



PARENT HANDBOOK

2009-2010

SCHOOL YEAR





Welcome to JEWEL! You've made an exciting decision about both your child(s) education and your family life. We are confident that this decision will continue to deliver benefits long after your child leaves our school. This is why we call it JEWEL, **JEWish Education for Life**

JEWEL, a program of the Jewish Family Center, provides not just a school, but a support system, educational outlet and community for the entire family. Because we are unaffiliated with any branch of Judaism, our families are from diverse backgrounds with so many interesting experiences to add to our program. We are a fun place for the kids and a help for all of our families who are raising proud Jewish families.

We cover the same categories of curriculum that other schools do – Hebrew, Israel, Holidays, Culture and Torah – we make sure to add fun to the mixture to make it great for your kids. Through songs, games, food and good fun, our students truly look forward to getting together every Sunday.

Curriculum

Kindergarten – First Grade - This is a very important age to associate Judaism with FUN! We use games, songs, food and arts and crafts quite a bit in this class. During this year, each Hebrew letter will be introduced, identified and repeated through the year. Writing is not stressed this year. Reading is not stressed, but is an added benefit toward the end of the year. All students will be taught colors and counting up to the number 10, body parts and other vocabulary units.

Israel will be introduced in early emergent ways. Using the map, flag and symbols, students will become familiar with Israel. Culture and Holidays are very important to this age group. The story of every holiday will be presented along with lessons, meanings, and ways to celebrate. Cultural symbols and foods make this class even more memorable.

Second Grade – This is the year that children really will begin to learn the Aleph –Beit, or Hebrew Alphabet. They will spend a lot of time drilling to make sure they have both letter and vowel recognition and that they will remember it for the rest of their lives. This is the key to getting children to get on their way to reading Hebrew. This can be a challenge since many have not had prior exposure to Hebrew or reading. The Hebrew focus for this year will be block letter identification, vowel identification. Students will continue counting to the number 20 and a review of colors. Families are the key to making Hebrew a successful venture for children. Find 15 minutes a day to have your child practice Hebrew lessons. If they need help, a wonderful interactive resource on the Internet is www.behrmanhouse.com – with several click and read links under the family page link.

Holidays and Culture can be a lot of fun with this class. The students have a great understanding of the underlying meaning of the stories and the lessons of the holidays so going into greater depth is a must! The teacher may utilize cooking, movies and music very well here as well as plays. It is also appropriate to start introducing Jewish American culture and symbols.

Third Grade - This is the key year to get the students reading Hebrew comfortably. The year will build on their block letter and vowel identification and begin to put it together to begin reading. In addition to reading, this year will be the first to learn everyday cultural Hebrew words and begin with the calendar. Writing block letters will be introduced in this year. Families are the key to making Hebrew a successful venture for children. Find 15 minutes a day to have your child practice Hebrew lessons. If they need help, a wonderful interactive resource on the Internet is www.behrmanhouse.com – with several click and read links under the family page link.

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Fourth-Fifth Grades - By the time the students reach this two year cycle, those who have attended the school or any school for several years should be comfortable with identifying Hebrew block letters, reading simple words and writing in



block. Review will be necessary. The focus will be on strengthening reading and beginning script writing. Review of counting (up to 20 plus the beginning of the other 10s) and colors. Our Hebrew specialist will cover this.

Teaching Israel this year is fascinating. While Israeli culture has been the focus for younger groups, this age level will get to learn about Israel's early history. Stories of Masada, the quest of the Zionists, and the wars over land are very interesting to this age group. But these are just starting points.... Crops, products, inventions, and personalities from Israel could keep the conversations going for a long time!

Holidays and Culture are much more focused this year. Stories of holidays can be read directly from the Tanach with moral questions presented. Deeper explanations of how to celebrate are important. A large part of our Cultural building block of learning is that of Mitzvot. Students will learn everyday Mitzvot that they can incorporate into their lives each week.

