



**Congregation Shir Shalom
Religious School
Leslie Gottlieb, Director of Education
(203) 438-6589, Ridgefield, CT**

Religious School Handbook- 2019-20 School Year Forward

Teaching Torah, prayer, Hebrew, Jewish values, Israel, history and the rituals of our tradition throughout all grade levels-- in a fun engaging way-- is paramount at the Religious School. Working with our Rabbi, Cantor, teachers-- and all of you-- helps to create a special community in where every student at our school feels successful. We welcome new and returning students and their families to our shared home at Shir Shalom. It is here that new and special memories are waiting to be experienced!

Program Features & Policies

Student Arrival:

We ask that all students be ***dropped off*** at the front of the building for arrival but parents, guardians or family members are *most welcome* to escort students into the building. For our younger students, parents are encouraged to escort their children into the building and to their classrooms. We will greet students at the door every time school is in session.

On Sundays, Grades 2/3 will dismiss from the library at the conclusion of the morning service, at 10:45 am. Grades K/1 and 7 arrive at 10:15 am for the morning service.

At 10:45 am, our K/1 teacher will escort students upstairs for class after the service. These K/1-- and all students-- will be dismissed together at noon from the library; all parents/guardians will need to enter the building for dismissal

Student Dismissal/Wednesdays & Sundays:

For Sundays, teachers will escort students to the first floor dismissal area ***in the library*** near the main entrance when school ends each day. Teachers will use the same library area location for dismissal each week. **Parents need to park & enter the building for Sunday pick up.**

For Wednesdays, students can line up for dismissal at the door and the Director will help dismiss students one at a time to parents lined up in cars.

Roles of Student Mentors (Grades 9-12):

Mentors assist classroom teachers and are registered in a formal teacher training program that lasts for four years. These high school students will be assigned to your children's classes. Mentors will assist with classroom activities and work with individual students. Mentors will enhance the Religious School experience for students and these teens also provide role models for younger students. Mentors will often teach small groups of students and provide general assistance to the entire group for educational games, art projects, story reading, cooking-- and in other ways. Mentors are included in the lesson planning process. For their first year, Mentors

attend a weekly pedagogy class with the school director. Mentors, in their senior year of high school, may be chosen to work as co-teachers (full staff members).

Practically RS:

Children ages 2-5 (not yet enrolled in kindergarten) may participate with a parent in our monthly cultural program for little ones in order to welcome families to the Religious School before children are eligible for our regular class experience starting in grade K. Our annual flier indicates the dates the class will meet.

RS Parent Socials:

Join other RS parents once a month on Sunday at our socials for coffee, brunch and some great conversation while students are in the classrooms. The program lines up with our dismissal time so that attending becomes convenient, too!

Family Education:

Join us for grade-wide programs that help to teach students and parents together. These scheduled events can be found on our school calendar.

Student Leaders (Grades 9-12) & Volunteers (Grades 8-12):

Leaders and Volunteers work in classrooms, on special school events-- and help with projects and other educational programming.

Grade-Wide Oneg Shabbat/Grade Services:

Parents, students, families, teachers and mentors are all encouraged to attend the grade service for their student/s. Preparing for these services helps to enhance the school experience for students as members of the synagogue community. All service dates are listed on the school calendar. The teachers, Rabbi and Cantor will help to prepare students in advance for their participation.

We encourage all students to attend the Simchat Torah service in the fall (officially the Grade 7 service). Groups of students help read/sing special well-known sections of Torah that our teachers, Rabbi and Cantor help them to understand, in advance.

Security, Emergency Drills & Building Procedures:

There will be school drills for fire, lockdown and shelter-in-place much as students experience in their secular schools. Parents will need to use the intercom system during school hours if they need to enter the building during school hours. On most days school meets, we have a dedicated security officer who monitors the building.

Student Attendance:

Students are expected to attend their one-day-a-week K-6 class and are encouraged, in addition, to attend weekly Enrichment Day classes to enhance learning opportunities; the Enrichment Day can also be helpful if regular attendance on required days is compromised due to illness or a

family obligation. Parents should contact the Director to discuss individual needs of the family. Advance email notice is helpful for the school to know whom to expect for Enrichment classes so that instruction can be tailored specifically. Enrichment classes are organized to help students in Grads 4-6.

Grade 7 students are required to attend their two weekly classes-- on Wednesdays and Sundays. Individual B'nai Mitzvah tutoring schedules will be arranged for our 7th graders.

Snack:

We welcome students to bring in a healthy snack (no nuts, please) for school hours and individual teachers will designate a time or protocol for enjoying these treats. Please contact the school director or your child's teacher to arrange supplying a special class or grade-wide snack as many students have allergies that require consideration. For students with allergies, parents may consider storing safe items for consumption with the school director.

