

McHenry County Jewish Congregation

**Religious School
Handbook**

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Please keep this handbook for future reference for this year – and beyond.

Dear MCJC Families,

The MCJC Education Faculty has prepared this official MCJC Religious School Handbook for the current school year. Please read through this entire handbook so that you and your child will understand how our Religious School operates, what you can expect from the school, and what the school expects from students and parents.

As our congregation changes and adapts, so must the school. The MCJC Religious School is an integral part of the congregation, and as such is supported philosophically, physically, and financially by the congregation and its Board.

Please discuss this handbook with your child. If you have any questions, feel free to speak with her/his teacher or Rabbi Tom Samuels. We appreciate your support and cooperation in following the guidelines in this handbook.

May your family have a healthy, joy-filled, productive school year!

Respectfully,

The MCJC Religious School Faculty

and

Rabbi Tom Samuels
tsamuels123@gmail.com

I. Philosophy

McHenry County Jewish Congregation believes a comprehensive Jewish education for every child is essential if our children are to experience the values of Jewish life and concepts enthusiastically, and if they are to understand their Jewish heritage. We recognize that every family is different in terms of Jewish observance and background, and we don't assume any specific knowledge or experience level upon entry in the school.

II. Goals

At MCJC, we have four primary concerns in educating our children:

1. To have them be sincere, committed, and knowledgeable about Judaism;
2. To instill in them a sense of pride in who they are, and a feeling of responsibility for the continuation of our people;
3. To provide a loving and supportive atmosphere in which they can study their heritage;
4. To instill in them a feeling of community with other Jews in other times and places.

III. Educational Programs

The desire of MCJC is to make the religious school a place where knowledge and commitment to Judaism are important and where parents, students, and teachers all work together to instill a sense of community and caring. We offer the following formal and informal educational programs:

1. Religious School – Formal and Informal
 - Kindergarten, and Grade 1 on Sundays only
 - Grades 2 - 7 on Sundays and Wednesdays
 - Grades 8 – 11 Programming available, including *madrichim/madrichot*
2. Family
 - Family Holiday Programs during Sunday School
 - Bar/Bat Mitzvah Workshops for parents and students
 - Family Shabbat Programs
3. Adult - based on interest. Possible topics include:
 - Timely Holiday Workshops
 - Ethical dilemmas
 - Lunch & Learn Text Study
 - Adult Bar/Bat Mitzvah Instruction
 - Hebrew Literacy Instruction

IV. MCJC Religious School Staff and Course of Study

The Religious School utilizes multi-age classrooms. Why? A review of literature compiled by Heidi Mattern and Russell Yates in 1995 showed that in a meta-analysis, Professor Barbara Pavan reviewed 64 research studies on nongraded (multiage) schools. She found that 58% of those students in multiage classes performed better than their peers on measures of academic achievement. 33% performed as well as their peers, and only 9% did worse than their peers.

Pavan also found that students in multiage settings were more likely than their peers to have positive self-concepts, high self-esteem, and good attitudes toward school. Her review of the research also indicates that "underachieving" students also benefit from being in multiage classrooms. (This research summary can be found in the October 1992 issue of Educational Leadership, pp. 22-24).

Parents are often concerned that older children in a multiage setting will not benefit as much as younger children. Research shows, however, that when older students teach information and skills to their younger classmates, their academic performance, and even IQ scores, dramatically improve. The research of Arthur Whimbey (in his program, T.A.P.S: Talking About Problem Solving) also showed that when students were routinely given the opportunity to teach someone else, their scores on IQ assessments improved as much as eighteen points.

In summary,

- Problems associated with a yearly transition from one grade to another can be overcome. The teacher has a nucleus of children, trained in the details of the class organization, who keep it going while newcomers absorb it.
- As the student-teacher-parent relationship develops over a longer period of time, students will receive greater support for their success in school.
- Their program is not geared to the work of a single year, but can be adjusted over two or more years.
- Benefits come to the older children from the quality of leadership and responsibility they develop.
- Young children are stimulated intellectually by older children.
- Children have a broader social experience with increased opportunities to lead and to follow, to collaborate and to make stable peer relationships, which provides better community-building.

MCJC Staff & Curriculum

Kitah Gan/Alef (Kindergarten/First Grade).....Jenna Mussar
Shabbat, beginning Jewish literacy, Alef Bet letter recognition, Shabbat & holiday
brachot (blessings,) Jewish holidays, oral Hebrew vocabulary.

