberties, rights and responsibilities. Mercaz Academy graduates students who have gained the foundations of knowledge and understanding not only of our country's past and present but also of world history and global events, so that they can understand America's role among nations and contribute meaningfully to the future of American life and society at large.

A Modern, Spacious Learning Environment

Our newly renovated campus provides a perfect backdrop for academic achievement and personal growth. Mercaz Academy's expansive facility offers more than large, fully equipped classrooms, a beit midrash for t'fila (prayer), study, and reflection, an auditorium, advanced and supportive technology, an extensive secular and Judaic library, and spaces dedicated to special studies, with a STEM lab and art room. Together with our outdoor and indoor sports areas, including an impressive gymnasium, an indoor early childhood playscape, two outdoor playgrounds, and a full baseball field, our robust facilities foster our students' health and development while expanding their horizons and igniting their imaginations.

I. HOME-SCHOOL PARTNERSHIP

Mercaz Academy wholeheartedly supports a close interactive relationship between home and school. We assure you that your child(ren) will be partaking in a first-class religious and secular education and that Mercaz Academy will be dedicated to each child's social and emotional growth.

We ask that you join us in taking advantage of the many communication channels on-hand to ensure each student's needs are addressed and met. Please remember that children's perception of school, and the seriousness with which they approach their studies, is influenced by the attitudes of their parents. A child's positive feelings about learning will be stimulated by interested parents who express positive opinions about school, staff, and studies.

II. COMMUNICATION & STUDENT PROGRESS

Mercaz Academy is committed to consistent, well thought-out communication with parents. We sincerely hope that you will take full advantage of the many ways you may reach out to us.

We begin the academic year with Meet the Teachers Night. As the name implies, it is an opportunity for you to meet the professionals with whom your child(ren) will be spending more than 30 hours a week. This event will allow you to learn about the classroom objectives, curriculum, and routines.

The academic year for students in Kindergarten through 6th Grade is divided into three learning blocks (each approximately ten weeks long). Report cards are prepared at the end of each learning block. These reflect written assessments as well as the teacher's observations of each pupil's performance.

Parent-teacher conferences are scheduled twice a year to provide a more personal review and discussion of your child's educational and social-emotional progress.

In addition to these scheduled updates, Mercaz staff will communicate with you throughout the year in a number of ways, including via Remind, email, ParentLocker, Google Classroom, phone calls, and written notes sent home with a student.

Parents are encouraged to contact school personnel directly (using any of the means above) to discuss any aspect of their child's education and development. Kindly note that teachers cannot receive phone calls during class time, but our school office staff will gladly take your message. If the need arises, the school office can also arrange for you to meet in person with the teacher or the Principals. [In addition, please refrain from calling teachers at home to discuss school matters.](#)

III. SCHOOL HOURS & ATTENDANCE

(A) Early Childhood Center- Toddler through Nursery Bet **1. Arrival and Dismissal**

ECC hours are 9:00 am to 2:00 pm, Monday through Thursday, and 9:00 am to 1:45 pm on Friday. Student drop-off and pick-up procedures will be announced before the start of the school year.

You may opt to enroll your Nursery Aleph or Nursery Bet student in our before-care and/or after-care enrichment programs. Information will be sent separately.

(B) Elementary School- Kindergarten through 6th GRADE **1. Arrival and Dismissal**

Students arrive in school between 8:00 and 8:15 am. They depart on Monday through Thursday at 3:55 pm and on Friday at 1:45 pm.

Mercaz cannot assume responsibility for the safety of children on premises before or after school hours unless they are engaged in a school sponsored before- or after-school program.

Your school district will notify you regarding your bus stop and approximate time of morning pick up. For the first week or so, delays are common, so please be patient if your bus is late.

The following rules apply to all passengers on the bus:

- ◆ Students should wait on the curb for the morning bus. The bus driver will not wait for passengers who are late.
- ◆ No food or drink may be consumed on the bus.
- ◆ A child may not move to another seat en route. The bus driver may assign seats.
- ◆ A student's bus privileges may be suspended for inappropriate behavior.

To ensure the safety of your child, please inform the school office of any changes in your child's pickup, busing, or after-school plans via email to office@mercazacademy.org BEFORE 2 pm Monday through Thursday, and before 12 pm on Friday.

Dismissal will be assumed to be by the usual routine, unless the parent requests a change via email. Parents should make their children aware of any necessary dismissal changes before sending them to school, as students will not be allowed to call home to make "on-the-spot" after school arrangements.

