

RELIGIOUS SCHOOL HANDBOOK

2025-26 5785-86



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Dear Families,

I would like to welcome all of our students and their families to our Religious School. Our entire staff is looking forward to an exciting year filled with wonderful programs and experiences for our students. The following pages contain our school's curriculum, guidelines and other general information.

The Temple Emanu-El Religious School faculty recognizes the great responsibility parents have placed in our hands. Our dedicated staff prepares the students, from ages five through eighteen, for participation in the Jewish Community. It is our goal to familiarize our students, your children, with our Jewish history, values, language and traditions. This goal, however, cannot be ours alone. In order for us to successfully prepare your children for a lifetime in the Jewish community, we look forward to your continued participation and support.

I encourage you to read the handbook from beginning to end to familiarize yourself with our exciting programs and policies. If you have any questions or concerns, please contact me as soon as possible. I am happy to discuss any Religious School matters with you.

L'shalom,

Dana Shectman

Executive Director and Religious School Director

Phone: 732-549-4442 ext. 104

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GOALS AND PHILOSOPHY OF TEMPLE EMANU-EL'S RELIGIOUS SCHOOL

The goal of Jewish education within the Reform Movement is to deepen Jewish experience and knowledge for all Jews, so as to strengthen their commitment to Judaism, their identification with the Jewish people, their involvement in the Temple, their participation in Jewish life, and their determination to live with Jewish values.

Furthermore, it is the aim of a Jewish religious education that every Jew should understand the history of the Jewish people, the basic concepts that unify Judaism and the various trends within it to the end that each Jew may willingly choose to be a part of that history and a bearer of the Jewish tradition.

The Director, Rabbi, and faculty of the Religious School of Temple Emanu-El have organized our school to provide a variety of educational, cultural, and religious experiences for our students. By enrolling your child in the Religious School of Temple Emanu-El, you are doing so with the understanding that your child will learn about all subject matters from the Jewish perspective. Through our curriculum including Judaic Studies, Hebrew, as well as Family Education programs, we strive to meet these goals:

- Impart knowledge of Jewish history and traditions
- Celebrate holidays, services and rituals
- Build Hebrew language skills that will enable our children to comprehend and participate in worship services
- Introduce modern conversational Hebrew
- Develop an understanding of Tanakh (Bible)
- Teach Jewish ethics and values including *tikkun olam* (social justice)
- Create an interest in Jewish current affairs in Israel and worldwide
- Develop a positive identification and commitment to Judaism

SCHOOL SCHEDULE

K-3rd grade Tuesday 4:00-6:00

4th-6th grade Monday/Wednesday 4:00-6:00

7th-12th grade Wednesday evenings 7:00-8:30

RELIGIOUS SCHOOL DAILY SCHEDULE:

Mondays (Grades 4-6) and Wednesdays (Grades K-6):

Arrive 4:00, Meet in the sanctuary

4:00 - 4:15, All classes meet together for announcements and quick lesson

4:15 - 5:30, Grades meet in their classrooms

5:30 - 6:00, Meet in the sanctuary or social hall for T'fillah, an art project, a social activity, or a social action project - families are welcome to join us!

6:00, Dismissal

Wednesday (Chai School):

Arrive 7:00. Meet in the social hall

7:00 - 7:30, Light dinner and guided group discussion

7:30 - 8:30, Class time in the youth lounge

8:30, dismissal

CURRICULUM TOPIC OUTLINE (Classes are not limited to these topics.)**All-School**

Dana Sheckman, TEE Executive Director and Director of Education, will teach across grade levels, leading sessions on Jewish lifecycle, weekly parsha with modern-day applications, and middot (values)-based learning. The weekly parsha with modern learning will be taught on Mondays from 4-4:15. Middot will be taught on Wednesdays from 4-4:15 with a follow-up activity reinforcing the concept on Wednesdays from 5:30 - 6:00. This will take on a variety of different forms, including community service / Tikkun Olam projects, group discussion, art, and movement activities. All of these activities are purposeful and structured.

