

Congregation Beth Israel

Religious School Handbook

2009-2010
5770

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Congregation Beth Israel Religious School

The mission of the Congregation Beth Israel Religious School is to foster in our students a strong and enduring Jewish identity, rooted in Jewish values, in a loving and supportive environment. Partnerships between the home, synagogue, and the Jewish community help us further this mission by allowing for experiences that create a connection between a deepening Jewish literacy and practice. We encourage lifelong Jewish learning and a strengthened community, as we prepare our students for the future.

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Dear Religious School Parents,

A successful religious school year doesn't begin with your children. It begins with you. Long before the car door opens for the ride to Beth Israel, your encouraging words and eager participation signal to your children that Jewish life at home is a family value. Like an excellent education to grow the mind and participation in sports to grow the body, Jewish learning and living enrich the heart and soul.

Your children are enrolled and ready to begin. What role will you play? Perhaps you'll come in with your children on Sunday mornings to attend an Adult Education class, or learn Hebrew as an adult, or sit with like-minded parents at the coffee bar, or enjoy a book in the Schachtel Library, the southwest's largest Jewish library, or visit privately with your rabbi or cantor. Your children's attendance will soar when your own interest grows.

The New Year is filled with potential for modern, joyful and relevant Jewish life and learning. Our Religious School is poised to treat your children and your family to the best Jewish educational experience available. Come on in, join us on Sunday, and grow with your children into the family you wish to be.

Welcome,

Rabbi David A. Lyon

Dear Religious School Parents,

Our faculty and staff join me in welcoming you to the Religious School and wishing you a wonderful year. We are committed to providing an outstanding Religious School education for your children and we are looking forward to having your children here on Sundays. Parents are always welcome. There are many volunteer and educational opportunities taking place at Beth Israel on Sunday mornings; our Library is open or meet friends at the coffeebar.

This year, we are looking forward to continuing several of the initiatives that were implemented last year:

- using email and our website for most family communication
- keeping families informed through bi-weekly classroom e-news
- holding Sunday services for all PreK-6th Grade students; the service schedule is on our website
- pursuing online Hebrew learning with a focus on in-class instruction and b'nai mitzvah tutoring
- responding promptly to parents questions and concerns

The success of the Beth Israel Religious School depends upon the work we do in partnership with you. We have high expectations for our students and at the same time work hard to ensure that they are able to attain success. With your continued commitment to our goals, we will continue to see our students grow.

Please contact your children's teachers, Assistant Director Susan Perry, or me, with any questions that you have about the Religious School.

Wishing you a happy and healthy New Year,

Barbara Garber
Director

Dear Religious School Family,

On behalf of Congregation Beth Israel Religious School Board of Overseers, I would like to welcome you to the Religious School for the 2009-2010 year. We are very excited about the continued commitment we have made to bring your children a quality Jewish education and a sense of community.

The Board, in partnership with Barbara Garber and the teaching staff, want to continue communication with parents regularly and want to involve you more in the activities your child experiences while attending religious school. We will continue with initiatives we have set forth from past years:

- Regular teacher email updates covering topics covered in the classroom
- Comprehensive curriculums for the classrooms will be provided to you
- Volunteer parents will be communicating with you about special programming or events going on throughout the year, as well as, updates on the congregation website
- You will receive a class roster, as well as contact information for each teacher

We are also instituting a new attendance policy. This is a way to encourage all students to attend. With the current financial difficulties our families and temple are facing, we want you all to realize the commitment our school makes to you. We want to deliver the best education possible and operating the Religious School is an expensive endeavor so the students must be present for this to be successful!

Like you, the Board wants our students to have the best possible experience every Sunday. We are committed to creating an environment that kids love, while improving the content and experience of Jewish education.

We are asking our students and parents to help make religious school a priority.

Please partner with us - bring your kids and let's give them a sense of community and an education!

Please do not hesitate to contact any of us on the Board or Barbara Garber with any questions or ideas.

