

**The Paul S. and Sylvia Steinberg Pre-School
North Suburban Synagogue Beth El
1175 Sheridan Road
Highland Park, Illinois 60035
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Dear Parents,

Shalom and welcome to our school! We are excited to share our passion, creativity, philosophy and mission of working with young Jewish children and their families. Our school has been on a wonderful and fulfilling early childhood journey. The ride is fluid and ever changing as we continually add to our understanding and knowledge base of young children and their families. We are actively involved in integrating inspiration from the Reggio Emilia philosophy into our curriculum, as we learn about and better understand the **Hundred Languages of Children**. We are also involved in the Jewish Accreditation Kehillah to further refine and integrate our wonderful Judaic program, and are proud to have received its accreditation.

We have prepared this packet of information to help you become familiar with our school. You will also find in our Parent Handbook written explanations that highlight the important areas of our school, representations of our children's and teachers' documentation in the classrooms and in the halls.

We are very proud of our school, our teachers, auxiliary staff, children and families. We offer you Hachnasat Orchim (hospitality), and invite you to share a wonderful year looking at the world through the eyes of the Steinberg Pre-School children.

B"Shalom,

Tammie B. Roth
Pre-School Director

Our Learning Environment:

“A Sense of Wonder”
“Overall Softness”
“Relationships”
“Community”
“Constructiveness”
“Narration”
“Rich Normality”
“The Art of Listening”
“Documentation”
“Revisiting”

The concepts listed above are the key words that individuals and schools on a Reggio Emilia journey use to create welcoming and stimulating environments for children and their families. Tammie Roth, our Pre-School Director, has journeyed to Reggio Emilia, Italy twice to observe and absorb the gestalt of the program, and the practice of the teachers. Each time she has brought back a new interpretation of Reggio Emilia practice, and each time has added new meaning to how we can further integrate the “Hundred Languages of Children” into our Jewish pre-school curriculum. For the past several years she has been helping the teachers, parents, auxiliary staff, clergy and synagogue members of the Paul S. and Sylvia Steinberg Pre-School of North Suburban Synagogue Beth El learn about the validity and beauty of the Reggio philosophy. We, at the Paul S. and Sylvia Steinberg Pre-School, have embraced the Reggio practice wholeheartedly, and carefully and critically plan our school’s environment to reflect these wondrous and descriptive words.

La Piazza

When you enter the Steinberg Pre-School, you walk into an area filled with natural light that is reflected on and/or from interesting shapes and textures, opaque and translucent materials to visually explore, natural greenery, a soothing and touchable water fountain, parenting information, and a comfortable bench to meditate, talk or just rest. All the materials in the Piazza were selected to co-exist with one another. Each individual who enters the Piazza has the opportunity to create mental and/or physical relationships with the materials. This entryway into our school reflects the overall personality of our school, while supporting a sense of community. **It represent the three protagonists of learning, the children, the teachers and the family, all working in harmony to enrich the learning of each child.**

Celebrating Together

At the end of the long corridor, before the double doors, which is the entry to the pre-school wing, there is a wonderful bulletin board called “Learning Through Celebration”. It provides an opportunity for children and their families to

revisit our school's special family events. The board changes throughout the year to represent the changing seasons and family celebrations. These family events include Family Sukkah Decorating, Classroom Thanksgiving Parties, Family Hanukkah Parties, Shema Pajama Party, Tu B'Shvat Extravaganza, Bubbie, Zaidie and Me February Frolic, Purim Parties, Pre-School Seders, Pre-School Fantasy Trip to Israel, Lag B'Omer Picnic, and the Pre-School Shabbat Dinner for the PM children and their families.

The words that accompany the picture documentation are computer generated and explain the experience in greater depth. They provide additional insight into the children's world that is represented in pictures, while adding experience and familiarity with letter recognition and early literacy. This board is a formal documentation that encourages reflection of the children's and families' experience in pre-school and enables them to revisit these fun events.

The Heart of the School

Once the double doors are opened the children and their families officially begin their school day. The hall in the pre-school wing is organized to be **“a workshop for children's autonomous learning”**. It provides provocation for the pre-schoolers', siblings' and families' imaginations, and helps develop a natural interest in the world around them. This area beautifully demonstrates integration of Judaic and secular learning.

The Arteries and Veins of our school's Heart are the various interest areas within the Heart. Please note that there are many provocations throughout the school that challenge and encourage children's thinking and ways to look at their Jewish and secular world. **We offer a “Please Touch and Explore Environment”**.

1. The Bubbling Fish - challenges children's scientific minds. As the children pass by the bubbling tube they are attracted to the dancing water and moving fish. They quickly relate to the orange fish and call him Nemo, after the Disney character. This provocation stands at their eye-level, so they know it is meant for them. They can observe how the artificial light transcends the water and hit's the various colored fish as they dance. The Bubbling Fish has served as a provocation, such as frequent spontaneous sketching, for further exploration from the various classrooms. (See Mark O.'s sketch of the Bubbling Fish on the cover of this booklet.)
2. Annette's Closet - has been created in memory of a beloved pre-school teacher, Annette Seidenberg, and is appropriately located in the “Heart” of the school. The closet reflects our school's personal and Jewish values, and is home to our many Judaic

objects. The ritual objects rotate with the Jewish holidays, and as the school year continues. Our staff, children and parents continually borrow and integrate these objects into their daily curriculum. The closet also enables our children and families to revisit their Jewish holiday experiences as they walk by on a daily basis.

