

# Parent Handbook

School Year 5770  
2009-10

*North Suburban  
Synagogue*

*Beth El*

בית כנסת בית אל

***Jack & Mildred Cohen Religious School***

*1175 Sheridan Road, Highland Park, IL 60035*

*847-432-8537*

*[www.nssbethel.org](http://www.nssbethel.org)*

## **Jack & Mildred Cohen Religious School**

The Jack & Mildred Cohen Religious School is an eight-year primary religious/Hebrew school, serving students in kindergarten through seventh grade (Vav), with mid-week instruction beginning in second grade (Alef).

The Cohen Religious School reflects an approach to Jewish tradition and an outlook on contemporary Jewish life exemplified by our Synagogue and by the Conservative Movement.

In 2008, professional staff, lay leaders, and education professionals met over a period of several months to develop an education vision statement reflecting the beliefs of the Beth El community, which forms the guidelines for curriculum development within the school. Through professional development, research review, and collaboration among professional staff and faculty, we provide a high quality education for our students.

Please read through this entire handbook so that you and your child will understand how our Religious School operates. We appreciate your support and cooperation in following the guidelines in this handbook. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact the Director.

## **School Objectives**

- ❑ The advancement of Judaism in America and the maintenance of Jewish tradition in its historic continuity; the study and commitment to the Torah; the fostering of Jewish religious life in the home and the observance of Shabbat and the laws of Kashrut.
- ❑ Hebrew is the national language of the Jewish people through which culture and values are expressed and the language in which the major portion of the textual material is written. Hebrew is therefore a crucial medium of instruction in our school.
- ❑ We believe in the obligation of every Jew to care for and to work on behalf of his fellow human beings. Therefore the values of justice and Tzedekah are central concepts to our program and our attempt is to make these values personal ones for each of our students.
- ❑ With our concern for Klal Yisrael, Jewish peoplehood, and M'dinat Yisrael, the Land of Israel, we will teach the reality and significance of Israel, our obligations to the Jewish State and our oneness with all Jews over the world.
- ❑ Together with the appropriate arms of the Synagogue, we work to create a familiarity with and facility in our Religious Services. An appreciation for the traditional liturgy is developed with Hebrew as the language of prayer.
- ❑ Judaism lives not just in books, but also through a living community. Each opportunity to express Jewish culture, music, art, literature, holiday celebrations, food, historical commemorations experientially, and through formal and informal education will help to transmit holiness and build community.

## **Educational Programs**

### **A. Religious School**

- Kindergarten and Grade 1 on Sundays only
- Grade 2 on Sundays and Wednesdays
- Grades 3-7 on Sundays, Mondays, and Wednesdays

### **B. Youth Groups**

- Shalom Club (Grades 3-5)
- Kadima (Grades 6-8)

### **C. Enrichment**

- Pizza & Pages Book Club for Grades K-2
- Jr. Book Club for Grades 3-5
- Enrichment Classes TBD (based on interest). Possibilities include Jewish Cooking, JNF Environment Club, Israeli dancing, Honors Hebrew, etc.

### **D. Family**

- Family Education Programs during Religious School
- Family Shabbat Services and Dinners
- Beth El Shabbaton

### **E. Adult (Based on interest)**

- Navigating the Siddur
- Hebrew Literacy Instruction
- Parenting from a Jewish perspective

## **Cohen Religious School Staff & Programs 5770**

Religious School Director – Karen Raizen  
Administrative Assistant – Emily Caulfield  
Director, Learning Center – Rachel Kamin

Gan (K/1) - Jodi Gershman, Chaya Minkus, Rochelle Pelzner

Kindergarten and first grade students learn in multi-age classrooms known as our Gan classes. In this cooperative learning environment, students engage in a variety of activities that work to each of their strengths in increasing their Jewish knowledge, as well as building community.

The Gan meets for 2 hours a week on Sundays from 9 am to 10:55 am. The program is a two-year rotating curriculum in which an emphasis is placed on Hebrew letter recognition, as well as expanding their oral Hebrew vocabulary. In addition, Torah stories and the mitzvot that we learn from each story are taught one year, and different aspects of Jewish life and traditions within the synagogue are taught the other year. Shabbat, holiday traditions, tefillot (prayers), and Israel are included in the curriculum for each year. Art, music, library story time, field trips, family education programs, social action projects, and other experiential activities are also a part of the program. Students and their families are asked to attend the Mini Minyan Shabbat services at Beth El a minimum of four times over the course of the school year.