Allergies:

Registration forms should include essential allergy information and emergency contacts. If an Epi pen or other personal medication or items are required to keep nearby for a student, the school director will store these items safely. Your child's teaching staff and school director are happy to meet as a team with parents to review extraordinary medical requirements. Teachers will pay strict attention to allergy information provided for all students in their care.

Parents can provide written personal information that will ensure student success at all levels. This information, as well as the discussion of learning issues, is important for teachers to know—in advance of the start of school. Please arrange to meet with the school Director or the teachers of your children to discuss this confidential information before school begins-- or at any time the information becomes important to share.

Sanctuary/Services/Kippot:

Teachers will sit with their students during school services and help them to be actively engaged during the program. Freshly washed cotton kippot will be issued each time students use them. They will be washed and dried according to Health Department standards each time they are worn. These kippot will not be co-mingled with the synagogue's collection. A separate collection bag will be used at the conclusion of student services and washed ones will be issued each time boys and girls enter the sanctuary. Parents and family members *are always encouraged* to attend student services. Students may elect to bring and wear their own kippot. This practice of wearing kippot during school services reinforces the idea that the sanctuary is a very special place. No child will be forced to wear a kippot if there is a personal objection.

School Library:

Student books will be located in the school library in Room 1 on the second floor. Parents, teachers and students can access these materials before the start of classes and may elect to borrow books. Please sign them out with the school director.

School Office:

The School Office located on the second floor as you reach the top of the staircase.

Progress Reports & Student Assessments:

All students in Grades K-7 will receive progress reports twice during the school year: in January and May. Teachers will implement more regular assessments of students to help identify individual achievement for determined goals for all students. Individual student needs will *always* be considered. The Religious School is dedicated to teaching all learners in an inclusive way.

School Shabbat Service Recognition Program:

Students can use the Shabbat Box index card file at the entrance to the sanctuary on Friday evening Shabbat services to get credit for attendance at our synagogue. Just have your child hand his/her card to the clergy or staff at the conclusion of services. The school director will record attendance and parents can check in to see how many services are registered at any time. If students attend the same number of services at our synagogue as their grade level, they will qualify for recognition at the end of the school year.

Instructional Program:

The instructional program is designed to fully engage and challenge students at every grade level. Educational expectations for each grade level will be specific and lesson plans will consider the needs of all learners. Regularly held student assessments will be managed by teachers throughout the school year.

School Books/Texts:

Class sets of all book titles *will not always be issued* for permanent use. Many books are used in class only. Hebrew workbooks for grades K-6 will be issued to students. Please send students to school with a writing implement and notebook-- in addition to other books or materials required by individual teachers. Also, tzedakah (justice, literally—but think of it as a small charitable donation for school) is important and teachers collect this from students every time class meets. Replacement texts can be purchased if necessary.

Homework:

Teachers will often, but not always, assign short homework assignments or time-based online Hebrew review sessions in order to reinforce class lessons. Often, teachers will create study logs for students that will require a parent signature. Please email your child's teacher regularly if you need to discuss a homework issue. Teachers are very happy to regularly communicate with parents.

Technology:

The school owns many I pads that will be used for specialized group work to supplement instruction and add a sense of the modern world-- always with teacher supervision. Teachers may

ask students to use certain educational websites at home with parent oversight, too.

Behrmanhouse.com is a commonly used website that helps with Hebrew instruction at all levels and has a helpful audio component with adjustable speed settings for self-checking. Our website has helpful prayer recordings that can be useful, as well. Please help your children monitor their time using these sites if this is part of their homework.

Shekel Shop: (Student Incentive Program):

Students in Grades K-6 can shop at this student-run gift shop using teacher distributed shekel coupons that will be made available for you in September. Shekels are only good for a single school year. At dismissal time, the student-run gift shop will be open for approximately 15 minutes. It is located near the base of the steps in the built-in glass-door closet area.

Student of the Week:

This program is used to reward *acts of loving kindness* by students as witnessed by their peers, teachers, the Rabbi, Cantor and Director of Education during Religious School. One student will help identify another student worthy of this recognition. This honor will be exchanged from week to week. Occasionally, but not as a rule, students will be publicly recognized by their peers.

Arrival for Teachers/Parent Meetings:

Teachers arrive at school fifteen minutes before class begins and remain at the end of each session until a parent/guardian or carpool driver has met students. Arrival and dismissal times can be very busy; if parents need more personalized attention from teachers, please arrange a private meeting to discuss your child's success.

Class/Grade Parents:

Each grade will have at least one class or grade parent assigned to it to help plan events to reach out to grade families. Please feel free to communicate regularly with these parents.

