

**CONGREGATION BETH SHALOM**  
**RELIGIOUS SCHOOL HANDBOOK**  
**2025-26**

Questions? Reach out to Devon Nelson (they/them), Interim Education Director  
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**Educational Vision**

We strive to cultivate a warm, nurturing, evolving educational community that encourages Jewish values and identity and increases involvement within the Beth Shalom and Jewish community. Our educational vision is linked to the vision statement of Beth Shalom.

**Study leads to action**

*[Talmud, Kiddushin 40b]*

- *We at Congregation Beth Shalom are a learning community dedicated to studying Torah, cultivating spirituality, and engaging in worship (avodah) and social action (tikkun olam).*
- *We promote Hebrew literacy and our connection to Israel, our ancient and modern homeland.*
- *We entrust each member to be both learner and teacher.*
- *We will create vibrant learning across the age spectrum, respecting both tradition and innovation.*

**and action leads to understanding.**

The Beth Shalom Religious School (RS) is a synagogue-based program committed to providing an inclusive nurturing, stimulating and safe environment for children in our community. We seek to enhance children's sense of the depth and breadth of a full Jewish life through study, worship and caring for the community. Following the rhythms of the Jewish calendar, the program will immerse children in Jewish culture, songs and language, and foster their connection with Jewish traditions and values. We will use the current knowledge and research of how children develop, grow and learn. Such knowledge provides the framework for incorporating the best and most appropriate educational practices, as well as the best ways to foster growth of spiritual and moral values inherent in Reform Judaism.

## **Overall Goals**

### ***Judaic***

- To provide opportunities for each child to take part in an enriched Jewish life.
- To promote the partnership between the school, home and Beth Shalom, in order to strengthen families and integrate them into congregational life.

### ***Social and Emotional***

- To develop a sense of self-esteem and exhibit a positive attitude toward Jewish life.
- To promote skills of independence, self-confidence, self-control and responsibility.

### ***Intellectual***

- To provide opportunities for children to be active participants in their own learning process, constructing their own best way to learn through varied and repeated experiences.
- To provide a continuum of skills and experiences that meet the needs of individual students as they grow and develop within a dynamic classroom setting.
- To develop learning experiences that engage the whole child – mind and body.
- To enable the child to explore, discover and exert creative effort in order to problem-solve and make sense of her world through logical thinking.
- To acquire concepts and thinking leading to a fuller understanding of their Jewish world.

## **Sunday morning schedule**

*\*time will extend earlier or later by 15 min after registration poll. Change announced by 08.11\**

10-10:45 Tefilot

10:45-11:30 Judaica (all grades)

11:30-12:30 aftercare (if staying)

11:30-11:45 break

11:45-12:30 Hebrew (1<sup>st</sup>-7<sup>th</sup> grade)

## **Tuesday afternoon optional schedule:**

*[families may choose to enroll their child in place of the Sunday Hebrew option or in addition to the Sunday Hebrew]*

4:30-4:55pm Hebrew Vocabulary and Structure (Gr.3-4)

5:00-5:25pm Hebrew Vocabulary and Structure (Gr.5)

5:30-5:55pm Chumash (Gr.6-7)

## **Curriculum**

- **Tefilot:** Part of our curriculum is to immerse children in a typical morning service so that they feel comfortable with prayer and blessings, learn synagogue etiquette, and begin to experience the beauty of Jewish communal worship. Interspersed in the service are explanations and questions for discussion. Parents are always welcome to participate in services. Our service is based on the slightly more traditional Conservative prayer book *Sim Shalom*, but laced with Reform movement music and interpretation.
- **Judaica:** our goal is to familiarize children with the biblical narrative from creation to the prophets, explore the way Judaism unfolded over the centuries and examine the many Jewish holidays each year so that the nuances, varied traditions, reasons for why we do what we do are studied and celebrated annually in a scaffolded and developmentally appropriate level. Incorporated into lessons are the foundations of Judaism: study of the Torah, worship (tefilot) and social justice (*gemilut hasadim*, *zedakah* and *mitzvot*). All our studies are based on Jewish texts that leave room for discussion, debate and interpretation.
- **Hebrew:** The study of Hebrew as both a conduit to participation in Jewish prayer and texts and a link to the land of Israel is an important part of our curriculum. We teach both liturgical and modern Hebrew so that children understand that Hebrew is a living language connected both to tradition and modernity. We use a variety of texts including Israeli magazines with contemporary topics, authentic Hebrew literature and traditional primers. The top objective is to have children reading competently and fluently in preparation for their bar/bat mitzvah and for children to have a small vocabulary of modern Israeli vernacular.

