



2024-2025

Beit Midrash

Family Handbook

Rabbi Mara Nathan
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Mark Eichelbaum, President
Ellen Barshop, Director of Congregational Learning
Sara Planto, Religious School Administrator

Welcome to Beit Midrash!

On behalf of the faculty and staff at Temple Beth-El, welcome! We are glad your family has joined us as partners in your child's Jewish Education. Together, we will continue to work as a team to ensure that all the students in our school foster lasting and meaningful relationships with one another, their teachers, and our rich religious traditions.

We are in a new world and are making every effort to meet these challenges with thought, data, and innovation. For years and years, we called ourselves Religious School, but we are now Temple Beth-El's *Beit Midrash*. Synagogue buildings are meant to act as 3 things: a *beit t'filah*, a house of prayer, a *beit k'nesset*, a house of gathering, and a *beit midrash*, a house of study.

We are more than a school, teaching classes and giving grades. We are a community of learners, working together to find what impact Judaism can have on our lives and how we can make an impact on the Jewish world. We will study what is important to our congregation, our families, and ourselves and explore these topics in a Jewish lens in our own *Beit Midrash*.

Within these pages we will outline our curricular model and highlight the important details you will need to know for the year.

We proudly feature:

- A host of classes for students to choose from for themselves, based on their own interests.
- A guide and administrative support to keep a road map on which to grow their Jewish literacy.
- 9 key content areas (Community, Holidays, *Mitzvot* and Values, *Tanach*, God, Israel, Culture, Lifecycle, and History) that students explore in myriad ways throughout their studies.
- Formal Hebrew instruction in grades 3-6 with options for private tutoring.
- Classes for students of all interests from literature, art, music, cooking and science.
- Access to the Bendiner Library and its fantastic, contemporary collection of books to check out.
- Family education opportunities for each grade level to build community.

We surely have a fabulous year ahead of us!



Ellen Barshop, Director of Congregational Learning

Hebrew Program, Grades 3—6:

Goals and Curriculum

The goals of our Hebrew curriculum are multi-faceted; the primary emphasis is on the study of the *siddur* (prayer book). We strive to balance the need for both *kevah* (the routine) and the *kavanah* (spirituality) of prayer. To become fluent participants in a worship service, students learn to decode Hebrew text with accuracy and fluency, gain a working Hebrew vocabulary of approximately 100 words, and develop some basic knowledge of Hebrew grammar. Students also can explore the concepts expressed in Jewish liturgy as they sing and chant many prayers from the evening and morning services.

Additionally, we offer a Transitional Specialist whose primary function is to work with students who need extra support before joining their grade level or who benefit from small-group instruction. Placement with the transitional specialist is possible after meeting with a family and assessing their needs.

Education Programs for Post-B'nai Mitzvah

For students in Grades 8-12, we offer the following courses in addition to our Madrichim program and SAFTY.

Preconfirmation, Grade 8-Grade 9:

Grades 8-9 begin their Confirmation studies in our **Preconfirmation Class**. This group spends two years learning about Jewish Culture and Comparative Religion and a second year of Reform Jewish History. The class is a seminar-style of instruction. Students are challenged to take more difficult and nuanced topics than in years before as they prepare for the challenge of Confirmation.

Grade 10

In our Reform tradition, Confirmation is a significant lifecycle event. This ceremony marks an academic milestone in the students' process of Jewish learning and their informed affirmation of their commitments as Jews. Our Confirmation students will have the opportunity to study primarily with Rabbi Nathan and Cantor Ettinger to prepare for the Confirmation Service. The Confirmation curriculum focuses on the various ways we think about God and develop a personal understanding of what a relationship with God means.

Grades 11 and 12

Post-Confirmation students meet eight times a year throughout the city of San Antonio from 12:30-2:00 pm. This seminar-style series allows students to use Judaism as a relevant lens through which to see the world around them. With a facilitator, students will discuss issues that impact their lives and join as voices for justice in the broader Jewish community. Alternating years, students will advocate in Austin during the legislative session and Washington, D.C. to attend the Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism's L'Taken Social Justice Seminar.

Health and Safety

Students are expected to be free of fever (temperature less than 100.4° F) and free of communicable diseases to attend Religious School. If it becomes apparent that a child is not feeling well during school hours, every effort will be made to contact a parent/guardian. If this happens, please pick up your child as soon as possible. To minimize the spread of potentially contagious illnesses at Religious School please keep your child home until the child is fever-free for at least 24 hours without anti-fever medication. We will keep hand sanitizer in each classroom (under strict teacher supervision) and will encourage its use after coughing, sneezing, or nose-blowing.