Parents cannot assume that a bus, other than the student's own bus, will transport their child(ren) to a friend's house. For this to be possible, bus companies and districts must give permission and the school office must be notified in advance.

A child leaving school early will not be called out of class until first being signed out by a parent in the school office. Parents should come to school a few minutes before the intended pickup time. Parents may not go to the classroom to pick up a child early.

(C) Attendance and Lateness

The New York State Board of Education mandates attendance for all school age students on all days that school is in session, unless a child is ill. Daily attendance is also an understood prerequisite for academic achievement.

It is a parent's responsibility to ensure that their child(ren) attends school regularly and arrives punctually. Lateness and excessive and/or inappropriate absences impact both the student's success and the classroom environment. Planned medical or dental appointments should not be made for school hours, unless absolutely necessary.

1. When Your Child is Absent

If your child is being kept at home due to illness, please call the school nurse between 8:30 am and 9:30 am at 516-696-4200 or email the nurse at sweissberg@mercazacademy.org.

In the event of a student's necessary absence from school for reasons other than illness, prior arrangements should be made with the Principal. Parents are advised to schedule trips and vacations for days when school is not in session. Teachers cannot provide children with material for use during vacations taken during school time.

2. When Your Child is Late

Any student arriving after 8:30 am should go directly to the school office for a late note and then proceed to class.

As an integral component of Mercaz's curriculum and philosophy, our day begins with *tefillah* (prayer). It is important in the development of your child's attitude towards *tefillah* and to their entire day of learning that parents stress its centrality and the need for punctuality. Lateness is disruptive to *tefillah* and habitual lateness conveys the message that school rules and *tefillah* are not important.

(D) School Cancellation

Whenever Mercaz is to be closed due to inclement weather, announcements will be made via **automated text message** and will also be posted on www.mercazacademy.org.

IV. DRESS CODE

Mercaz students understand their responsibilities as links in the chain of Jewish tradition. They learn that the Torah principle of *tzniut* is more than a modest dress code. Studies have shown that students who are well groomed and appropriately dressed have a more respectful attitude towards school. They achieve more and help maintain a conducive learning environment for all.

It is impossible to detail in advance all items that are and are not

appropriate for students to wear. Kindly use the following as guides. In addition, whether any particular article of clothing is appropriate will be determined by the school administration.

It is the parents' responsibility to ensure that their child(ren)'s attire conforms to the school dress code. If necessary, parents will be contacted to bring a change of clothes for their child. Inappropriately dressed children may not be allowed to remain in class.

- ◆ *Mercaz students present themselves in a manner appropriate to the academic atmosphere of Mercaz Academy. This includes, but is not limited to:*
 - Dressing neatly and respectfully
 - Conservative hairstyles

(A) Kindergarten

- ◆ *Mercaz boys wear:*
 - *kippot* (required) and *tzizit* (encouraged)

(B) Grades 1 through 6

- ◆ *Mercaz boys wear:*
 - collared or polo shirts and slacks (not t-shirts, jeans, or shorts)
 - *kippot* and *tzizit*
 - closed-toe shoes or sneakers that are safe for all physical activities and recess (*sneakers are required on gym days*)
- ◆ *Mercaz girls wear:*
 - dresses or skirts that are knee-length or longer, with no slits above the knees and no cutouts (*ankle-length skirts are not allowed for gym; girls may keep a knee-length skirt or baggy sweat pants in school for gym days*)
 - conservative necklines, covered midriffs, and long or short sleeves (not cap sleeves)

- closed-toe shoes or sneakers that are safe for all physical activities and recess (*sneakers are required on gym days*)
- ◆ **A note to Mercaz parents:**
 - All adults are role models for our children. When visiting the school or accompanying a class trip, **please abide by the same dress code set forth for our children** as we do not wish to convey a contradictory message.

V. SMART DEVICE AND PHONE POLICY

Students may not use smart devices (including watches) and cell phones on school premises at any time. Smart devices and cell phones will be confiscated if used. If necessary, your child may have a smart device or cell phone which remains powered off in school and kept in his/her book bag ONLY.

The school office phone is reserved for official business. Please do not expect your child to use the school phone. In addition, please do not call the office to convey messages to your child(ren), except in emergencies.