## **Kindergarten/First Grade**

Children develop a sense of Jewish identity through the rhythms of Jewish time and space. They examine the many different ritual objects in the home and synagogue which help us practice our Judaism (eg. mezuzah, Kiddush cup, candlesticks, hanukiyah, Ark, Torah, kippah, talit etc). They begin learning *brachot* associated with the wonders of everyday life and shabbat. They read a variety of stories relating to holidays, Torah, and mitzvot and enjoy art, music, and cooking.

## **Second/Third grade**

Students study the biblical narrative: they read the stories, discuss the characters and the dilemmas and talk about the mitvahs associated with each story. They begin the year with Genesis and Exodus and then continue with the wanderings of the Israelites in the desert. This is the period when the Jewish nation was founded on the law and the discussions will focus on this foundation. Children begin to understand how a community is formed and what ingredients are

needed to create a just society. In addition to Torah study, the children will also continue to learn more about the Jewish holidays, culture, and food.

#### **Fourth/Fifth grade**

Children will learn about the importance of Jewish leaders beginning from Judges, Kings and Prophets and traveling chronologically and geographically throughout the Jewish world. How did they engage with Judaism? What were their important ideas? How did they shape our world? They learn about Jewish figures from many different areas including potentially unexpected ones like pirates and cowboys.

#### **Sixth/Seventh grade**

Children will learn about the variety of ways people practice Judaism and make tradition meaningful by interaction with Beth Shalom community members. They will learn about different types of davening, forms of tikkun olam, caring for community, and a variety of ways people practice shabbat and chaggim through discussion with members, synagogue groups, and people outside of Beth Shalom.

#### **Hebrew: offered on Sundays (in person) and Tuesdays (via zoom)**

*Alef-Bet*: first level for any child who does not know the alef-bet, generally gr.1-2.

*Mat'chil*: beginners for those who have completed the alef-bet class, generally gr.3-4.

*Beynayim*: intermediate level for those who have beginning vocabulary and grammar, gr.5.

*Mitkadmim*: advanced class for students preparing for b'nei mitzvah focused on Torah texts and interpretations, gr. 6-7.

We do expect children to practice reading at home. Please sit with your child twice a week and listen to them read one page in their class materials. We understand children are busy, but research has shown that the only way to learn to read is to actually read, no matter what language. This is a skill that improves only with practice.

#### **Art, Games, Discussions, Cooking, Drama, Field Trips**

All of our classes include creative and hands-on ways to engage children. We love to bake and cook but in a way where children connect the activity to what is being learned. So, for example, a child may make a variety of *harosets* on Passover to learn about the diversity of Jewish food. They may visit a farm to harvest vegetables and collect eggs to donate to Mother Hubbards' Cupboard to enrich their understanding of food insecurity as part of their learning about tikkun olam. They may make usable candlesticks to light candles at home. Or as part of their Torah studies, they may create their own rendition of the mishkan (the tabernacle), with exact

instructions mimicking the precision of the Torah. We try to incorporate all our senses to learn, allowing the children to move around and learn in an interesting and provocative way.

### **Relationships**

All of what we do is to help your child create relationships with other Jewish children so that they form their own safe and nurturing Jewish community. We want them to laugh and learn together and to seek each other out for friendship. We offer family-inclusive shabbats, hikes and holiday celebrations so that your children can be Jewish together.

### **Arrivals & Departures**

For security purposes, we ask that you come as close to 10am as possible as tefilot is a key part of our whole learning experience. Teachers will be at the door to welcome children (and you if you would like to stay for tefilot). Please ring the bell or use your fob if nobody is outside when you arrive.

At pick up, please exit your car to collect your child so that teachers can be sure your child has indeed been handed off to an adult. If your child is walking home or riding their bike, just let us know.