Group Tefillah, led by Rabbi Axe with student participation, will take place on Mondays from 5:30 - 6:00, and will include prayer and song found in the format of the services for Shabbat and BMitzvah.

The only deviation from this schedule would be when specific holidays are being celebrated, such as a model seder for Passover, a Tu B'shvat seder, a Chanukah celebration, etc...

Other highlights of the year include:

- Two school-led Shabbat programs
- Family education events throughout the year
- Youth Group events, now offered outside of Religious School hours (these were previously monthly in the RS calendar)
- Monthly Shabbat Dinner & Service

Kindergarten - 2nd Grade

This hands-on class experience is designed to foster a love of Jewish learning. Students will create art, sing songs, hear stories, and participate in movement activities. They will explore Shabbat, Jewish holidays and lifecycle events, alef-bet recognition, Torah stories, and much more! This program serves as a perfect introduction to religious school, helping students feel comfortable, become familiar with the traditions, and deepen their sense of belonging within the community.

3rd Grade

Hands-on learning is a central part of this class, giving students the opportunity to sing songs, create art, and begin their formal Jewish education with plenty of room for self-expression. Children will explore Israel through stories and creative projects. They will deepen their understanding of the alef-bet as they begin to connect letters and sounds. They will learn to read and chant Shabbat and holiday blessings, building the confidence to participate in, and even lead, during services and celebrations. Students will also discover Jewish heroes from our shared history, personal lives, and the modern world, fostering a meaningful connection to their heritage.

4th Grade

Students will strengthen their mastery of the alef-bet and continue developing their ability to read and chant the prayers needed for BMitzvah preparation and daily Jewish life. Basic Hebrew vocabulary will be introduced through engaging games and movement-based activities. Students will also explore what daily life is like for Israeli children their age by learning about school, food, hobbies, music, and more. We'll dive into the meaning of Hebrew names and birthdays, culminating in a fun and personal project. Lifecycle events will be discussed through the lens of family traditions and personal observance, encouraging students to think about how they mark time and milestones. Students will begin engaging with Jewish text through *The Explorer's Bible, Volume 1*, laying the foundation for thoughtful exploration and discussion.

5th Grade

The curriculum will include a unit on Israel's history leading up to the current conflict. The focus will remain on presenting factual information, avoiding personal opinions or emotionally charged language. Our discussion of the conflict will be limited strictly to the historical context of the land. These discussions will be approached with sensitivity, ensuring they are age-appropriate and mindful of each student's capacity to engage with complex and challenging topics. Students will have the opportunity to design their own lifecycle events and share what they personally find most engaging and meaningful. Everyone will create their own *yad* (Torah pointer) to use as they prepare for their BMitzvah. The kids will continue engaging with the text through Volume 2 of *The Explorer's Bible*, building on the foundation established in 4th grade when they completed Volume 1. The class will continue to build confidence in reading Hebrew while also learning elements of modern Hebrew through storytelling. Rabbi Axe will play a significant role in 5th grade instruction. She will work closely with students to strengthen their prayer reading and chanting skills, and will begin more focused BMitzvah preparation.

6th Grade

The 6th grade curriculum will include a unit on Holocaust education, utilizing materials from a range of reputable sources, including, but not limited to, the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, the Centre for Holocaust Education and Scholarship, and My Jewish Learning. We will also discuss current world events as they relate to Jewish history and their relevance to our lives today. Both topics will be approached with sensitivity and with careful consideration of each student's ability to process the material appropriately. Our study of Israel will include a focus on its development as the "Start-Up Nation," highlighting its innovation, technology, and entrepreneurial spirit. Students will create micrography art

pieces that illustrate the themes of their BMitzvah Torah portion. Throughout the year, students will help lead discussions about what is most meaningful to them personally as we celebrate each lifecycle event and holiday together. Rabbi Axe will play a significant role in 6th grade instruction. She will work closely with students to strengthen their prayer reading and chanting skills, and will continue focused BMitzvah preparation.