Sixth-Seventh Grade - These are the years when children morph into young adults – and at JEWEL we try to assist with Jewish part of the transition. Our curriculum focuses on how the students can utilize Judaism on a daily basis and understand its lessons in terms of being the guidelines to a good life. We begin introducing a series of Character's from the Bible that we use to teach moral and value oriented lessons.

Holidays and culture are covered in ways that pertain specifically to this age group.

Bar/Bat Mitzvah Preparation – A Bar/Bat Mitzvah is a beginning, not the conclusion of a student's Jewish education; it is a passageway to wider learning and observance. Students of JEWEL are encouraged to train for and have a Bar/Bat Mitzvah when they reach the appropriate age. Having a Bar/Bat Mitzvah is not a requirement of the school. If the family decides it does want to have a Bar/Bat Mitzvah, JEWEL will be able to help you design a service that is best for you, train the student to run the service, and help get the whole family involved.

Approximately one year before the student's Bar or Bat Mitzvah time, you should be in contact with Rabbi Fink, our Bar/Bat Mitzvah Coordinator, to set up a family meeting. Sometimes, when the family is planning a large reception, they would like to discuss the arrangements more than a year in advance. If this is the case you must take the initiative to contact Rabbi Fink when advanced arrangements are required. At the initial meeting, we will discuss your goals, expectations and hopes for your child's special milestone. We will be able to discuss the service, facility options and dates. When a decision has been made on what kind of ceremony that will accompany your child's Bar/Bat Mitzvah, an appropriate tutor will be referred to you and a detailed. Tutoring will take about 6 months, it will occur outside of school hours and the charge for the tutor is included in the Bar/Bat Mitzvah charge that is incurred the year of the ceremony. Our coordinator will monitor progress and maintain communication with your family.

Please know that Bar/Bat Mitzvah tutoring fees MUST be paid in full before the Bar/Bat Mitzvah service. In addition, it is important that our students realize that the Bar/Bat Mitzvah is not the destination in their Jewish lives, but rather on stop along the way. Thus, student who become Bar/Bat Mitzvah during the school year will need to have their yearly tuition paid in full prior to the first day of class and will be expected to attend the entire year of classes.

Just Jew It! - Just Jew It! is an important part of Jewel's overall curriculum. It is an attempt to encourage students to add Judaism into their everyday life and the lives of their family, and also for the teachers to check on learning progress and retention. Just Jew It!, is a voluntary, incentive based program where prizes are given for a student taking the extra step to bring what they learn to life. Our experience has shown the program to be an effective tool to leverage the time at school with home involvement.

JJI gives students and families many ways to earn points for doing Jewish activities – such as celebrations, Shabbat, Mitzvot and other various activities associated with Judaism. Some activities your family may be very familiar with and some may be completely new, but each activity has a part in our program. Also, there are some activities in JJI that are specifically taught to the students in class as part of the curriculum.

Each grade level has a specific number of points that we would like each student to strive for throughout the course of the year. K-1 needs 1400 points, 2-3 needs 1500 points and 4-7 needs 1700 points to complete the program and receive the



grand prize at the end of the year! Students are given incentives to keep moving on in the JJI program through goals given along the year at specific times.

Through experience, we know that this program is not something you can try to accomplish at the last minute. If done in a consistent manner throughout the year, students will have no problem getting enough points to achieve their goal. There are many strategies to approaching Just Jew It! Students are encouraged to sit down with their parents and mark down what activities they can definitely do, what activities they would like to do and what activities they may need help with. It is sometimes helpful to figure out the average number of points each child will need every month to reach their goal. Points are turned in on activity grids that can be downloaded from our website. The program is formulated so that a combination of low point-value, medium point-value and high point-value activities will be needed to attain the goal. Then, each week, students/parents will record which activities were done on the JJI grid (also available on the website.) These sheets may be turned in every Sunday and the Principals will tabulate the student's totals to that point. Points for each month must be turned in **NO LATER** than the first Sunday of the following month to be counted – **LATE POINTS CANNOT BE ADDED IN**. It may at first sight seem like a lot of writing to do at home. The purpose of doing some activities repeatedly is to create a habit of easy Judaism for our next generation. Other activities may have goals of knowledge, awareness or simply celebrating with the community and family.