Kitah Alef (Second Grade) – Myra Friedland, Yael Hoffman

Alef (second grade) students attend on Sundays, 9 – 10:55 am, and on Wednesdays, from 4:10 – 6 pm. The curriculum includes Hebrew language, both spoken and written, learning about the Jewish calendar, holidays, Israel, tefillot (prayers), and Torah study about the first Jewish family (Abraham & Sarah), the related mitzvot we learn, and about the ancient land of Israel. Art, music, library story time, field trips, family education programs, social action projects, and other experiential activities are also a part of the program. Students and their families are asked to attend the Mini Minyan Shabbat services at Beth El a minimum of four times over the course of the school year, as well as a special Friday Family Kabbalat Shabbat service and oneg. At this service, families participate in the Kabbalat Shabbat service and students prepare a musical presentation.

Kitah Bet (Third Grade) – Elana Michael, Gila Pniel.

Bet (third grade) students attend on Sundays from 9:00 to 10:55 am, and on Mondays and Wednesdays from 4:10 to 6:00 pm. The curriculum continues to emphasize Hebrew language, Israel, tefillot and learning about Jewish history and Jewish holidays. Art, music, library story time, field trips, family education programs, social action projects, and other experiential activities are also a part of the program. The Bet students and their families attend a mid-year Kabbalat Shabbat service followed by a Shabbat dinner and student presentations. As part of this evening, the students receive their own personalized siddur. Students are also asked to attend the Jr. Congregation Shabbat services at Beth El once a month.

Kitah Gimmel (Fourth Grade) – Edith Belkind, Shula Shleiser

Gimmel (fourth grade) students attend on Sundays from 9:00 to 10:55 am, and on Mondays and Wednesdays from 4:10 to 6:00 pm. The curriculum continues to emphasize Hebrew language, tefillot, Parashat HaShavua, Israel, Jewish history through the study of Prophets, and Jewish holidays. Art, music, library story time, field trips, family education programs, social action projects, and other experiential activities are also a part of the program. In the winter, students and their families celebrate Mincha, the service at which Shabbat is ushered out, followed by a Seudah Shlisheet (third meal of Shabbat), participate in student presentations, and Havdallah. Gimmel students practice tefillot and shirim (songs) with the Hazzan and have the opportunity to lead prayers at some Beth El Shabbat services throughout the year. Gimmel students are also asked to attend the Jr. Congregation Shabbat services at Beth El once a month, as well as the Beth El Shabbaton in the winter.

Kitah Dalet (Fifth Grade) – Shoshana Axler, Dr. Itzhak Hoffman

Dalet students attend on Sundays from 9:00 – 10:55 am, and on Mondays and Wednesdays from 4:10 to 6:00 pm. The Dalet curriculum continues to stress Hebrew,

tefillot, and introduces beginning Torah reading skills, along with the study of the land of Israel, Jewish history, and holidays.

For six weeks during the school year, the students attend family Shabbat services with at least one parent, in lieu of attending school on Sundays. During these services, students lead the prayers, accept an aliyah, and read Torah. At the conclusion of this six week session of family Shabbat services, the students and their families celebrate with a Family Shabbat luncheon.

Students also have the opportunity to attend a regional overnight Shabbaton experience in the winter sponsored by the Jewish Educators Assembly, as well as the annual Beth El Dalet/Hey Kallah in the spring.

Students and their families are asked to do a tikun olam project during the year. Art, music, library story time, field trips, family education programs, social action projects, and other experiential activities are also a part of the program.

#### Kitah Hey (Sixth Grade) – Zion Cohen, Gila Pniel

Hey students attend on Sundays from 11:10 – 1:00 pm and on Mondays and Wednesdays from 4:10 – 6:00 pm or from 6:10 – 8:00 pm, based on enrollment. The Hey curriculum includes Hebrew language, Jewish text study related to mitzvot, Jewish history and holidays, tefillot, and Israel.