Chai School

Our oldest students will begin each session by sharing dinner and engaging in meaningful conversations about current events, personal interests, and a variety of other relevant topics. After dinner, a prompt will be introduced to spark discussion and guide independent or group research. Students will then use their findings to collaboratively create a learning aid of their choice. This might take the form of a website, social media campaign, board game, pamphlet, or another creative format they develop together. The central theme of the project will be maintaining mental health, practicing self-care, and supporting others during challenging times. Guided by the values of *middot* (Jewish ethical traits), students will design learning opportunities aimed at both children and adults, fostering empathy, resilience, and community awareness. We will welcome guest speakers to this class.

Religious School Policies and Procedures

ARRIVAL AND DISMISSAL

Arriving late and leaving early present serious disruptions to our religious school classes. It is important to make a concerted effort to get your child to class on time and to make sure that they remain for the entire session. All students must be transported to and from the Religious School. If an early pickup is necessary, please send a note with your child or email the Religious School Director. Parents must first come to the Director's office to sign out their child. Children cannot be dismissed until a parent or guardian arrives, and children are not permitted to wait unaccompanied outside the building. No child will be permitted to walk home at night. Should an emergency arise, please call the Temple office.

ATTENDANCE AT RELIGIOUS SCHOOL

All students are expected to attend ALL religious school sessions.

1. Attendance will be recorded each day.
2. A phone call or email by the parents to the Director on the day of an absence is appreciated.
3. After two consecutive absences in K, 1st, 2nd, and 3rd grades, as well as Chai School, and three consecutive absences in 4th through 6th grades, the teacher or Director will call the parent to verify the reason for absence.

MAKE-UP WORK

1. It is the responsibility of the student and family to contact the school office or the teacher directly for make-up work.
2. Excessive absences may also require, at the discretion of the Director, tutoring at the

expense of the family.

ATTENDANCE AT WORSHIP SERVICES

Parents are urged to accompany their children to services as often as possible to reinforce what is being learned in school, and to help build a feeling of community within our Temple. It is also our experience that service attendance has a direct effect on the students' readiness and ease of preparation for BMitzvah and for participation in the Jewish Community.

Each student will have a card on file in a box at the Temple. At the end of each service, the student should retrieve their card and have the date marked with a stamp by the School Director, Rabbi or head greeter. The card will be immediately returned to the box. This card will represent the official attendance record. The students who meet their service goal will receive recognition and a special prize at the end of the year.

Service Goals:

K-3rd, 3 services between September and June

4th-5th, 5 services between September and June

6th-7th, 7 services between September and June

One Friday a month, Dana will be available to have dinner with the children (and any adults that would like to join them) at 6pm. These dates are listed on the school and temple calendars. After dinner, Dana will accompany the kids to services. Parents may drop their child(ren) off for dinner and services, and pick them up after, however, we strongly encourage families to attend together. Please register so we know how many people to expect:

<https://www.edisontemple.org/event/rs-dinner-with-dana-followed-by-services.html>

There are a variety of Shabbat and festival/holiday services to appeal to all ages. For example, there are services with musical instruments, outdoor services, services with special speakers, and BMitzvah services. In addition to Friday and Saturday Shabbat services, we have Festival services (Sukkot, Simchat Torah, Purim Megillah reading, and Shavuot). It is our expectation that all children will attend High Holy Day services on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, so those holidays will not be included in the count.

There will be two all school Shabbat evening services during the school year. It is an expectation that your child and family will be present at these services. These dates are listed on the school calendar, so please take note.

Although it is our hope that the majority of the service goals will be met by attendance at Temple Emanu-El of Edison, Shabbat services at other congregations may count towards your child's total. A signed note from the parents to Dana Shectman should be submitted.

PROGRESS REPORTS AND CONFERENCES

A progress report will be sent home twice a year. Parents should feel free to set up appointments

with their child's teacher as necessary. Students' progress will be assessed at the end of each year to determine eligibility for promotion to the next grade.

