402 N Tioga Street Ithaca, NY 14850 | www.tbeithaca.org

Rabbi Felix Aber Religious School
Temple Beth-El

Family Handbook
2026-2027 Academic Year

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Welcome!

Dear Families,

It's a joy to welcome you to a new school year at the Rabbi Felix Aber Religious School!

At Temple Beth-El, we see Jewish learning as a dynamic, lifelong journey that connects each of us to our tradition, our community, and our personal sense of meaning. Our goal is to create a learning environment where students are both grounded in Jewish tradition and encouraged to bring their full selves into the classroom. We value curiosity, creativity, and the unique voice each child brings to their Jewish education.

Our curriculum is centered around deepening students' relationships with Jewish texts, *mitzvot*, and values. Across all grade levels, learners will explore the rhythms of Jewish life, grapple with big questions, and engage with Torah in ways that are relevant and resonant. Through art, music, movement, discussion, and play, students will have opportunities to think critically, build community, and form lasting connections with Jewish learning.

We see Religious School as not only a learning opportunity but also a space for our community's children to build their own relationships to Jewish community, to both their peers and their elders. Strong friendships and mentorships formed in Religious School can give our students the connections and support to navigate life with ties to a shared peoplehood and tradition.

Beyond the classroom, Temple Beth-El offers a host of programs such as Shabbat dinners, service-learning projects, and holiday celebrations where families can grow and celebrate together. We hope you'll join us in these joyful moments and find meaningful ways to be part of the wider Temple Beth-El community throughout the year.

Please take time to review this handbook carefully, as it contains important information about our policies, calendar, and expectations for the year. If you have any questions or would like to talk more about how we can support your family, don't hesitate to reach out.

Thank you for partnering with us in this sacred work. It's an honor to accompany your children as they learn, question, and grow. We look forward to a year filled with discovery, connection, and meaningful Jewish experiences.

Aitan Avgar
Interim Director of Education and Engagement
Email: director@tbeithaca.org
Phone: (607) 342-3370

Academic Calendar

Our religious school meets on **Sundays from 9:00 AM to 12:00 PM** (kindergarten through 7th grade) and on **Wednesdays from 4:00 PM – 6:00 PM** (2nd grade - 7th grade.)

The school calendar has a unique start this year! Wednesday sessions start on September 9th, while Sunday sessions start on October 18th. We encourage you to attend the Family Programs and Children's Services planned around the High Holidays this year ! This year *Shabbat BaBoker,* a Shabbat morning children's service will replace class services. Please see those dates below.

Important Dates

Friday, September 11	Erev Rosh Hashanah Se'udah
Saturday, September 12	Rosh Hashanah Children's Services
Saturday, September 13	Rosh Hashanah Children's Services
Wednesday, September 30	Sushi in the Sukkah
Monday, September 21	Yom Kippur Children's Services
Saturday, October 3	Torah Unrolling
Saturday, October 17	Shabbat BaBoker
Saturday, November 7	Shabbat BaBoker
Saturday, December 12	Shabbat BaBoker
Saturday, January 16	Shabbat BaBoker
Wednesday, January 20	All-School Tu BiShevat Seder
Sunday, January TBD	Tu BiShevat Field Trip
Saturday, February 6	Shabbat BaBoker
Saturday, March 13	Shabbat BaBoker
Sunday, March 21	Purim Carnival
Sunday, March 28	Field Trip to Jewish Cemetery
Saturday, April 17	Shabbat BaBoker
Sunday, April 18	Mini Mock Passover Seder
Saturday, May 15	Kitah Vav/Zayin Class Service
Sunday, May 16	Siyyum (End of Year Learning Celebration)

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2026 - 2027
RELIGIOUS SCHOOL CALENDAR

KEY

School in Session September 9-May 16
School Not in Session
Midrasha (8th-12th Grade) October 6-May 25

SEPTEMBER

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
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NOVEMBER

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APRIL

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The School Day

Daily Schedule

Classes are held on Sunday from 9:00 AM-12:00 PM for our K-7th grade students, with students in grades *Bet-Zayin* (2nd-7thgrade) also meeting on Wednesdays from 4:00 PM-6:00 PM. Barring any special circumstances, these are the daily schedules:

Sunday		**Wednesday**	
Time	**Activity**	**Time**	**Activity**
9:00 AM – 9:15 AM	*Ma'agal Boker*	2:00 PM – 4:00 PM	*Gesher*
9:15 AM – 10:10 AM	Judaics Period	4:00 PM – 4:15 PM	*Ma'agal Tzohorayim*
10:10 AM – 10:40 AM	*Avodah*	4:15 PM – 5:00 PM	Hebrew Period
10:40 AM – 11:25 AM	Hebrew Period	5:00 PM – 5:40 PM	Judaics Period
11:25 AM – 12:00 PM	*Tefillah*	5:40 PM – 6:00 PM	*Tefillah*