For six weeks during the school year, the students attend family Shabbat services with at least one parent, in lieu of attending school on Sundays. During these services, students lead the prayers, accept an aliyah, and read Torah. At the conclusion of this six week session, the students and their families celebrate with a Family Shabbat Luncheon.

Students have the opportunity to attend the annual Beth El Dalet/Hey Kallah in the spring. B'nai Mitzvah classes with the Hazzan are held outside of Religious School hours.

Students and their families are asked to do a tikun olam project during the year. Art, music, library story time, field trips, family education programs, social action projects, and other experiential activities are also a part of the program.

#### Kitah Vav (Seventh Grade) – Sunday: Rabbi Vernon Kurtz, Rabbi Michael Schwab, Joyce Witt; Weekday: Dr. Itzhak Hoffman, Chuck Kahalnik, Mark Stadler

Vav students attend the Cohen Religious School on Sundays from 9-10:55 am and on Mondays and Wednesdays from 6:10 – 8:00 pm. The Sunday morning program is designed for students and parents to pray and study together. The students and parents begin Sunday mornings with a Shachrit Service led by Rabbi Kurtz, Rabbi Schwab, and Hazzan Goller, followed by a breakfast of bagels, juice, and coffee. At 10 am, the students and parents study together. Three courses are offered in a seven-

week rotation, one each on Life Cycle, Holocaust, and Traditions and Text: Holidays & Israel. Each student (with his or her parents) takes each of these courses during the Vav year. Solomon Schechter families with Bar/Bat Mitzvah age children are active participants in the Sunday morning program.

During the week, students continue to study Hebrew, learn about American Jewish history, text study (Pirke Avot), and complete the Judaism & Urban Poverty program. To complete their Religious School years, Vav students take a 100 Question test to assess their learning. Students are required to complete three social action projects throughout the year, and provide a reflective paragraph of each project upon its completion.

At the conclusion of the Vav year, there is a Kabbalat Shabbat Service, a Shabbat dinner, and a Geshet Ceremony. This ceremony celebrates the conclusion of the Vav year (the eighth year of study) as a geshet (bridge) to our High School.

#### Enrichment Room/Halomdim – Stacy Daybook

Through the Calvin and Lana Eisenberg Halomdim Program, North Suburban Synagogue Beth El is able to provide a Jewish education for every child. This program is designed to meet the individual needs and learning styles of the students in the school, and provide accommodations for a variety of learning situations. Open enrollment is offered to all students who seek a Jewish education with a policy of inclusion. Parents are asked to provide student information to help determine the best learning opportunities for their children. The Religious School and parents shall work together to determine the learning environment that will best meet the student's individual needs.

#### Art - Ariela Danieli

Art projects are developed for students of each grade level through Kitot Hey to help support and enhance the curriculum of each grade.

#### Music – Shelley Orbach

Students have music every week to learn songs to enhance their understanding of their culture and traditions. Songs are taught to support and enhance the curriculum of each grade.

#### **Attendance**

Please note our Religious School meeting times:

<u>Sundays:</u>	Gan – 9:00 – 10:55 am Alef through Dalet, Vav – 9:00 – 10:55 am Hey – 11:10 am – 1:00 pm
<u>Mondays:</u>	Bet through Hey (1 class) 4:10 – 6:00 pm Hey (1 class) through Vav 6:10 – 8:00 pm
<u>Wednesdays:</u>	Alef through Hey (1 class) 4:10 – 6:00 pm Hey (1 class) through Vav 6:10 – 8:00 pm.

Punctuality is extremely important in order to ensure safety and efficient use of class time. Children need to be picked up promptly.

Missing a day of religious school is the equivalent of missing a week of secular school. Therefore, your child's attendance on Sunday mornings and Monday and Wednesday afternoons is vital to his/her Jewish education.

If your child is ill, please call the synagogue (847-432-8537) and leave a message prior to the beginning of class. Please send a note to the teacher in the event of a planned absence and contact his/her teacher to discuss make-up work. When a student is absent, it is the responsibility of the student to make up missed work.

If a child becomes ill during class, and needs to be picked up early, he or she will wait in the School office. In the event of an emergency, if a parent cannot be reached, the emergency name listed on your registration will be called.

