

Religious School Curriculum

The curriculum of the Religious School of Congregation Beth Israel emphasizes the development of Jewish insights and perspectives. Jewish values are taught through the study of Torah and holiday observation as well as through discussion of mitzvot, God, and prayer. The history of our people is examined from biblical stories through the modern nation of Israel. Children are encouraged to recognize the values of our heritage as they further develop their creative thinking and expression.

Our curriculum is based on established “Enduring Understandings” behind each of our curriculum topics. Our goal is to teach to the underlying concepts and values that we want the children to carry with them into adulthood. Students are guided to consider the “Essential Questions” of a topic through a specific project. “Project Based Learning” allows for individual exploration and collaborative learning. Each grade level focuses on one topic per year or per semester, allowing for in depth study of the subject. The school celebrates Jewish holidays together.

Many activities are used to reinforce the ideas we teach. In addition to the academic classroom instruction, a different specialist teaches the children some of the cultural aspects of Judaism each week including music, cooking, and art. Computers are available to be used as tools to accentuate and supplement our regular curriculum. Students participate in a weekly age appropriate prayer service in order to familiarize the children with the basic prayers and structure of the service. Parents are encouraged to participate in T’filah with their children.

Each class engages with the Erev Shabbat service through leading the congregation once during the year. There is a class dinner preceding this service to encourage community through families meeting and getting to know each other. Shabbat Services on the 1st Friday evening of most months are geared towards families. We strongly encourage parents to understand that services are a part of their child’s spiritual education. This team approach to education gives a well-rounded sense of what it means to be Jewish.

7th graders meet on Sunday mornings most weeks. Once a month, the students will meet on Saturday morning instead for Shabbat Study which includes Torah Study and Shabbat morning service. Parents are encouraged to attend Shabbat services and Torah study.

Our teens (in grades 8 - 12) are engaged through a variety of programs all under the umbrella of Aleynu.

- Wednesday evening study takes place every other week from 6:00 - 8:00. The group socializes over a brown bag dinner and then participates in a discussion period (limmud) followed by an experiential activity (chug). The classes and activities change each semester and the topics are determined through teen input.

- Teens are encouraged to become paid members of the faculty as madrichim (teacher's aides). They usually share a position within the school so that they do not work every Sunday morning that school is in session.
- Special trips for teens are planned. They will travel to Washington DC to participate in L'Taken, an empowering leadership program sponsored by the Religious Action Committee where they learn to lobby for social issues. They also take a day trip to ranch in Big Sur for a focus on Judaism and the environment.

A more detailed description of the areas of study is available from the Director of Education. This information includes the universal Enduring Understandings, the Essential Questions and the Project for every grade for each curriculum topic.

As always, the single most important factor in developing positive Jewish feelings in children is the attitude of the parents. Regular school attendance, participation in Shabbat dinners and Shabbat and Festival services by all members of the family, encouragement to participate in social activities, show our children that Judaism is indeed an important part of our lives.