VI. HEALTH GUIDELINES

Educational progress depends on physical, social, and emotional well-being. A healthy student will be able to learn more easily, adjust readily to classroom activities, and get along well with others. We strongly recommend that each child receive sufficient sleep each night and a nourishing breakfast daily.

Please share any health conditions that will affect a child's learning with the nurse and classroom teacher. Parents are also encouraged to share with their child's teacher signs of fatigue or trends of behavior which might cause one to suspect the beginning of physical illness.

(A) Health Exams and Immunizations

No student will be allowed to attend school without proof of appropriate medical exams and immunizations. Compliance with these requirements is mandated by New York State.

Physical examinations are required for all new students, and every child entering Nursery, Kindergarten, 1st, 3rd or 5th grade. Students will be given approximately 14 days from the start of classes to show proper documentation or proof that an appointment with a physician has been made.

Please send Information regarding recent immunizations, medical conditions, allergies or surgeries since your child's last physical with the school nurse at nurse@mercazacademy.org.

(B) Medication

Our school nurse will administer medication to your child **ONLY** if the following procedure is followed:

- ◆ The school nurse must have a signed or stamped request from the doctor which indicates the frequency and dosage of a prescribed medication.
- ◆ The nurse must have a written request from the parent to administer the medication as specified by the doctor.
- ◆ The medication should be delivered directly to the school nurse by the parent. **No medication should be sent to school with a child.**
- ◆ All prescription medications need to be in a pharmacy labeled vial.
- ◆ Over-the-counter medications need to be in an unopened bottle.
- ◆ Medication orders need to be renewed for each school year.
- ◆ Unused medication needs to be picked up by an adult at the end of the school year or it will be discarded.
- ◆ The medication will be locked in the school nurse's office to be dispensed when needed.
- ◆ The nurse is the only one who can dispense medicine.

Children are not allowed to take any medicine on their own.

(C) Illness

If a child shows symptoms of illness prior to leaving for school, please keep him/her home, rather than potentially exposing others. Please realize that medicines such as Tylenol simply cover up an illness, they do not cure it or make it less contagious. When in doubt about your child's health, please exercise the precaution of keeping your child at home, rather than having the child sent home sick from school.

When called to pick up a sick child from school, please do so as soon as possible. Children who do not feel well will be sitting at the nurse's office and might be extremely uncomfortable as they anxiously await your arrival.

New York State requires that you notify the school nurse immediately at 516-696-4200, ext. 516, if your child contracts a contagious illness (Covid, flu, strep, virus etc.). This allows our nurse to notify families of children who might have been exposed to the potentially contagious illness at school. We will always do our best to safeguard the privacy of the student with a reported illness.

When should your child return to school?

A child who has had an upper respiratory infection or fever may return to school only **after he/she has been free of fever and symptom-free, without any fever-reducing medications, for 24 hours.**

(D) Head Lice

Mercaz Academy aims to maintain a healthy school environment by preventing and managing head lice effectively and discreetly. It's important to note that lice are not a medical issue and do not pose a health risk, but they do require attention to prevent spreading. If anyone in your family has lice, we strongly recommend professional treatment, as the nits (eggs) are difficult

to see and treat. Only meticulous and immediate treatment can prevent the recurrence and spread of lice.

At the start of the school year, we conduct mandatory lice checks. In addition, we will send a "lice alert" to parents of children who are in the same class as a child who has been found to have lice.

Children having lice may return to attend school only after the school receives a written statement of successful treatment. The nurse will recheck them upon their return to school.

VII. FOOD AND DRINKS

(A) *Kashrut* / Kosher Guidelines

- ◆ Please make sure that any items to be shared come in their original packages with one of the following *kashrut* certifications:



- ◆ If it has a different certification, please reach out to the school office to see if it is acceptable.
- ◆ **Note that a simple “K” or “K-Pareve” is not acceptable** since such symbols do not necessarily indicate certification by a reliable *kashrut* organization. “K” is a non-registered trademark, which anyone may use.
- ◆ **NO home baked or homemade products or cut fruit may be sent to the school** for classroom use or distribution. Only food products with reliable *kashrut* supervision or whole fruits are acceptable. Neighborhood bakeries must also have reliable supervision. No open packages may be sent for distribution in school, even when bearing a certification symbol of an appropriate *hashgacha* (*kashrut* supervisor).

(B) Allergies

We are a nut-free school. All products entering our building

must be completely nut free. That includes both personal food items (such as a lunch or snack) and food meant to be shared with the class.