Sincerely,

Debbie Greenbaum
President, Religious School Board of Overseers

2009-2010 Religious School Board of Overseers

Debbie Greenbaum, President
Susan Klein, Vice-President

Carolyn Baum
Susan Bruch
Ann Bass Diskin
Scott Dorfman
Helen Galor
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Francine Todes
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Joseph Chesnick, Jr., Temple Board President
Barbara Garber, Director Religious School

Religious School Staff

Religious School Director

Barbara Garber: 713-271-7369, ext. 605
For emergency: 281-773-4381

bgarber@beth-israel.org

Assistant Director of Education

Susan Perry: 713-271-7369, ext. 307
For emergency: 281-923-5684

sperry@beth-israel.org

Administrative Assistant

Karen Taylor: 713-271-7369, ext. 313

ktaylor@beth-israel.org

Clergy

David Lyon, Senior Rabbi
Adrienne Scott, Associate Rabbi
Mark Miller, Associate Rabbi
Robert M. Gerber, Cantor

dlyon@beth-israel.org
ascott@beth-israel.org
mmiller@beth-israel.org
rgerber@beth-israel.org

Hours of Operation

Religious School Office Hours

Monday, Tuesday, Thursday	9:00 AM – 5:00 PM
Wednesday	9:00 AM – 6:00 PM
Friday	9:00 AM – 4:00 PM
Sunday	8:30 AM – 1:00 PM

Class Sessions

Religious School: Grades Pre-K – 6	Sunday, 9:00 AM-11:15 AM
Hebrew Classes: Grades 4-7	Wednesday or Thursday, 4:30-6:00 PM
Upper School: Grades 7-12	Sunday, 11:30 AM – 1:00 PM

SCHEDULES

SUNDAY SCHEDULE (PRE-K-6TH GRADES 9-11:15AM)

Pre-K – Second Grades

9:00-9:25am T'fillot (Chapel)*
9:30-11:15am Classes meet in classrooms

Third Grade

9:00-9:25am T'fillot (Chapel)*
9:30-10:10am First Period
10:10-10:45am Second Period
10:45-11:15am Hebrew

Fourth - Sixth Grades

9:00-9:50am First Period
9:55-10:40am Second Period
10:45-11:15am T'fillot (Chapel)*

* On days when there is a Religious School Family Service, only one service will be held. The Family Service schedule is on the Beth Israel website, www.beth-israel.org.

Upper School Sunday Hours (Some Grades Subject to Change)

11:30am Meet in APR
11:45am-1:30pm Classes meet

WEDNESDAY & THURSDAY SCHEDULE (4TH-7TH GRADES, 4:30-6PM)

4:30pm Classes Begin
6:00pm Classes End

General Information

Academics

A summary of our curriculum is posted on the Beth Israel website. Twice yearly, your child's teacher(s) will send home a summary of the material covered during the semester and your child's progress. Additionally, biweekly updates are sent (via email) to parents, with updates about each class.

Hebrew

Our Hebrew Studies program will be led again this year by Susan Perry, Assistant Director. Students who need extra help with Hebrew reading skills will receive tutoring during class time; if more assistance is needed, private tutor referrals will be made available through the Religious School office.

Goals of the Hebrew Curriculum

The Beth Israel Hebrew curriculum will provide students with the opportunity to:

- * Know the name and sound of each letter and vowel of the Hebrew alphabet;
- * Understand the central role prayer and Hebrew language play in our heritage;
- * Identify and translate key Hebrew terms;
- * Acquire a Hebrew prayer and holiday vocabulary;
- * Understand the structure of Shabbat services;
- * Read the siddur prayers fluidly;
- * Participate and lead worship;
- * Progress at an individual pace;
- * Be an active member of the Beth Israel and Greater Houston Jewish community.

Special Needs

At Beth Israel Religious School, we truly believe every child is a special child. By understanding your child's special needs, we will be able to maximize his/her enjoyment of Jewish learning. If you would like to meet with the Religious School staff to discuss your child's experience, please contact us.

For confidential referrals and recommendations, teachers and parents are encouraged to contact Diane Brezner, Special Education Consultant for the Bureau of Jewish Education (dbrezner@houstonjewish.org). The BJE sponsors both community-wide classes for children with severe special needs, and the Kesher Parent Support Group, which offers workshops and speakers for families with special needs children.

