

Temple Chai Religious School Philosophy

Students will experience Judaism in soulful and spiritual manner.

At Temple Chai, our students are given the opportunity not just to learn about Judaism, but to experience it through many different lenses. In order to foster a lifelong connection to Judaism, they are given chances to experience what Judaism feels like in their souls, what it looks like in their hands, what it tastes like, what it smells like, and what it sounds like. Our students “do Judaism.” It is not enough to learn about mitzvot. They are performing mitzvot. It is not enough to learn about what food we eat on holidays. They are preparing and eating the food. We do not assume that our students will open their hearts to Judaism simply because their parents do. The magic happens when students discover their Jewish identity within their own human identity. We facilitate this by providing them with learning opportunities that are experiential and that appeal to learners of all varieties. The learners, not the teachers nor the texts, are the center of our educational goals. We focus on hands-on discoveries, technology, and student-led discussions, not just in the lower grades, but with our older students as well. Experiencing the living, breathing culture of Judaism allows us to feed the souls of our students, not just their minds.

Students will develop a community with their peers.

In order to foster a Jewish community among our students, we give them ample opportunities to form friendships. We give them the chance to exchange ideas and share opinions. We focus on relationships, not just encounters. Students at Temple Chai are given a chance not just to learn side-by-side with their peers, but to learn from their peers. The forming of relationships is prioritized so our students connect to their Judaism in a way that is meaningful and lasting. Students are given the time, space, and structure to form relationships. Our classes are taught in a way that fosters friendships and socialization so their experiences here are relevant and valuable to them. We are proud to make Temple Chai a place where children have the opportunity and the guidance to build strong, lasting friendships. Along with teaching curriculum, teachers focus on lessons and activities that allow friendships to form. Although it follows many variant models, both structured and unstructured socialization time occurs every time we gather together.

Students will learn to read Hebrew and recite prayers that connect them both to the past and to Jewish people around the world.

By teaching our students to decode Hebrew letters and recite prayers and blessings in Hebrew, we are providing them with a link to their ancestors, to their community, and to future generations. In order to make this process successful and enjoyable for students, we begin to establish a strong Hebrew foundation in our 2nd and 3rd grade classrooms, teaching our young students who are eager and able to learn. Then, when our students reach 4th, 5th, and 6th grade they are more confident and our teachers are able to raise their expectations. Also, to help our students learn, we give them more independence and base their Hebrew studies on what their ability is as a Hebrew reader. They are encouraged to acquire their Hebrew knowledge at a pace that is comfortable and safe for them. Our Hebrew classrooms are student-centered places where learners are encouraged to work at their own pace at a level that suits them best. The classroom is a place where students can work and bond with their peers. Advanced readers and struggling readers alike work side-by-side on material that is appropriate for their level. Hebrew is a gateway into a deep, empowering, engaging modern and ancient culture and the more knowledge we give our students in this area, the stronger will be their bond to their culture and to Israel.