



PARENT HANDBOOK, 2007-2008 SCHOOL YEAR

Welcome to JEWEL! You've made an exciting decision about both your child(s) education and your family life. This decision will continue to deliver benefits long after your child(s) Bar or Bat Mitzvah – for a lifetime.

JEWEL, a program of the Jewish Family Center, provides 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. The main difference between JEWEL and traditional Hebrew schools is the method in which the information is presented. We make it our priority to mirror the feelings of attending Jewish youth group or camp – where Judaism is learned through living – so the students REALLY enjoy coming here each week.

Although we cover the same categories of curriculum that other schools do – Hebrew, Israel, Holidays, Culture and Torah – we add a spoonful of sugar to help it all get digested. Through songs, games, food and good fun, our students truly look forward to getting together every Sunday.

Curriculum

Just Jew It! – Chemdaz Program - Just Jew It! is JEWEL's revolutionary program to both encourage students to add Judaism into their lives and the lives of their family, but also for the teachers to check on learning progress and retention. Just Jew It!, hereon referred to as JJI, had phenomenal success during its first year at JEWEL and has been adjusted to make it even more fun for both students and families.

JJI gives students and families a huge number of 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. Once student can prove to the teachers that they've mastered the lesson or skill, the teacher will award points.

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 – a trip to Six Flags! Students are given incentives to keep moving on in the JJI program through goals given along the year at specific times.

Students should 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. 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 students 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 can not be added in.

It may at first sight seem like a lot of writing to do at home. However, 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 is that 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.

Each family will receive a JJI "menu" of Jewish activities at the beginning of the year – and it is accessible on the www.betterfamily.org website. **TORAH** Students will learn stories and lessons from the Torah throughout the year in their classes. These lessons will be presented in age-appropriate manners with coordinating discussion or activities. While we try to correlate the lessons to the Torah portions being read on the same Shabbat, sometimes our schedule will be off due to holidays. A great resource for families to discuss each week's Torah portion is at www.akhlah.org.



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-Third Grades - This is the key year to get the students reading Hebrew comfortably. 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 and writing, vowel identification and beginning reading with ease. Students will continue counting to the number 20 and a review of colors. In addition to reading, this year will be the first to learn everyday cultural Hebrew words and begin with the calendar. 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.

This class will include a review of Israel's map, symbols and flag. Also included will be discussions about lifestyles in Israel, including the differences between Jews in Israel and America, with regard to foods, activities, schools and other lifestyle issues.

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.

Fourth-Fifth Grades - By the time the students reach this class, 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 it's lessons in terms of being the guidelines to a good life.

Holidays and culture are covered in ways that pertain specifically to this age group. This class will also assist those about to become Bar/Bat Mitzvah in choosing a Mitzvah project to mark the occasion.

Bar/Bat Mitzvah Preparation - Approximately one year before your student's Bar or Bat Mitzvah time, you will receive a call from our Bar/Bat Mitzvah Coordinator to set up a family meeting. At this meeting, you will discuss your goals, expectations and hopes for your student's special milestone. At that time, you will also discuss facility options and dates. When a decision has been made on what kind of ceremony will accompany your student's Bar/Bat Mitzvah, an appropriate tutor will be referred to you and plans will begin. Tutoring will occur outside of school hours and there is a small charge for the tutor. After this point, 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 tutoring can start. 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.

School Calendar - Our JEWEL calendar is located at the site, www.betterfamily.org after clicking on the JEWEL link. This is the main calendar, but if changes are made, you will receive an email telling you of the changes.

Hours of JEWEL - JEWEL is a Sunday-only Hebrew School. Sometimes, we may have a family celebration or Shabbat dinner 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.

School Cancellations and Weather Policy - JEWEL follows the weather recommendations of Montgomery County. In case of inclement weather, JEWEL will be closed if Montgomery County schools are listed or announced as being closed. Also, you will receive an email about closures by 8:30 am on the day of class if there is a closing or delay for any reason.

Attendance - If your child will be absent during a JEWEL day, please email the Principal of your campus prior to 8:30 am that morning so your child is accounted for. When your children don't show up and we don't know where they are – we worry!

Emergencies - During JEWEL hours, you can reach the Gaithersburg campus and the Principal through the Principal's cell phone number – 240-506-9187. You can reach the Olney campus and the Principal through the Principal's cell phone number – 301-613-6557. 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 folder, bag and two writing utensils to JEWEL every week. Boys are asked to bring a kippa as well. There are times when JEWEL may ask parents to donate certain supplies to supplement activities. Our staff certainly appreciates your generosity during these times.

Book and Music Library - If you find a book, cd or dvd with Jewish content or interest that you would like to donate to JEWEL, please feel free to bring it in. It is always exciting to have a new source to use in teaching or reference that otherwise may have been unknown. Any book you donate will have a bookplate placed in the front cover with your family's name and the year of donation.

Snacks - Parents who would like to donate snacks or juice for the school with a recognizable OU Kosher symbol are very welcome to do so. Again, JEWEL very much appreciates your generosity.

Tzedakah - As Jews, we know how important to give whatever we are able to those in need. Through the year, we will collect tzedakah during snack 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.



Teacher Communication - 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. Please note that you will receive emails that are specific to the campus that your child(ren) attend.

Shabbat Dinners - JEWEL is dedicated to both student and family. We are extremely happy to provide two Shabbat dinners, free of charge, to our families 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. Although there is no charge, we will ask for ample notification of your attendance so we can have plenty of delicious food for your family.

Sunday Parent Classes - Several times throughout the year, parents will be invited to drop their students off at class and come to a parent program and nosh given by our Executive Director or a special guest. If there is a particular topic you are interested in having a program about, please tell the Principal. These programs are included with your tuition, but we will need to know if you will be attending so we can make sure to have everything ready.

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.

Parent Talents - If you have a skill or talent that is Jewishly oriented and that you feel may be beneficial to offer to JEWEL or present in a program, please alert the Principal. Our goal to enrich the lives of our families will be reached much quicker with everyone's help.

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) 260-0210.

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!