Worship Services in the Religious School

All students attend Sunday worship services; Pre-K through Third Grade (9:00-9:25am) and Fourth through Sixth Grades (10:45-11:15am). An exception to the times will be on the Sunday mornings when there will only be one Religious School Family Service for all grades and parents. The dates and times for these Family Services are listed on the Beth Israel website.

Services will be led by members of our clergy: these are learning services, where students learn basic prayers such as the Barchu, the Shema, Mi Chamocha, and be introduced to stories from the Torah. Parents are always welcome to join us during these services in the Chapel—some parents have the opportunity to learn these prayers for the first time, and many others have expressed their appreciation for the chance to gain an understanding of the meaning of the Hebrew words and prayer concepts.

The 4th-6th Grade students will also have opportunities to help lead the services under the guidance of Susan Perry and their teachers. These services are designed to help students gain a comfort level standing on the bimah as well as practice the prayers they are studying in the classrooms. Again, parents are always welcome to join us!

The Creative Arts

Josh Levine, assisted by Mara Schnitzer and Kirby Simon, will once again teach music to students in Pre-K through Second Grade classes, and enhance our school's worship services. Additionally, Rabbi Scott, Rabbi Miller, and Cantor Gerber will add their voices and guitars to teach students prayer, holiday and contemporary Jewish songs.

Our art teacher, Marla Roberson, leads students in creating ritual objects specially selected for each grade. Our goal is to provide students with the opportunity to perform the mitzvah of *hiddur mitzvah*—the beautification of a mitzvah—by allowing them to work with quality art materials as they develop their own collection of beautiful ritual objects, worthy of being used and saved!

Tzedakah

Giving is an important mitzvah (commandment) of Jewish life. In each class, money for *tzedakah* is collected from the students. *Tzedakah* can be literally translated as “righteousness”—making the giving of *tzedakah* the “right” thing to do! Please take time to discuss with your child the mitzvah of giving *tzedakah*, and encourage your child to give a portion of his/her own money. Each class will determine which cause or organization they wish to contribute their funds.

School Policies

Attendance Policy

Good attendance, arrival on time and leaving only at dismissal are ways to honor Jewish education, our teachers and the community. Students who attend Religious School regularly become a vital and integral part of the Beth Israel Religious School community.

We understand that students may miss school due to illness, family issues, or school-related needs. If you know your student must be absent, please contact the Religious School office (713-271-7369 or ktaylor@beth-israel.org) or his/her teacher as soon as possible.

All students are expected to maintain at least a 75% average attendance and participate in a Mitzvah Day project (Sunday, April 18, 2010). 7th-12th Graders should also attend the community observance of Yom Ha'Shoah (this year on Sunday, April 25, 2010).

If a student misses more than 25% of a semester, we will assign make-up work according to grade:

PreK-2nd Grade: make-up work cannot recreate the classroom. While there is no substitute for attendance, excessive absences will result in appropriate family assignments such as attending Family Shabbat; hosting a Shabbat dinner at home with another family; reading a Jewish book and writing or drawing a review together; or watching an appropriate movie and telling the teacher about it.

3rd – 6th Grades: all of the above; plus, meet with Hebrew tutor during class time to help catch up; use Hebrew CD at home; Hebrew homework may be assigned. Judaic Studies teachers may also send

home make-up work. Excessive absences may impact your child's preparedness for the bar/bat mitzvah.

7th-12th Grades: Group make-up sessions will be held two times/semester; dates and times will be announced a month prior. Students who must make up time (and their parents) will be contacted via letter, email or phone. Dates may occur on an evening or Sunday when there will not otherwise be 7th-12th Grade classes. Students may also arrange individual make up sessions with their teachers or the Director. Make-up activities may include: watching a Jewish film followed by discussion or writing; reading a book and discussion; attendance at a Beth Israel or other Jewish communal event; volunteer service with reflective writing; writing a thoughtful response to one of our Rabbis' sermons; writing a reaction paper to current events involving Israel or Judaism, etc.