No medication will be dispensed without the direct written permission of a parent/guardian. If a child needs prescribed medication during school hours, parents are expected to advise the Education Office and arrange to have the medication available.

If your child has a life-threatening allergy that requires the use of an epi-pen in the event of contact with the allergen, please make sure that you provide an epi-pen with clearly written instructions, in a Ziploc bag, clearly marked with your child's name. The epi-pen will be kept in the Religious School office.

Class Hours

Preschool (3 & 4 year olds)	Temple Beth-El	Sunday, 9:30 am – 11:00 am <i>(optional childcare 11:00-12:00)*</i> Beginning September 8
Beit Midrash • Includes Hebrew time for Grades 3-6 (Kindergarten – Grade 7)	Temple Beth-El	Sunday, 9:30 am – 12:00 noon Beginning September 8
Pre-Confirmation (Grade 8-9)	Temple Beth-El	Wednesday, 6:30-8:30 Beginning September 11
Confirmation (Grade 10)	Temple Beth-El	Wednesday, 6:30 pm – 8:30 pm Beginning September 11
Post-Confirmation (Grades 11-12)	Temple Beth-El	Sunday, 12:30-2:00 pm Beginning September 15
Wednesday Midweek Hebrew	Temple Beth-El	Wednesday, 4:30 – 6:00 pm Beginning September 11

*For families who have older children that will be picked up at noon.

Dates to Remember

Sunday, September 8 - First Day of Religious School

Wednesday, September 11 - First Day of Hebrew Classes

Sunday, November 3 - Consecration ceremony (K-2 first-year students)

Saturday, May 17 – Confirmation service (grade 10)

Sunday Drop Off and Pick Up

The covered entrance on the San Pedro side of our building is the entrance we use on Sundays. Our carpool line moves quickly, but we would love to have you come inside to say hello and enjoy *t'filah* when you drop off your students.

Preschool-Grade 2

Students should be dropped off and picked up at the classroom door, or meeting place, by a parent. For pick-up, a middle or high school-aged sibling may pick up a primary student, if arrangements have been made with the Religious School office.

Grades 3-7

Students may be dropped off via the carpool lane or by a parent or older sibling walking them inside. Students who are picked up via the carpool lane will wait until their ride pulls up to the door, so we know that every student gets home safely.

Wednesday - Hebrew School Drop Off and Pick Up

Drop off and pick up will be at the covered entrance on the San Pedro side of our building. If you need your student to be released early, come into the building, and sign them out. Sending a note or calling the Religious School office can expedite an early pick-up.

Eligibility for Religious School

The purpose of the Religious School of Temple Beth-El is to provide a Jewish religious education for Jewish children. A Jewish child is defined as the child of at least one Jewish parent who is being raised as a Jew and is not formally identified with any other religion.

If a child has no Jewish parents but is being raised as a Jew by a Jewish adult, a Conversion Certificate will be issued to him/her privately at the time of his/her Bar/Bat Mitzvah or Confirmation.

Synagogue membership is a prerequisite for registration in our Religious School.

In consideration of the developmental skills needed for a smooth adjustment to Religious School, **children Pre-K 3-year-olds must be age 3 by September 1st, Pre-K 4-year-olds must be age 4 by September 1st, and children entering Kindergarten must be age 5 by September 1st.**

Registration Fee

Annual Religious School registration fees are non-refundable after August 1 and include the costs of instruction, books, materials and supplies, special programs, and retreats.

NEW THIS YEAR! Fees increase after July 15th, \$25 per child. New members who join after July 15th will not be subject to fee increase.

In addition to Religious School classes and Hebrew studies, there is a separate *Bar/Bat Mitzvah* fee that is payable during the year of the *Bar/Bat Mitzvah*, which helps to offset a portion of the extra costs of tutoring and special services.

Scholarships

We are committed to providing for the Jewish Education of all our members' children, regardless of their ability to pay. Scholarship assistance will be available to all families with demonstrated need. Those families receiving scholarship assistance can demonstrate their commitment to the program by ensuring regular attendance (at least 50% of classes).

Scholarships are available for Religious School, Jewish camps experiences, and Israel programs. Participation in our Religious School program is a prerequisite for summer program scholarships.

All requests for scholarships should be submitted through your Shulcloud account. The deadline for applications for Religious School scholarship is June 1st and the deadline for summer programs is February 28th.

Enrichment Programs

We proudly offer several different enrichment programs which are part of our weekly schedule. Each is designed to expand and enrich your student's experiences in Jewish learning and living. Holiday assemblies, field trips, and Family Education programs and retreats round out our program.

Retreats

Jewish Education can happen almost anywhere, so we believe in bringing students out of the classroom as much as we can. Retreats help students build Jewish identity and help transform our community of peers into a community of friends. Our weekend retreat programs include time for recreation and social activities combined with prayer and the study of Judaism.