***If your child needs to leave early, you must call or send in a note to the office. When picking up your child, you must come to the office to sign out your child first.***

### Synagogue Worship Services

#### Shabbat

Worship is an integral part of Jewish life, particularly on Shabbat and Jewish holidays. Students are taught how and why to worship and are encouraged to attend Shabbat services frequently. The following children's services are offered each Shabbat, beginning at 11 am:

- Tot Shabbat – Pre-school children
- Mini-Minyan – Kindergarten through 2<sup>nd</sup> Grade
- Jr. Congregation – Grades 3-5

Special family Shabbat services for Dalet & Hey students, beginning at 10:30 am:

- Hey Family Shabbat Services – October 17-November 21
- Dalet Family Shabbat Services – January 9 – February 13

*All Dalet and Hey students read Torah and accept an aliyah during the Family services.*

Students are required to attend Shabbat services (either Friday night or Saturday morning) at least once a month. Please see the NSS Beth El website for additional information on special Shabbat programming and Ruach Shabbat dinners.

[www.nssbethel.org](http://www.nssbethel.org).

#### Other Holidays

There are services at the synagogue for each of the major Jewish holidays. We encourage you to attend as many of the Beth El community holiday services as possible with your child. There is a list of Jewish holidays for the upcoming year on

this year's school calendar. Family-friendly services and activities are planned for each holiday.

### **Dress Code**

In keeping with the sanctity of the synagogue, students are asked to dress modestly and appropriately.

Head coverings other than kippot are not acceptable.

### **Electronic Devices**

Cell phones are to be turned off during class time. If a cell phone is used for any reason, including text messaging or calls during class, the phones will be confiscated and held in the school office. Students can pick up their cell phones from the office when school has finished.

I-Pods, MP3 players, hand-held electronic games, etc. must be turned off during school hours.

### **Appropriate Conduct and Discipline**

Students should conduct themselves with appropriate respect and dignity.

We believe that students have the right to learn and teachers have the right to teach. We strive always to provide the best quality Jewish education for all our students. We appreciate students remembering that they are responsible for their own behavior. There are times when this educational process can become disrupted because a student is not behaving in an appropriate manner. The school needs the parents' cooperation and understanding in maintaining discipline. Please read the Covenant of Conduct as a family at the end of this document, sign, and return to the Religious School office.

### **Family Participation and Communication**

#### Parent Council

*"Hillel said, 'Separate not yourself from the community.'" (Avot 2:5)*

Hillel is stressing the importance of communal responsibility. "All Israel is responsible for one another" has always been a vital part of Judaism. When we respond to a call for help, we show that we care and are part of the community. (Tzedekah – A Sourcebook on Caring and Sharing, by Abraham Eckstein and Azriel Eisenberg).

The Parent Council helps provide the faculty with needed volunteer support to run the school smoothly. Being a Parent Council member is an easy way to enhance your child's religious school experience and expand your involvement in the NSS Beth El community. Even a couple of hours of your time during the year will be greatly appreciated.

Parents are asked to contribute \$20/year to help purchase necessary equipment for students' use, underwrite enrichment programs, print a student directory, as well as other uses.

### Communication

The Director will send out weekly religious school announcements via e-mail on school happenings and reminders. Please make sure your correct e-mail address is on file in the Religious School office. If you wish to receive hard copies of the announcements, please inform the school, and they will be mailed to you.

Please check the Beth El website under the Jack & Mildred Cohen Religious School tab for updated information, and do not hesitate to call the school office if you have any questions.

### Open House

After the High Holy Days, families will be invited to Open House. This is an opportunity to meet the teachers, be introduced to your child's curriculum, be able to sign up to volunteer, and to sign up for a Parent Teacher Conference time.

### Parent-Teacher Conferences:

We recognize the importance of regular school-home communication. We will arrange individual parent-teacher conferences in January in the first week back after Winter Break. In addition, written progress reports will be sent home in December and May.

### Family Education Programs and Social Action Projects

Throughout the school year, the Religious School will hold special Family Education programs during Religious School hours on Sundays. This is a wonderful opportunity for families to engage in shared Jewish learning. Please note the dates on the calendar and plan to attend school with your child on those dates. Students are required to attend, whether or not they are accompanied by a parent.