(C) Birthdays and other Celebrations

1. In School

We love celebrating with our students! At our daily 8:10 am line-up on the basketball court, students in grades K-6 sing “Happy Birthday” to everyone celebrating that day—and you may join us

While birthdays should be fun for all, they must be celebrated within reason. To that end, you are welcome to send a limited snack to be shared in honor of your child’s birthday. When doing so, please send it in its original sealed package, showing the *kashrut* certification and ingredients (allergens) label.

Please do not send in dairy snacks for the class to eat in the afternoon on days on which a meat lunch is served.

We will only distribute snacks that all students in the class can eat. Please check in advance whether any of your child’s classmates have allergies by emailing nurse@mercazacademy.org.

2. Outside of School

If you are making a birthday party outside of school, please bear in mind that inviting some children and not others hurts children deeply and has an adverse effect on the lessons of friendship and harmony which we try to instill among classmates. One way in which we promote these values is that invitations to a party outside of school may be distributed in school only if every child in the class is invited.

Please consider your child’s classmates when planning your child’s at-home party and adhere to school *kashrut* policies. We also urge that you use paper dishes and plastic utensils at all times during the party. Parties on Friday afternoons should end at least one hour prior to candle lighting to allow children to return

home for Shabbat.

(D) Lunch

Lunch may be sent from home (see allergy note above) or ordered in advance through the PTA lunch program. Menus, pricing, lunch program meat days and other information will be sent to you in advance.

Students may bring in dairy or meat lunches every day. Placemats will be provided to separate meat lunches from dairy lunches. Milk will be served daily, except on days on which the PTA lunch program serves meat.

(E) Eating in Class

Students are not permitted to eat during class. Non-glass water bottles are allowed in class. Purified water refill stations are in the building for student use.

Teachers will establish snack times. Please do not send dairy afternoon snacks if your child has a meat lunch.

Please note that gum chewing is forbidden everywhere in school.

VIII. LEARNING MATERIALS

(A) Textbooks

General Studies textbooks, in most cases, are supplied through Nassau and Suffolk BOCES and issued by Mercaz. Books that are not provided by your district will be furnished to your children by Mercaz. Judaic Studies books are issued by Mercaz.

Parents will be required to pay to replace any lost textbooks or workbooks.

(B) School Supplies

During the summer we will distribute via email a list of the classroom supplies your child(ren) will need for school. It will also

be posted on the school website.

(C) Respect for Materials

Students are responsible for caring for their textbooks and their workbooks. Unless specifically instructed by teachers, students are not to write in their textbooks. Books must be returned in the same condition that they were received, less normal wear and tear. Families will be required to pay for their child(ren)'s lost or damaged books.

IX. HOMEWORK

(A) Purpose

Teachers continually strive to help each child reach his/her fullest potential by planning activities both in and out of school.

Homework assignments foster many positive goals, which include:

- ◆ promoting good work and study habits;
- ◆ advancing organization and study skills;
- ◆ reinforcing classroom lessons through review;
- ◆ providing an efficient tool for a teacher to check that the lesson was understood;
- ◆ extending knowledge learned in school to real life situations; and
- ◆ allowing a parent to keep abreast of class activities and learning.

Please help your child to succeed by providing him/her with a quiet place for doing homework. We recommend a set time each evening when the child is expected to do homework. Ideally, homework should be done after the child has had some time to relax and eat a snack, but before it gets too late. Please encourage your child to plan ahead regarding long-term assignments, projects or exams so that he/she may avoid the pitfalls of high pressure, last minute work.

Every child is expected to submit his/her own assignments in a

timely and responsible fashion.

Please create a system for your child(ren) to remember to bring homework assignments back to school. Students may not call home to ask parents to bring in forgotten assignments.

(B) The Parent's Role

Although homework assignments are certainly the child's responsibility, a parent's encouragement and appropriate support is warranted. Appropriate support would include providing an environment in which a child can focus or providing needed supplies. Unless you are specifically notified by a teacher, children should not need parental assistance in doing homework. Please contact the teacher if a question arises regarding the quantity or quality of a child's assignment.

X. SPECIAL PROGRAMS & ACTIVITIES

(A) Field Trips

Class trips are integral to our educational program. Field trips promote learning through experience and enhance a child's understanding of their in-school learning and the world around them. A general trip permission form will be distributed before the start of school for the parents to sign. Please complete and return the form before the start of school. The signed form will be kept on file. Parents will be advised before each trip by a separate notice.