One very important thing for families to know about this program is that the school is here for you. If, at any time you have questions or need assistance with helping your child succeed in JJI or any part of JEWEL, please contact your campus principal as soon as possible. We are here to partner with you for your child's Jewish success.

Administrative

Attendance – JEWEL recognizes that Sundays can be a very busy family day and is often a time for family obligations as well as extra curricular activities and other fun events. Families who send their children to JEWEL should be commended for making a commitment to their children's Jewish Education. In all school settings, regular attendance is crucial to a child getting the most out of their experience. It is very important to the student and to the class that there be some continuity in attendance during the school year. When students do not show up, come late or leave school early it is not only very disruptive to the students and to their class, but it sends the wrong message about school to your child. If your child will be absent during a JEWEL day, please email the Principal prior to 8:30 am that morning so that your child is accounted for. The school considers any more than 5 unexcused absences during the year unacceptable. Furthermore, classes begin at 10:00 am. Arrival after 10:10 am is considered a late. **If the student's absences or late arrivals are excessive, the student and the parent will be required to meet with the Executive Director of the school.** For your child and all the children in the school, please respect and support our attendance policy.

Parental Involvement – The Staff at JEWEL is very aware of the demanding schedules of parents today. It can make some parents feel they need a frantic pace just to accomplish all of their responsibilities for themselves and their family. But studies show that when a parent is involved in their child's educational experience, the child's schooling is effective. When enrolling your child in Jewel, you demonstrate to your child that their Judaism is an integral part of your life and that you want it to be an integral part of theirs. **WE STRONGLY ENCOURAGE** all parents to be actively involved in their children's education at Jewel. This includes actively discussing with your child(ren) the things that they learn at school and attempting to incorporate these ideas in your home.

In order to facilitate this parental involvement, JEWEL has initiated many opportunities just for the parents. Besides the weekly email that contains the lessons that we are learning, JEWEL provides classes for parents. Classes will be provided monthly at drop off time. This will cover the topics that are being learned in the school that month and will be presented in a way for parents to understand and assist their children. Jewel also provides at least one monthly class for parents in the evenings. By registering for JEWEL, each family is **EXPECTED** to have at least one parent attend at least 5 learning opportunities during the year.



School Calendar - The JEWEL calendar is located at our website, www.betterfamily.org on the JEWEL page. This is the main calendar for the year. There are times when we find it necessary to change certain activities that have been planned. If any changes are made, you will receive an email telling you of the changes and it will be updated on the website.

Hours of School - JEWEL is a Sunday-only Hebrew School. Sometimes, we may have a Shabbat dinner or Holiday celebration on another day. School hours are between 10 am and noon. Please bring your children no earlier than 9:55 am – as teachers use the early time to prepare for each day. Please pick up all children no later than 12:05 pm. Students will only be released to those people noted on the registration forms unless other arrangements have been made with the Principal.

Email – The Primary mode of communication between the school and the parents is through e-mail. Emails will alert parents to upcoming events, important deadlines, billing matters and of course what your child has been learning in class. This proper communication between the parents and the school is essential for the school to run. It is the responsibility of the parent to make sure they are aware of all deadlines, sign ups for trips and activities. JEWEL offices do not have the resources to chase after parents for this communication. It is expected that parents will open up the school emails to stay informed and see if there is any action on the part of the parent that is needed.

School Cancellations and Weather Policy - JEWEL follows the weather recommendations of the Montgomery County School System. In case of inclement weather, JEWEL will be closed if Montgomery County schools are listed as being closed for weekend activities. Families will receive an email about closures no later than 8:30 am Sunday morning. Please check your emails before leaving for school.