Tzedakah:

Students should bring tzedakah (translation: *justice*) each time classes meet. Teachers will individually-- or with other teachers in the grade—coordinate a year-long tzedakah project that represents the collective interest of the students. The Director of Education will collect funds and over the course of the year allocations and presentations will be made to honor these organizations or individuals. Each class will have a receptacle in the class for students to use for donations. Lessons will regularly include classwork toward repairing the world (*tikkun olam*). The school will work in close coordination with the synagogue Social Action Chairs and Committee to program and plan events together.

Student Issues/Communication with Parents/Director of Education Involvement/Intervention:

Teachers will inform the Director of Education on a regular basis of all pertinent information about individual student progress and all issues of concern that arise (behavioral, educational, etc.) as early on as possible. It is preferred that parents and teachers have a strong ongoing

relationship and this is encouraged through regular teacher outreach and parent participation. It may become vital, however, to include the Director of Education in conversations that are considered important and delicate in nature in order to protect all partners in the relationship. As many of us live in the community in which we work, teachers will keep all student matters confidential and sacred--other than informing essential synagogue personnel including the Director of Education and Rabbi—of an ongoing issue.

Classroom & Room Set Up:

All students are expected to help keep their classrooms in an orderly condition with all chairs pushed in and all papers, books and garbage put away. Parents can help to reinforce this goal by discussing how the synagogue is the home to all of us and we need to share in the responsibility of maintaining its appearance and cleanliness.

Student/Teen/Adult Behavior:

It is the expectation that all students, teachers, Mentors, Leaders and synagogue personnel will maintain behaviors that reach toward the highest goals in terms of being respectful to all others. If there is a time when this rule is broken, or that a feeling of disrespect is perceived by anyone involved in the school, attention will be given to correct the situation in the most loving kind way. Parents will be included in the discussion if the problem appears to warrant that action-- and this will be determined by teachers and the Director of Education. By modeling strong respect for others from the top down, students will be encouraged to care for others-- as this school environment has as its strongest goal the mission to *repair the world*-- which starts in the home and at school.

Cell Phone Policy for Students:

Students are not permitted to use phones during school hours and if they are in possession of them for emergency purposes, devices need to be on *silent mode* so that classes are not disrupted. Students will be allowed to use their phones in the lobby area only—with permission. We greatly appreciate ongoing student and parent support with respect to this policy.

Registration:

All students need to be fully registered (forms and payment) by the opening day of school and families need to be members in good standing for participation in the Religious School. Forms are available on our temple website.

Family Education Dates:

Family programming dates on Sunday mornings, one per grade, are included to create a family learning time that connects teachers, students and their parents. Special lessons for these dates—and in some cases outside professionals are included to present a particular program-- will foster conversations and create projects that are intergenerational. Check the calendar for dates!

Youth Group:

The **BBYO** B'nai B'rith Youth Organization meets twice a month at Shir Shalom; this is a regional program. Information can be obtained through our office for meeting times, representatives, etc.

Field Trips:

Our older students go off-site for several important activities that include visiting: The Community Center of Northern Westchester in Katonah, NY, the Dorothy Day House in Danbury, CT, Laurel Ridge Nursing Home in Ridgefield, CT, the Museum of Jewish Heritage in NYC, the Religious Action Center (RAC) in Washington, D.C. and other locations. Some trips will require parent carpools and volunteers are greatly appreciated. Drivers will be asked for a copy of their license for insurance purposes.

Sandwiches for Service:

Students in all grades will be making sandwiches for the Dorothy Day House in Danbury, CT to drive home the message that feeding the hungry is a Jewish and humanitarian value—and that we can all do something to help. Check the school calendar for specific dates. On your child's date to prepare sandwiches, please send your student in with a pound of beef bologna and a loaf of whole wheat bread. We'll provide the mustard and sandwich bags! Thank you.

SAJE- Grades 8-12- Social Action as Jewish Education

It is especially important to run meaningful programs for our post-B'nai Mitzvah students and the SAJE program offers our older students a chance to work with teachers and clergy to enhance their understanding of topical, political and historical issues that affect them as global citizens and Jews. These discussion-based classes center around community service projects-- and provides a wonderful opportunity for students to voice their opinions and concerns in a safe, supportive and instructive atmosphere. Students are encouraged to attend the Religious Action Center (RAC) weekend in Washington, D.C. with our staff to further their interest in political and social justice areas.

Student Services:

Students attend services each time they are here for their regularly scheduled school meeting day of the week. Music features prominently in our school services. Families are always welcome to participate.

Special Events:

Parents are strongly encouraged to volunteer for all special events run by the school. Your ongoing active participation is always desired. Please contact your child's teachers and the Director of Education on a regular basis to get involved.

Instagram:

The Religious School has a new Instagram account: *shirshalomreligiousschool*. Please follow us at that address; we welcome you to send photos of your family doing all things Jewish! We would love for you to be part of this effort in order to make our school community even stronger.