Kitah Bet/Gimel (Second/Third Grades).....Davina Kelly
Prayer, Blessings, Holidays, Israel, Alef Bet, Oral Hebrew vocabulary, Torah study,
Being a Mensch

Kitah Dalet/Hay (Fourth/Fifth Grades)...Rita Janowitz, Dara Turnball, Rabbi Tom
Dynamic Judaica modules to follow the cyclical Jewish calendar year, Hebrew study,
b'nai mitzvah preparation

Kitah Vav/Zayin (Sixth/Seventh Grades).. Rita Janowitz, Dara Turnball, Rabbi Tom
Dynamic Judaica modules to follow the cyclical Jewish calendar year, Hebrew study,
b'nai mitzvah preparation

Wednesday Faculty: Paula Eskoz, Davina Kelly, Rita Janowitz, Rachel Bailenson, and
Rabbi Tom.

Chai School (Grades 8-11).....Programming available, including *madrichim/madrichot*

Hebrew Language Computer Lab.....Rachel Bailenson, Supervisor
Students in Grades K-7 have the opportunity to use the Language Lab to enhance their
Hebrew learning. Computer games and activities, board games, flashcards, and other
educational supports are available for the students.

Music, Dance, Art, and Storytelling are very important elements in teaching our
children about their Jewish culture. MCJC is fortunate to have several guest teachers to
help in teaching these throughout the year.

V. Attendance

Please note our Religious School meeting times:

Wednesday: (Grades 2 - HS) 4:30 to 6:00 pm

Saturday: (Grades 5-7) See B'nai Mitzvah Manual

Sunday: (Grades Kindergarten – Chai School) - 9:15 am to 12 noon

Punctuality is extremely important in order to ensure safety and efficient use of class time. If a child needs to arrive early, the designated adult needs to remain with the child until school starts.

In the interest of safety, please bring your children to their classroom at the scheduled time. At pick-up times, children must remain in the building until picked up by a designated adult.

Children need to be picked up promptly.

Missing a day of religious school is the equivalent of missing a week of secular school. Therefore, your child's attendance on Sunday mornings and Wednesday afternoons is vital to his/her Jewish Education.

A. Sunday morning arrival schedule:

All students are to report to their classrooms at 9:15 am. Havdalah 9:30 – 9:45 for all grades and parents.

Adult Education will meet 11 - 12 am.

B. Wednesday afternoon schedule:

Students in Grades 2- Chai School report directly to the sanctuary at 4:30

If your child is ill, please call the synagogue (815-455-1810) and leave a message for his/her teacher prior to the beginning of class. Please email or otherwise notify the teacher in the event of a planned absence. Also, please ask his/her teacher what make-up work will be required.

If your child needs to leave early, please notify the teacher. Students will not be released early to wait outside for a parent. Please come inside to the classroom to pick up your child.

VI. Safety

The safety of our children is of utmost importance and in addition to safety drills, our safety procedures are routinely evaluated. All of our teachers and senior aides have undergone background checks and have been trained to be mandated reporters.

VII. Synagogue Worship Services

A. Shabbat:

Worship is an integral part of Jewish life, particularly on Shabbat and Jewish holidays. Students are taught why and how to worship, and are encouraged to attend Shabbat services frequently. Kabbalat Shabbat is Friday evenings with Veggie/Dairy Potluck Dinner.

On Saturday mornings, Shabbat services begin at 9:30 a.m..

Students of all ages are strongly encouraged to experience Shabbat at MCJC on Friday evenings and Saturday mornings

Throughout the year, each class is assigned a Shabbat service at which the students will lead specific prayers. The families of that class will provide either a meal or a special "Oneg Shabbat" after the service.

C. High Holy Days

Children's services are conducted at MCJC on the High Holy Days. A note or call from you to your child's secular school should be enough for his or her excused absence on the High Holy Days, or any time during the year when we have holiday observances during the week. If further explanation to the school is necessary, Rabbi Tom will be glad to help you.

D. Other Holidays

There are services at the synagogue for each of the major Jewish holidays. We encourage you to attend with your child as many holiday services as possible.

VIII. Appropriate Conduct and Discipline

A. Dress Code

In keeping with the sanctity of the synagogue, dress which is extreme, exhibitionist, torn, or of immodest fit and style to the extent that it interferes with the instructional process will not be allowed.

B. Head coverings other than kippot, such as baseball caps, are not acceptable.

C. Electronic Devices

Cell phones are to be turned off during class time. If a cell phone is used for any reason, including text messaging, taking photos or videos, making calls, or any other use during class, the phones will be confiscated and held in the school office. Students can pick up their cell phones from the office when school has finished. Hand-held electronic games, electronic tablets, etc. also must be turned off during school hours.