The daily schedule is designed to provide students with a balance of both formal instructional time and experiential learning opportunities that empower them to put their Jewish values and Hebrew language skills into practice. These experiential moments in the school day are:

Ma'agal Boker/Ma'agal Tzohoroyim: *Ma'agal Boker* (morning circle) and *Ma'agal Tzohorayim* (afternoon circle) will take place at the beginning of each school day in the social hall. These opening moments together serve as a time for the whole school community to gather as one to learn about upcoming Jewish holidays, sing Hebrew songs together, and engage in community-building and values-based activities. Additionally, some classes might use this time to present class projects to the rest of the school. Families are always welcome to join us for *Ma'agal Boker* and *Ma'agal Tzohorayim*!

***Avodah*:** *Avodah* can be translated as "work" or "worship." This time will be used to encourage students to feel invested in the synagogue as full members of our *kehillah*, our holy community. During Avodah, students will engage in projects led by our teachers and *madrichim* to take care of the Temple Beth-El grounds, building, and congregants. Some examples might include: helping organize books in the youth library, writing letters to community members who aren't feeling well, helping pack *mishloach manot* for Purim, and more. This time will cultivate a sense of ownership in our students while also giving them a chance to stretch their legs and get a bit of a "brain break" before their next class period. As we will periodically offer active or outdoor activities during *Avodah*, we ask that all students come to religious school dressed appropriately for the weather and in clothes they can easily move around in.

***Tefillah*:** The best way to learn the *tefillot*, or prayers, is to pray! Our learning services are led by Rabbi Brommer and are designed to help our students learn the rhythms and choreography of a synagogue service while also practicing the weekday prayers and learning their core themes. Our all-school *tefillah* (prayer service) will serve as a complement to the Hebrew curriculum, which is based largely around the Shabbat liturgy and *nusach*. Throughout the year as students gain familiarity with the foundational prayers of the service, they will be given opportunities to lead either as individuals or in small groups. Family members are encouraged to attend our school services and be *dugmaot*, or role models, for our students.

Nitzanim

Nitzanim, our monthly program for preschool students and their families, occurs one Sunday a month from 9:15 AM to 10:15 AM (*with the exception of our September session this year) in the Nitzanim classroom off of the social hall. Many Nitzanim students and families join the full school community for Ma'agal Boker at 9:00 AM, before spending time together in class with our Nitzanim educator. Families are welcome to stay in the space after 10: AM with their children to connect with one another, play, or read from a selection of Jewish-themed books. Nitzanim has rolling admission, so families are welcome to enroll at any point during the year once their child turns 3. The Nitzanim dates this year are:

Fall Semester	Spring Semester
September 30 (Sukkot)*	January 17 (Tu BiShevat)
October 18 (Shabbat)	February 7 (Gemilut Chasadim/ Loving Kindness)
November 15 (Ho'da'ah/Gratidude)	March 21 (Purim)
December 6 (Chanukah)	April 18 (Pesach)
	May 16 (Theme TBD)

*Please note: due to multiple holidays falling on Sundays throughout September, our September session will meet on Wednesday, 9/30 at 5:15 p.m. in the Nitzanim classroom. It will last approximately 45 minutes before moving to Pardes Hannah (the garden behind the shul) to join the Family Programming Sushi in the Sukkah event at 6:00 p.m.

Gesher

Gesher is a program offered to our second through seventh grade students who attend religious school on Wednesday afternoons. Gesher (bridge) provides students with after school care from 2:00 PM - 4:00 PM. Our Gesher staff member will meet students at the bus and escort them into the building before providing supervised care. Students may use this time to complete homework assignments, play Hebrew board games, make art projects, and more.

School Policies

Arrival & Dismissal

For both arrival and dismissal, students and their families should use the Tioga Street courtyard entrance. If students not enrolled in Gesher arrive more than five minutes before the beginning of the school day, a caregiver should escort them into the social hall and wait with them until school begins.

Students should also be picked up promptly at the end of the school day (12:00 PM on Sundays and 6:00 PM on Wednesdays.) For students in kindergarten through fourth grade, caregivers and other designated adults must enter the building and check children out with their teacher. Fifth through seventh grade students may exit the building themselves if their caregiver submits written and signed permission. Otherwise, they must also be checked out by their teacher with their caregiver or other designated adult present. Students not picked up by 12:15 PM on Sundays and 6:15 PM on Wednesdays will wait in the Youth Library, and a $35 late pickup fee may be charged to the family.