Mark your calendars as the 2nd-6th grade will be heading to Greene Family Camp the weekend of November 15-17, 2024.

With any questions about retreats, please contact the Religious School office.

Family TzEDek Days

Each of our classes has a unique opportunity to participate in a hands-on *mitzvah* project with organizations in the community. In the spirit of *tzedek tirdof*, pursuit of justice, and *tikkun olam*, repairing the world, you are invited to participate in our Family *TzEDek* Days. As families, you will meet the teachers and Ross Halfant, Temple's Director of Programming and Social Justice, at an assigned service site in or around San Antonio. This is instead of their regular Hebrew and Judaics classes at Temple.

Special Needs and/or Circumstances

Temple Beth-El is committed to meeting the individual needs of each student. If your child has a learning disability, medical condition, behavioral disability, or if there has been a special circumstance (birth, death, divorce) in your family, it may affect your student's learning experience. By informing our Religious School staff or clergy of your circumstances, you will enable us to help guide your student through Religious School in a manner that addresses their individual needs such that we can provide the best possible experience for the whole family.

***B'nai Mitzvah* Program**

Becoming *Bar/Bat Mitzvah* is a significant lifecycle event, shared by a student, family, and Temple community. Traditionally, a Jewish person becomes *Bar/Bat Mitzvah* at age 13, but we believe that this *simchah* (joyous event) should be available to anyone age 13 or older who wishes to study Jewish tradition and Hebrew and is willing to take on the commitments of our faith.

To qualify for our *B'nai Mitzvah* program, students should complete four years of Judaic and Hebrew education, including regular attendance during Sunday and mid-week classes and

enrollment through their *Bar/Bat Mitzvah* school year. In doing so, students will be able to decode Hebrew with a certain degree of proficiency.

Those who wish to become *Bar/Bat Mitzvah* and who, because of extenuating circumstances, are unable to participate in the traditional Hebrew program should reach out to Ellen (210-733-9135 x105, ebarshop@beth-elsa.org) for information on how to proceed. We will work with you to ensure your student can reach this milestone in his or her Jewish life.

A *B'nai Mitzvah Shabbaton* is scheduled for all students in Grade 6 and their parents. This is a chance for your family to meet with the clergy to understand the steps involved in our program from study to celebration, and discuss their feelings about preparing for and embracing life as a *Bar/Bat Mitzvah*.

Students Attending the Eleanor Kolitz Hebrew Language Academy

We are happy to welcome students who attend EKHLA to be part of our learning community at Temple as well. EKHLA students devote additional hours to Hebrew and are likely to have strong reading skills. As part of our *B'nei Mitzvah* program, they might be exempt on a case-by-case basis from attending Hebrew instruction, particularly during Grade 3. If you think your child might qualify for this exemption, please contact Ellen or the Religious School office.

Stay in Touch!

Director of Congregational Learning:

Phone:
Email:

Ellen Barshop

(210) 733-9135, ext. 105
ebarshop@beth-elsa.org

Education Administrator:

Phone:
Email:

Sara Planto

(210) 733-9135, ext. 108
sara@beth-elsa.org

- Please let us know when your child will be absent by calling the Religious School office or Sara at 210-733-9135 extension 108.
- If you are running late for pick up, please give us a call 210-733-9135 x108. Students will be waiting for you in the Religious School office.
- If your child has an allergy or other condition that might require medication during Religious School, please help us by making arrangements to keep those remedies on hand. If your child carries an Epi-Pen, please send that to school in a ziploc bag along with clearly written instructions including your child's name.
- If your child is being picked up by someone other than a parent, please let us know in advance so we can make sure your child has a safe way home. Students must be picked up by a known adult; we will not send home students in cabs or rideshares without a parent present.

- Please contact us in advance if your child needs to leave school early. In these circumstances, please plan to come inside to sign your child out. A staff member will get your child from the classroom.
- We are happy to have your child bring a friend to class. Please let us know in advance so that we are sure to have precautionary forms on hand for all our guests. This helps us keep everyone safe.
- To cut down on cell phone use in the classroom, we ask that you please use our office numbers to reach your students while they are in class.
- Be on the lookout for regular, grade-level updates of school happenings from Sara. Be sure to add sara@beth-elsa.org to your list of safe senders since these updates will be your main source of information about upcoming events.

A Final Note

We want you to feel comfortable and confident about your child's Jewish education. If you have any questions or concerns, please contact Ellen. We want to work with you to allay your concerns and provide the best possible experience for your entire family. Thank you for entrusting us with your child's religious education. We look forward to sharing this journey with you!