The curriculum is a thoughtful curriculum that increases in the level of sophistication and is tailored to the needs of our young people. The culmination of the program is graduation, at the end of 12th Grade. In order to graduate, students must fulfill these additional requirements in 9th-12th Grades:

9th Grade:

- 75% attendance at all class sessions and activities
- Participation in opening retreat
- Volunteer for Purim Carnival

Confirmation (10th Grade):

- 75% attendance at all class sessions
- Completion of 9th Grade year or enrollment in Jewish day school (as of 2010-11, completion of 8th and 9th Grade years, or enrollment in Jewish day school)
- Participation in retreat
- Participation in additional volunteer service project (December)
- Pass 2 exams
- Participation in Confirmation rehearsals

11th Grade:

- 75% attendance at all class sessions
- No additional requirements

12th Grade:

- 75% attendance at all class sessions and activities
- Completion of all school requirements since the bar/bat mitzvah

If a student has missed the prior year, extensive summer make-up work will be required in order to be enrolled in 12th Grade.

We understand that people's situations vary. Please let us know about any issues of which you are already aware so we can make accommodations in advance. Extenuating circumstances will be handled on a private and individual basis.

Bar/Bat Mitzvah Preparation

Our Religious School seeks to provide students with adequate preparation for Bar/Bat Mitzvah in both Hebrew and Judaic Studies. We have made it possible for students to pursue both areas of study without conflict by separating B'nai Mitzvah tutoring from the Religious School classes. We would also like to impress upon our families that Jewish learning is a life-long process that continues well

past the Bar/Bat Mitzvah year and we strongly encourage our students to commit to finishing our high school program.

Nametags

For the safety and security of our children and families ALL ADULTS entering Congregation Beth Israel **MUST BE IDENTIFIED WITH A NAMETAG** at all times. If you do not have a nametag, you will need to see the officer on duty and scan your driver's license. Please let us know if you need a nametag.

Arrivals and Departures

Arrivals:

Sundays and Wednesdays: School entrance

Departures:

Sunday mornings:

Walk-in, pick-up and carpool options are available. Carpool details and a carpool release form are on the website.

Wednesday and Thursday evenings: School entrance

Please be prompt in dropping off and picking up your child. For the safety of all children, please **do not use a cell phone** in the carpool line and **do not ask your child to cross traffic in order to come to your car!**

Children will not be allowed to leave the designated area before their car (or parent) arrives. Teachers and volunteers will be on duty in the parking lot to help keep our children safe.

Early Pick-Up

Your child's safety is our primary concern. Thus, if you need to pick your child up early from school, you must come into the building to pick him/her up. Students will not be allowed to leave the building or classrooms unescorted.

Cancellation Procedures

In the event of severe weather or other emergency, school may be cancelled. Cancellations will be announced on radio station **KTRH 740 AM**. If possible, you will receive a call from the school.

Visiting the Classroom

Parents are always welcome to visit the classroom; however, we request that you let us know ahead of time.

Guest Policy

For extenuating circumstances, please let us know if your child will bring a friend to class. We want to be sure our teachers are prepared for our guests.

Medication

We will not administer any medication to a student, including over-the-counter medications, and students should not bring their own medications to Religious School as well. When necessary, we will

contact the parent, or others listed on the emergency form, to pick up a student who is not feeling well. **Please inform us of any medications your child is taking should we need to inform emergency personnel.**

Proper Attire

Students are expected to dress in clothing that brings honor and respect to themselves. The Religious School Board has passed the following policy guideline: "If a child's clothing is distracting or disturbing to the class, the teacher is to report it to an administrator, who will assess what actions are necessary (e.g. a phone call to the parents)." We abide by the HISD dress policy.

Family Learning Opportunities

An updated Religious School calendar appears on the Congregation Beth Israel website.

Parental Support for Jewish Learning

Receiving a Jewish education is the right of every Jewish child. We invite you to become an active participant in your child's Jewish education and in the Beth Israel community through the many learning and social activities for adults and families that are offered. Attend a family education program...volunteer to help...bring your child to Shabbat or holiday worship services...or contact us to explore ways in which you can become involved. Parent volunteers are always welcome.

