

Committee on Religious School
Report to the Temple Israel Board of Trustees
Co-Presidents Jerrod Gross and Alan Siegel
Monday, September 9, 2019

The school year just beginning, but I have been hard at work on behalf of the Committee on Religious School. It's been an active summer.

The 2019-2020/5780 school year began yesterday, September 8th, with a fun and informative kick off celebration. After the learning service, sang folk songs in the social hall, while in the sanctuary Rabbi Howald and Student Cantor Benrey led a parent orientation introducing our new curricula and reviewing religious school expectations and policies. Each family received a folder including the newly revised school handbook. Then Student Cantor Benrey led the students, teachers, and parents in Israeli folk dancing. Finally, out to the lobby to taste test different varieties of honey and apples. It was a fun morning and a successful start to the school year. Many thanks to Rabbi Howald, Cantor Benrey, the Dr. Ronald Avis Foundation and Terry Baver and Brynn Biren, and my husband Brian Cortijo, for all of the support and help they provided.

Last academic year, The Committee on Religious School met several times. In our discussions, parent suggestions regarding the school had these dominant themes:

- Deepening knowledge and understanding of the Shabbat prayer services
- Needing more individuation and adaptation within religious school classes to accommodate students with different abilities and learning styles
- Making the curriculum and pedagogy exciting and fun, with project-based, experiential, and multi-sensory learning opportunities
- Improving teacher/parent communication regarding curriculum, goals, and student progress

I have communicated these goals and concerns to Rabbi Howald during the regular meetings and conversations we have had since last fall. In coordination with Rabbi Howald, I have read up on many religious school curricula and pedagogical approaches, with the goal of, as Rabbi Howald calls it, "raising the Bar." Last year and over this summer, I have been researching what other Reform and progressive Jewish congregational schools are doing to reach their educational goals and meet the needs of students and families.

I am thrilled to let you know that we have chosen innovative curricula for every grade that will help our religious school meet its educational goals, address parent concerns, and be more in sync with contemporary trends in part-time congregational schools.

Last May, we mentioned that this academic year, Kitah Gimel, our class for grades 5-7, would be adopted the *Hebrew in Harmony* curriculum. This innovative newly published curriculum teaches Hebrew through the music and language of the Shabbat liturgy, instilling in students a thorough understanding of the prayers, as well as familiarity and confidence with the liturgy which be invaluable preparation for b'nai mitzvah.

Due to our hard work over the summer, a new Judaic curriculum is ready to be initiated immediately, rather than in January as we had previously predicted. ShalomLearning's Jewish Values curriculum provides multimodal, interdisciplinary lesson plans for early childhood through seventh grade. Important Jewish values and ethics are taught using study of classic Jewish texts, prayers, modern children's literature, videos, activities and projects. This approach will make learning fun, while at the same time providing the multi-sensory and project-based learning opportunities our students' parents have been asking for.

Excitingly, the ShalomLearning curriculum schedules study of each particular value simultaneously for all levels. That means our families with more than one child in religious school will find that their children are each learning the same concept, but from different, age-appropriate perspectives. This will give our students and their families fuel for car/table talk, and give our Temple Israel community a common vocabulary of Jewish values.

Upcoming this month for the Committee on Religious School:

- Using SignUpGenius, we will be coordinating parent volunteers to assist Brooke Lopez each week in her early childhood class at religious school.
- Sunday, September 15th at 10:00am, following the religious school learning service, we will hold our first meeting of the school year.

Respectfully submitted,
Jennifer Cortijo
Chair, Committee on Religious School