3. The Rosh Chodesh (new moon/month) Display - is created by the Rosh Chodesh Committee of the Parent Auxiliary, and changes monthly. It is a visual example of the progression of time, and the significance of this monthly holiday is reinforced in the classrooms. As our families enter the **Heart of the School**, they see contrasting colored area rugs in the shapes of moon and stars, which act as provocations for the children and parents to wonder about Rosh Chodesh, and how the holiday affects and relates to them. Individual examples of our children's various reflections and creations of the moon are seen throughout the halls of the school.
4. The Contemplation Corner - is discovered as you continue your walk down the pre-school hall, and is another critical component in our environment. The area welcomes the children with a cozy child sized chair to sit in, a bubbling water fountain with interesting rocks, and surrounding greenery. Children of all ages stop and discover these environmental attributes that compliment and support one another. Here children can speak through the "Hundred Languages of Children", and construct their own knowledge. The mirrors and fountains promote ongoing investigations like "Where does the water come from?", or "How does the fountain work?". The mirrors are placed to help children observe the world around them from varying perspectives. This expands their knowledge of the world around them. There are many textures to learn from and wonder about, as they utilize all their senses to explore and manipulate the rocks, and listen to the water bubbling in the fountain. Children observe themselves in the nearby mirrors and see their reflection as they play and explore in this area. They also gain a sense of themselves in space and the world, as they ponder these natural surrounding in their Jewish pre-school world.

The Atelier

The Atelier is a special workshop where the children gather to use clay, metal wire, paints, and many other materials of all textures and colors. It is in the Atelier that the children are encouraged to explore their world through art and

language and to state different points of view. Under the guidance of the “Atelierista” (the studio teacher), children are encouraged to symbolically represent what they know through the use of their “Hundred Languages of Children”. These may include drawing, painting, collage, clay, construction, weaving, wire sculpture, drama, shadow play, and movement. The Atelier contains a great variety of tools and resource materials, along with records of past projects and experiences. Just like the schools in Reggio Emilia, Italy, our Atelier allows the children to come to the Atelier to construct their ideas. It is a place where children can choose from the many materials provided to them, to describe or express themselves and their ideas, or create representations of their learning. In the Atelier, children will be able to explore with their hand and their minds.

The Atelier is a special place where children express their knowledge about the world and their one hundred languages in many different ways!

Cepi, Giulio, and Zini, Michele, eds. Children, spaces, relations: met project for an environment for young children. Modena, Italy: Grafiche Rebecchi Ceccarelli s.r.l. 1998.

Hendrick, Joanne, ed. First Steps Toward Teaching the Reggio Way. New Jersey: Prentice-Hall Inc. 1997

Documentation of Children’s Work at the Steinberg Pre-School

When you walk through the Steinberg Pre-School halls, you see walls, shelves, and bulletin boards filled with panels of children’s work. As a visitor, who is not familiar with the “life at Steinberg Pre-School”, it is difficult to know where to look and how to sort through the many different types of documentation. It is suggested that you move slowly through the halls and take notice of the variety of documentations, and the different types of stories they tell about the deep learning happening in each classroom. If you see a panel that particularly interests you, take time to stop and read the information. At our school, we use documentation to record the important learning and special events in the classroom, and to share it with the children and their families. OUR INTENT IS TO MAKE LEARNING VISIBLE. We also use it to record our community celebrations and events. It is an important way to preserve our pre-school history and record the steps of our Reggio journey.

Documentation is the visual way to present and to organize classroom studies, and helps the children stay in touch with current school experiences and to revisit past experiences. It is also an important way to help parents understand the learning and depth of expansion of knowledge that happens in the classroom. When Jewish events are recorded in pictures and script, children and their families stay connected to holiday tradition and celebrations.

Documentation tells the story of meaningful learning that is shared with school friends, teachers, parents, and members of the Beth El community. At the Paul S. and Sylvia Steinberg Pre-School there is no right or wrong way to document children's work. Each teacher and her team are at different levels of experience with documentation, and are on their own Reggio journey. Some of our documentation appears quite formal, with photographs neatly mounted and word processing explanations and descriptions. This type of documentation takes time to create, and cannot be done spontaneously. Other teacher made documentation is more casual and spontaneous in its presentation, and can include Polaroid pictures, hand written explanations, children's dictation, and/or children's work. Some presentations are three-dimensional, and are created entirely by children. Again, there is no right or wrong way to document children's learning and wonderings. Often the type of experiences and happenings in the classroom dictate the way they are presented.

Placement of the panels on the walls is important, also. If the documentation is at child height, it should be primarily visual, so children can "read" and understand the information. When it is mounted at adult height, it can include pictures with explanations about the experience and the process.

We know that you will enjoy your journey through our halls and classrooms. Your walk will be filled with wonderment and appreciation of the amazing "work" of our teachers and children! We are very proud of all our accomplishments, and we continue to learn and grow in our Reggio Emilia journey.

Our journey is an exciting one, as we move forward in our practice. Our hope is that the Reggio inspired work we do here speaks to you in some way, and helps you to see all children as strong, rich, and capable co-constructors of knowledge. If we listen to our children, our time with them is so much more enriching and valuable.

Revised August 2008 by Tammie Roth

Prepared November 2004 by: Tammie Roth, Pre-School Director and
Sharon Lichtenstein, Early Years Consultant

Reflections on our Reggio Journey

**The Paul S. & Sylvia Steinberg Pre-School
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**Relationship with the Bubbling Fish Tank
Mark O. - Age 4.0**