Family Education Programs

Family Education programs bring parents and children together for a fun, Jewish learning experience. These family programs not only reinforce classroom learning, but provide opportunities for families to get to know one another through engaging activities led by members of our faculty. *Please mark your child's Family Education Program on your calendar!*

- ◆ **Shalom Sunday: Sunday, August 30, 2009; 9:00-11:15am (Upper School, 11:30am-1:00pm)**
- ◆ **Kindergarten: Consecration Family Education Program, Sunday, September 13, 2009; 9:00-11:15am**
- ◆ **Consecration: Sunday morning, October 4, 2009; 10:00am**
- ◆ **Confirmation (10th Grade) Family Education: Sunday, October 11, 2009; 11:30am-1:00pm**
- ◆ **Second Grade: Synagogue Program, Sunday, December 6, 2009; 9:00-11:15am**
- ◆ **Fourth Grade: Mock Wedding, Sunday, February 1, 2009; 10:00-11:15am**

Special Programming

We have planned several special programs for our students and families in addition to those mentioned above:

- ** **4th-6th Grade Parent Meeting with Rabbi Lyon and Susan Perry (subject: Hebrew): Sunday, October 11, 2009, 10:15-10:45am**
- ** **Greene Family Camp Presentation to students: Sunday, October 25, 2009; 9:00-11:15am; exact time will depend upon grade**
- ** **5th and 6th Grade overnight at Beth Israel: Saturday, November 14, late afternoon -**

Sunday, November 15, 11:15am

**** Confirmation Kallah (required for Confirmation students), Galveston, January 8-9, 2010**

**** Tu B'Shvat Seders, Sunday, January 31, 2010, 9:00-11:15am**

**** Pancake Breakfast, Sunday, February 21, 2010, 9:00-11:15am**

**** Purim Carnival, Sunday, February 28, 2010, following Religious School**

**** Model Seders, Sunday, March 28, 2010, times to be announced**

**** Mitzvah Day, Sunday, April 18, 2010**

Sunday Morning Chapel Services

Parents are invited to attend all services with their children on Sunday mornings.

Tot Shabbat

Usually held on the third Friday of every month, Tot Shabbat offers families with children ages one to five, a Shabbat dinner and a highly interactive worship experience. *Please see your Beth Israel Bulletin or Website for specific dates.*

Shabbat Play Date

Shabbat Play Date is usually held on the 2nd Saturday of the month from 10:00-11:30am. If your children are in Kindergarten or younger, you do not want to miss this monthly program of songs, games, stories, and a snack, led by Rabbi Miller or Rabbi Scott. Older siblings are welcome...but activities are geared toward the younger children. Please check the Beth Israel website and bulletin for updates.

Holiday Programs

Throughout the year, the Beth Israel community joins together in worship and observance of Shabbat and the Jewish holidays. These are wonderful opportunities for parents and children to celebrate and to feel a part of the Beth Israel family!

Beth Israel Mitzvah Day – April 18, 2010

Please mark the date! Religious School students will participate *with their families* in specially designed, age-appropriate activities.

Questions and Comments

Your feedback and input are welcome. Please feel free to contact Barbara Garber, Susan Perry, or your child's teacher to discuss any questions or concerns. Let's keep the lines of communication open!

Code of Student Behavior

Our code of student behavior, which is based on Jewish tenets, directs our interaction with each other. The following behavior is expected of all students in Religious School:

- Derech Eretz – Act respectfully in every way
- Emet – Be truthful and honest
- Teshuvah – Make amends if you hurt others
- Kehilah K'doshah – We are a holy community
- Lilmod u'l'lamed – Learn from each other and teach each other

Certain offenses will result in immediate removal from the school:

- ◆ Use or possession of drugs, alcohol, harmful or dangerous objects.
- ◆ Theft
- ◆ Vandalism
- ◆ Smoking
- ◆ Violence or threat of violence to others
- ◆ Placing self and/or other students in danger
- ◆ Extreme disregard of Religious School rules

The following items should not be brought to school and are subject to confiscation:

Frisbees	skateboards
skates	squirt guns
cards (trading, playing)	iPods/walkman/CD players (<i>except for tutoring purposes</i>)
fireworks	radios
weapons	balls

Please note:

- ◆ **Cell phones / beepers must be off and out of sight during class sessions. Any cell phones in use during class will be confiscated by the teacher and returned at the end of class.**
- ◆ Chewing gum is not allowed on the premises; food and drinks are allowed in designated areas only.
- ◆ The sale of any item not for a Jewish school or youth organization is prohibited.