Emergencies - During school hours the best way to reach the school is by contacting Rabbi Fink directly at 240-994-2373. It is also important that each family fill out accurate contact numbers on their application where they can be reached during school hours. We ask that you please be at one of the phone numbers you listed on your information sheet in case there is an urgent need to contact you. Taking the time to find you at a different number could waste valuable time.

Student Information - On your registration forms, please alert the JEWEL staff to any student information or family situations that will help us best serve your student and family. Should new information or situations arise during the year, it is extremely helpful to everyone involved if the teachers and Principal are notified. All information is confidential.

Supplies - JEWEL makes every attempt to supply everything needed for in-school activities. We do ask that every student bring their bag, a notebook and two writing utensils to JEWEL every week. Boys are asked to bring a kippa as well.

Tzedakah (Charity) – Tzedakah is a concept that is very basic to Judaism. We know how important it is to give whatever we are able to those in need. Our school tries to develop within our students a commitment to share with those less fortunate than themselves. Through the year, we will collect tzedakah during class time. At the end of the year, we will decide as a group to which group it will be donated. We may also do other tzedakah projects through the year. You will receive emails about these projects with details.

Directory - JEWEL will maintain an online directory of our families to be distributed to each family via email. Please use this directory only to contact one another or to find assistance. Please do not solicit or pass this directory on to anyone else.

Communication with Teachers - You will receive your child(s) teacher's name and email. Please feel free to contact your teacher with questions, comments or concerns. You may also contact the principal if you would like. Each week, you will receive a school-wide email newsletter alerting you to what lessons took place the previous Sunday. This email will also alert you to upcoming events, volunteer opportunities and other such things. If you find you are not getting the emails, please contact the principal.



Shabbat Dinners - JEWEL is dedicated to both student and family. We are extremely happy to provide Shabbat dinners to our families for a very nominal charge throughout the year. These dinners are a wonderful way to bring Judaism into the home and also celebrate with other members of the JEWEL community.

Parent Volunteers - Sometimes, JEWEL may need parents to volunteer with programs, as chaperones or in classes. You will learn of these opportunities through phone or email or from the Principal. Because JEWEL is a program for the whole family, volunteerism is extremely important and very appreciated.

Family Programs - JEWEL will try to provide a full family program on special occasions. The programs will take place during regular school hours, but we may need volunteers before and after these hours for set-up and clean up. Please make sure to tell us ahead of time how many family members will attend so we have plenty of supplies.

Family Services - While there is no membership fee to belong to JEWEL, we do try to provide support services for our families. If you find yourself in need of rabbinical services, counseling or advice, please feel free to contact our Executive Director, Rabbi Fink, at (301) 260-1378.

Tuition Payments - Although we make every effort to keep JEWEL tuition as low as possible, in the end, we really depend on that tuition being paid in a timely manner. Please make sure that your tuition payments are mailed as per your individual arrangement to **JEWEL TUITION, PO Box 798, Olney, MD 20832**. If a new development arises during the year, please discuss this issue with the Principal.

New Students - JEWEL depends on your happiness with our school to spread the word to new students. If you know someone who may be interested in finding out about our school, please forward their information to the Principal. If you know a number of people who would like to know about JEWEL, we encourage you to host a "Parent Party" at your home. We will provide snacks, a speaker and possibly a project for all in attendance.

Finally, One last Delivery of our Goal - When push comes to shove, the best ways to keep Jewish kids Jewish are through pride and identity. The best way to give kids Jewish pride and identity is to present a myriad of Jewish links to them in a fun, warm, and memorable way -- - and then let them choose the links which connect them most personally to this amazing history, culture and religion --- this lifestyle. Our staff is dedicated to empower your children to decide how to connect with Judaism and to feel great about their decision. We appreciate working with you not only as your child(s) teachers and advisors, but also as your partners in Judaism. Please feel free to ask us questions, tell us what would enrich your family's Jewish experience and anything else that crosses your mind – we're all part of the same family!