### **Tzedakah Program**

Tzedakah means 'justice' in Hebrew, and is one of the highest mitzvot in the Jewish tradition. The performance of this mitzvah is an important part of our curriculum on all levels. Our students are encouraged to contribute to the class tzedakah collection, which is then donated to various worthwhile organizations about which they learn in their classes.

### **Social Action**

All students will participate in class social action projects, as well as all-school social action projects. The Beth El Social Action Committee provides other opportunities for families to get involved in tikun olam (repair of the world), such as the Family to Family Thanksgiving Project, a coat drive, etc.

In addition, students in Dalet, Hey, and Vav are asked to do social action projects outside of school time as they prepare for their responsibilities in the adult Jewish community following Bar/Bat Mitzvah.

### **Kashrut**

Kashrut (following Jewish dietary laws, or “keeping kosher”) is fully observed within the synagogue. All snacks sent to Beth El must be kosher, either with CRC certification or marked with a K or U. If there are any questions concerning the acceptability of any particular snack item, please call the school office.

BEANS – the Beth El chapter of USY – holds a snack sale for Religious School students every Wednesday during the 5:00 pm break. Snacks include chips, candy, and water. Once a month, healthy food is offered (fresh fruit, vegetables & hummus, cheese & crackers, etc). All money raised by the USY for the snack sale is given to tzedakah.

### **Emergency Closings & Drills**

The phone tree is updated when school registration is complete. This information will be used in the event of school closing due to inclement weather or any other emergency. Please indicate on your school registration, your preferred number to be used for emergency contact. Also, please check the Beth El website for emergency closing information – [www.nssbethel.org](http://www.nssbethel.org).

Each year, a fire drill will be conducted so that teachers and students are comfortable with emergency procedures.

### **Lost and Found**

Are you or your children missing something? Check in the school office. Articles left unclaimed by the end of the school year will be donated to tzedakah.

### **Traffic Policy**

The safety and security of our students are of utmost importance to all of us in the Cohen Religious School. One of the areas in which we are always concerned is what happens during drop-off and pickup times. In addition, there have been complaints about cars blocking Sheridan Road while waiting to get in the parking lot.

On the north end of the parking lot, there is a sidewalk that goes down to the street. Cars are asked to pull up all the way down to the end of the sidewalk by Sheridan Road to wait for their children who will come down the sidewalk to enter the car. The purpose of extending the pickup area is to ensure that cars are not blocking traffic on Sheridan Road.

If you do not wish to wait in the pickup line, you are asked to park in one of the center lanes. If you park your car, you will need to come to the sidewalk to pick up your child. No Cohen Religious School students will be allowed to enter the parking lot without a parent during this busy time regardless of age.

### **Visitors**

If your child wishes to bring a visitor to the classroom, the permission of the teacher must be obtained ahead of time. Visitors are expected to follow all class rules.

### **School Calendar**

The calendar for the current Religious School year is attached. It can also be found on Beth El's website: [www.nssbethel.org](http://www.nssbethel.org).

## COVENANT OF CONDUCT

The Jack & Mildred Cohen Religious School is a *bet mikdash*, a “sanctuary,” as well as a *bet midrash*, a “house of study”. Our children must know they are in a safe environment to study, worship, learn, and play. In order to realize these goals, we ask each student’s family to read and discuss this “Covenant of Conduct,” sign and return to the Religious School office, or send with your child on the first day of school.

**Treat others kindly.**

*Rabbi Shammai said: Receive all people with a cheerful face.*

**Pay close attention to each other’s words and feelings.**

*Rabbi Hillel said: What you don’t like, don’t do to your neighbor.*

**Respect the property of others.**

*Rabbi Yossi said: Let the property of your neighbor be as precious as your own.*

**Be responsible for your behavior.**

*Rabi said: Which is the right path to choose? One that is honorable in itself and also wins honor for others.*

**Make a positive effort.**

*Ben Hei Hei said: According to the labor is the reward.*

We have read this “Covenant of Conduct,” have discussed it as a family, and agree to abide by it in order to create the best possible learning environment.

Student \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Student \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Student \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Student \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Parent/Guardian \_\_\_\_\_