School trips have always been a source of pride and pleasure for our school. We are frequently complimented on our students' fine manners and behavior as they venture out on field trips. Please encourage this positive behavior in your child, including before each trip, so we may look forward to another year filled with rich, rewarding experiences for our students.

(B) School Assemblies

School assemblies and special programs are scheduled

throughout the year. Our students eagerly look forward to these events. We will notify you of the days and times of these events in advance by email.

(C) Celebrate Israel Parade

As Mercaz fervently supports the State of Israel, our students participate in the ***Celebrate Israel Parade***. We expect all students from grades 4 through 6 to march in the Parade to demonstrate our love for Israel. Families are all invited to march together with Mercaz Academy to support our school as we celebrate Israel.

(D) After-School Activities

After-school programs sponsored by the PTA will be offered to all students. Most school districts do not provide transportation for after-school enrichment. Please check with your district to learn its policy. Children must be picked up at the conclusion of after-school programs, which usually end at 5:00 pm. Further details will be distributed by the PTA once school begins.

(E) Tzedaka

Our students have the opportunity to give *tzedaka* each school day. The act of giving *tzedaka* each day reinforces not only the desire to do the *mitzva* but also the connection each child has with a greater community. Please encourage your child to develop the habit of fulfilling this *mitzva*. Your child's daily contribution, even if it is only a penny a day, forges in him/her a valuable perspective that can last a lifetime.

XII RESPECT IN A CARING COMMUNITY

Integral to the values we share at Mercaz is the expectation that students will respect their peers, teachers, and the educational environment.

(A) Property

Students are to respect the property of the school, places where they are taken on school field trips, and the property of members

of the school community. This respect will be shown by treating all property and equipment in the school with care. To maintain school property for the benefit of the school community, families of students who lose or damage school property will be expected to pay for all repair or replacement costs that the school incurs.

(B) Personal Possessions

We recommend that students not bring valuables, toys, personal items or electronics from home which are not needed for classes. Items such as these can easily disappear. Mercaz cannot take responsibility for loss or damage to these items.

(C) Dangerous items

Water guns, pocket knives, glass bottles and other sharp or dangerous objects create a safety concern and are not permitted on school grounds under any circumstances.

XIII. PARENT – TEACHER ASSOCIATION

The PTA fosters close cooperation between parents and teachers and provides a vital link in the home-school relationship. It works together with the school administration to identify, understand, and respond to parental concerns.

The **PTA** is dedicated to the enhancement and enrichment of Mercaz Academy's educational and social programs. As the volunteer efforts of parents have untold influences upon their children's growth and development, the PTA strongly encourages all parents to become actively involved in its many diverse activities and support its many functions.

School programs and services supported and/or coordinated by the PTA include, but are not limited to:

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| ◆ After School Enrichment | ◆ Celebrate Israel Parade |
| ◆ Book Fairs | ◆ Chanukah Boutique |
| ◆ Calendar | ◆ Chanukah Celebration |
| ◆ Calendar Ads | ◆ Chocolate Pre-Pesach |

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| ◆ Sale | ◆ Lunch Program |
| ◆ Chumash Play | ◆ Mishloach Manot |
| ◆ Class Parents | ◆ Model Seders |
| ◆ Collations | ◆ Mother's Day Plant Sale |
| ◆ Davening & Danish | ◆ Purim Seudah |
| ◆ Fundraising | ◆ School Spirit |
| ◆ Holiday Enrichment | ◆ Sixth Grade Graduation |
| ◆ Lice Check | ◆ Sixth Grade Retreat |
| ◆ Kindergarten | ◆ Staff Appreciation |
| Graduation | ◆ Thanksgiving |
| ◆ Lag B'Omer BBQ | Celebration |

Various fundraising activities are sponsored during the year. Chairpersons for these programs, services, and activities are listed in the Mercaz calendar distributed by PTA at the beginning of the academic year. These funds directly benefit our children.

XIV. POLICY OF NON-DISCRIMINATION

Mercaz admits students of any race, color, national origin to all rights, privileges, programs, and activities generally accorded or made available to the students at the school. Mercaz does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national, and ethnic origin in the administration of its educational policies, admission policies, scholarship and loan programs, and athletic and other school-administered programs.

CONTACT INFORMATION

MERCAZ ACADEMY
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(516) 696-4200
mercazacademy.org