D. Behavior and Discipline

Students should remember that the school is within and a part of the synagogue, and should conduct themselves with appropriate respect and dignity.

We believe that students have the right to learn and teachers have the right to teach. We strive always to provide the best quality Jewish education for all our students. We appreciate students remembering that they are responsible for their own behavior. There are times when this educational process can become disrupted because a student is not behaving in an appropriate manner. The school needs the parents' cooperation and understanding in maintaining discipline.

The faculty has established the following procedure for discipline:

1. On the first day of school the teacher and students will discuss appropriate behavior in the classroom, in the sanctuary, and at school functions.
2. Teachers, parents, and students will read and discuss the Covenant of Conduct together on the first day of school.
3. If a student displays inappropriate behavior during school, the teacher will speak with the student and his/her parent.
4. If the student continues to behave inappropriately, breaking the Code of Conduct document, the student's parent will work with the staff to develop solutions that meet the needs of the student and MCJC school community.

IX. Learning Disabilities and Special Needs

In order for us to provide the best learning opportunities for our students, we ask parents to provide information about their children's learning styles, medication, disabilities, 504 Plan, and/or IEPs. The MCJC Religious School has a policy of inclusion for all students who seek a Jewish education. The Religious School and parents shall work together to determine the educational plan that will best meet the student's individual needs.

X. Family Participation & Parent Communication

We at MCJC strongly believe that religious education is a cooperative process involving both home and synagogue. As is true for all MCJC members, you will be asked to volunteer your time. We welcome the participation of Jewish and non-Jewish family members. To facilitate this process, we provide numerous opportunities in which families can participate.

1. Religious School:
 - A. In-classroom volunteering
 - B. Fundraising
 - C. Opening and Closing Day picnics
 - D. Holiday celebrations
 - E. Special activities/field trips

The success of our school program depends on our collective cooperative efforts. This is also a wonderful way to show your child that you value his/her Jewish education, as you yourself become involved in school activities.

2. Opening Day:

On the first Sunday morning of the school year, families will be invited to an Opening Day. This is an opportunity to meet the teachers, be introduced to your child's curriculum, and complete a volunteer opportunities worksheet.
3. Parent-Teacher Conferences:

We recognize the importance of regular school-home communication. We will arrange individual parent-teacher conferences in January. Please feel free to contact the teacher at any time throughout the year if you have any questions or concerns.
4. Community Education programs
Throughout the school year, the Religious School will hold special Community Education programs during Sunday School hours. These programs are open to all MCJC members, not just school families. Grandparents and other extended family members are welcome to attend. This is a wonderful opportunity for families to engage in shared Jewish learning.

Please note the dates on the calendar and plan to attend school with your child on those dates. **Students are required to attend regardless if family members can accompany them.** *Please make every effort to join your child.*

XI. Tzedakah program

Tzedakah is the Hebrew word for "Righteous Giving," and is one of the highest *mitzvot* in the Jewish tradition. The performance of this mitzvah is an important part of our curriculum on all levels. Our students are encouraged to contribute to the class tzedakah collection, which is then donated to various worthwhile organizations, about which they learn in their classes.

XII. Kashrut

Kashrut (following Jewish dietary laws, or "keeping kosher") is observed within the synagogue. If you wish to provide a special snack for a simcha, such as your child's birthday, or for a general snack, *items brought in must be veggie/dairy*. Please ask the rabbi or Ritual Committee Chair for guidance in this regard. Please check with your child's teacher about any allergies that may exist in the classroom. In addition, please consult with the office for specific guidelines about food usage in the synagogue facility.

XIII. Emergency Closings

In the event of school closing due to inclement weather notification of school closings will be sent via email, though phone calls and/or text messages can be made depending on your stated preference for school communication. **Please make sure we have your updated information.** MCJC school closings are rare, and are based on road conditions. Decisions to close Wednesday School will be made no later than 2:30 p.m., and Sunday School decisions will be made no later than 7:30 a.m.. Please check the website, email (mcjconline.org), or call the synagogue (815-455-1810) after those times if you think school might be cancelled and you are not sure. Parents will get a personal contact if school is closed.

XIV. Lost and Found

Are you or your children missing something? Check in the coatroom by the front door. Articles left unclaimed by the end of the school year will be donated to the needy.

XV. Visitors

If your child wishes to bring a visitor to the classroom, the permission of the teacher must be obtained ahead of time. Visitors are expected to follow all class rules.

XVI. School Calendar

The Calendar for the current Religious School year will be distributed separately.