### **Communication**

Parents may expect to receive a weekly email reminding you of upcoming events and programs as well as a weekly summary from your child's Judaic and Hebrew teacher on material covered in the class including any Hebrew homework.

The director is always available to discuss any issues and concerns either by email, in person, or by phone.

### **Tuition**

Tuition includes instruction and snacks at snack break. In order to keep religious school affordable to families, we rely heavily on synagogue membership. Families new to the community may enroll their children for one year without paying synagogue membership dues. Subsequent to that first year, all families must be members for children to attend religious school. Tuition may be paid in monthly installments and spread throughout the year. We ask that you pay in full, make an initial payment and **set up a payment plan by September 1**. This can be done in your Rakefet account if you are a member. Please contact our office ([bethshalombloomington@gmail.com](mailto:bethshalombloomington@gmail.com)) for help with plans.

Pre-K and K (Tefilot and Judaica): \$520

1<sup>st</sup>-7<sup>th</sup> grade (Tefilot, Judaica, and Hebrew): \$688

We do not want to prevent any child from learning. No family will be turned away for lack of funds. Please contact Interim Education Director Devon Nelson to make arrangements if you need a tuition reduction.

### **PJ Library and PJOURWAY**

The PJ Library is a book program for children aged 6 months to 12 years old, sponsored by the Harold Grinspoon Foundation, Beth Shalom and Gan Shalom. Enroll your child at [pjlibrary.org](http://pjlibrary.org) and they will receive one Jewish book a month free. If your child is over the age of eight, they can enroll in [PJourway.org](http://PJourway.org) and CHOOSE a Jewish book each month from a small selection. Over the course of the year we offer a few programs through the PJ Library. If you would like to help organize these programs and become a “connector” please let the director know.

### **TGI Shabbat**

TGI shabbat is a monthly abbreviated service for all ages children, parents, grandparents, relatives and close friends. For younger children it is a gentle and flexible way to learn about the service. For older children, it is an opportunity to celebrate shabbat together, participate in a parsha play, have dinner with friends, and of course socialize. For everyone, it is a time to celebrate together at the end of the week!

[Note this has now transitioned into our new TGI-Shabbats with both RS families and the wider Beth Shalom community together.]

## **RS Initial Calendar 2024-25**

Note: This is for initial planning purposes. Holidays and other family programming will be updated throughout the year via email and kept up-to-date on the Congregation Beth Shalom calendar as well (<https://www.bethshalom-bjc.org/events>).

### **FALL SEMESTER**

#### **August**

23	Fri (5:45pm)	Welcome back shabbat service and dinner
25	Sun	RS (First Day)
31	Sun	<i>NO RS (Labor Day)</i> ; Mitzvah volunteer day

#### **September**

1	Sun	RS
7	Sun	RS
14	Sun	RS
21	Sun	RS
28	Sun	RS

#### **October**

5	Sun	RS
12	Sun	RS
19	Sun	<i>NO RS</i>
26	Sun	RS

#### **November**

2	Sun	RS
9	Sun	RS
16	Sun	RS
23	Sun	<i>NO RS (Thanksgiving break)</i>
30	Sun	<i>No RS (Thanksgiving break)</i>

#### **December**

7	Sun	RS
14	Sun	RS
21	Sun	<i>NO RS (winter break)</i>
28	Sun	<i>NO RS (winter break)</i>

## **SPRING SEMESTER**

### **January 2025**

4	Sun	<i>NO RS (winter break)</i>
11	Sun	RS
18	Sun	RS
25	Sun	RS

### **February**

1	Sun	RS
8	Sun	RS with Tu BiShvat Learning
15	Sun	<i>NO RS; Mitzvah volunteer day</i>
23	Sun	RS

### **March**

2	Sun	RS
9	Sun	RS & Purim Carnival
16	Sun	<i>NO RS (Spring break)</i>
23	Sun	<i>NO RS (Spring break)</i>
30	Sun	RS

### **April**

6	Sun	RS & RS Seder
13	Sun	<i>NO RS (Passover)</i>
20	Sun	<i>NO RS (Passover)</i>
27	Sun	RS (last day)