DISCIPLINE

At Temple Emanu-El, we believe that students are entitled to a wholesome classroom experience conducive to effective learning. The teachers will discuss appropriate rules of conduct with students on the first day of class. We encourage good communication among the Director, the teacher, the students and the parents; therefore, parents are asked to become involved when disciplinary problems arise. Disciplinary actions will be decided on a case by case basis and may include removal from the classroom, removal of the student's right to BMitzvah or Confirmation, and independent study.

CELL PHONE POLICY

Cell phone use is not allowed in class unless it is deemed useful for classwork by the Director or teacher. If you need to reach your student, please call the temple office.

COMMUNICATION WITH TEACHERS

The professional staff will make every effort to create a productive and pleasurable atmosphere of learning for our children. Unfortunately, occasionally a situation might arise regarding areas of either a personal or an educational nature. Our aim is to encourage a positive and free flow of communication between parents and the Religious School. Accordingly, parents are asked to take the following steps if such a problem arises:

1. The parents should contact the teacher directly. The teacher will respond by telephone or in writing.
2. A conference can be arranged between parents and teachers.
3. If the situation is not resolved, the parents should contact the Director.
4. If the problem cannot be rectified in this manner, the parents may meet with the Director and/or Rabbi together.

TUTORING PROGRAM – We want all of our students to be able to read Hebrew fluently and to feel good about themselves and about religious school. To this end, parents of children who have Hebrew reading difficulties during the year will be notified as soon as the problem is apparent. School tutoring by our staff, tutorial teachers, and/or home tutoring, will be recommended in order to help a child reach grade level. If home tutoring is needed, a family will be sent a list of home tutors and it will be the parent's responsibility to contact one of them and arrange to have the child tutored at a time other than regular school hours. *If a student enters the Religious School after third grade and has no previous or recent Hebrew training, it will be at the discretion of the Rabbi and the Religious School Director to determine an appropriate plan for that student.*

TZEDAKAH – (The collection of funds for the needy). Tzedakah will be collected **at each session** and we hope you will encourage your child to give of their own money. The funds will be held by the school and each class will have a say in deciding which charities receive the funds. We strongly recommend all students participate in their Tzedakah Fund. Tzedakah and the participation in community service projects teaches the Jewish value of concern for others through sharing and doing.

CONFIDENTIAL FORM

Our school is concerned with the health and well being of our children. Any personal situation that could affect the attendance and performance of the child should be brought to the Director's attention. The Confidential Form that was sent to the parents of each student prior to the beginning of school **must** be completed and signed before the child will be permitted to attend school.

EMERGENCY SCHOOL CLOSING

Should the Edison or Metuchen Public School system be closed or have early dismissal, there will be no afternoon Religious School classes. Notice of school closing will be sent by email. Please check your email prior to class if the weather is questionable.

EMERGENCY PROCEDURES

We follow the recommendations of the Anti Defamation League in case of an emergency during school hours:

- There is an action policy in place with the Director and teachers including evacuation if necessary
- An alternate evacuation site has been identified
- Contact information for each child is on hand in every classroom

ENTERING AND EXITING THE BUILDING

The safety of our students is our prime concern. We ask that you cooperate fully with the guidelines. Adults with students in Kindergarten through third grade must come inside the building in order to drop off and pick up their child and/or children in their carpool. These children will not be permitted to leave the building unless they are accompanied by an adult. Adults with students in fourth through sixth grade are highly encouraged to come inside the building to drop off and pick up their child(ren). Unattended cars should not be parked at the curb. Please do not park in the fire lane or block the walkway entrance. If you are staying in your car, do not park along the curb, unless you are dropping off or picking up your child and leaving immediately. Everyone must use a fob to enter through the front door and a card to scan at the security desk. Fobs will also be used to enter the staircase leading to the classrooms. If you need a fob and/or card, contact the temple office.