If at any point your student needs to be picked up early from religious school, please contact the Director of Education and Engagement in advance whenever possible to ensure that your child is ready for you when you arrive. For your child's safety, you must enter the building to sign your child out for early dismissal, even if your child otherwise has permission to self-dismiss.

Attendance

We expect families to treat religious school as a key commitment in their weekly schedule so students can fully engage and thrive. Regular attendance at religious school is essential to your child's Jewish education and personal development. Consistent participation helps students build strong Jewish identities, form meaningful connections with their classmates, and feel empowered and confident when engaging with material in class. Every class session builds upon the last, especially when it comes to Hebrew. Hebrew learning, like any language, requires regular, repeated practice. Students who attend religious school consistently are far more likely to feel confident and competent when reading Hebrew, participating in *tefillah* (prayer), and preparing for B'nai Mitzvah.

Equally important to regular class days are Shabbat BaBoker services, days of service, field trips, and school-wide holiday programs. These experiences are not just enrichment—they are core components of our curriculum. They provide students with the opportunity to live their learning and take ownership of their place in Jewish life. We expect every student to be present, not only in the classroom, but as an active participant in the vibrant, communal life that brings their education to life.

We understand that life can sometimes present challenges that make regular attendance difficult. If this is the case for your family, please reach out to Aitan directly. We can work together to find ways to support your child's Jewish learning at home, ensuring they remain connected to their education and the broader Temple Beth-El community.

If your child will be absent from religious school due to a planned event, arriving late, or needs to be picked up early, please inform Aitan in advance so we can plan accordingly.

Inclement Weather

In the event that school must be canceled on a Sunday due to inclement weather, families can be expected to be contacted on Remini and by email by 8:00 AM. On Wednesdays, if ICSD has canceled school, neither Gesher or religious school will be in session . In the event of a Wednesday cancellation, a message will be sent out on Remini and by email by 9:30 AM. Even when school is in session, we ask that you always use your best judgment in determining if the roads are safe enough to travel, and students should always wear weather-appropriate attire.

Inclusion

The Rabbi Felix Aber Religious School is an inclusive program and we serve students across multiple lines of difference. Our staff and faculty are committed to ensuring that religious school is a safe and affirming space for our students and that every child is given the tools to engage fully in their Jewish learning. All members of our school community are invited, but not required, to share their pronouns with the expectation that they will be honored and respected, and our curriculum emphasizes the values of egalitarianism and equality in Jewish ritual life.

To support all learners, every classroom is equipped with fidgets and clear guidelines for their use. Students are also encouraged to take regulatory breaks as needed to help them stay focused and engaged. If your child has an Individualized Education Program (IEP) or a 504 Accommodation Plan, or requires other specific accommodations, please let me know so we can work together to meet their needs effectively.

We recognize the importance of embracing the many different families that make up our community. Our curriculum and school activities are designed to reflect and respect the diverse traditions and experiences that our students bring with them, as well as the many more diverse traditions that exist throughout the Jewish world. We strive to create a learning environment where every student can explore their Jewish identity in ways that resonate with their personal and cultural experiences. There isn’t just one Jewish Story, and our curriculum reflects—and embraces—the diversity of the Jewish People.

Phones

Religious School is an opportunity for your students to do meaningful and joyful spiritual work together as a community. To foster an environment focused on learning, connection, and spiritual

growth and to ensure that students are able to fully engage with their educators and one another, teachers will be collecting cell phones at the beginning of each school day. Phones will be securely stored in designated areas in each classroom and will be returned to students at dismissal. If at any point you need to reach your child, please call or text Aitan at (607) 342-3370 and any urgent messages will be relayed promptly.

This policy is rooted in the Jewish values of *kavod*, respect, and building a *kehilah kedosha*, a sacred community. By removing the distraction of cell phones, we encourage students to engage respectfully with their teachers, peers, and the material being studied. If you have questions or concerns about this policy, please reach out to Aitan at director@tbeithaca.org.

Ritual Garments

At Temple Beth-El, we believe that ritual garments should be opportunities for Jewish engagement and identity-building, not barriers. All students, regardless of gender identity, are strongly encouraged to wear a *kippah* or other form of head covering such as a headband or hat throughout their time in the building. Extra *kippot* are always available for student use in the school office. Additionally, students who have reached the age of B'nei Mitzvah are expected to wear *tallit* and *tefillin* as appropriate during *tefillah* and class services.

Snack

Every school day, students will be served a nut-free, kosher snack. If students wish to bring extra snacks from home, these snacks must be self-contained, have an approved *hechsher* (kosher certification), and be nut-free.

Before sending an extra snack with your student, we ask that you contact your student's teacher to ensure there are no food sensitivities in the classroom. Please note that if snacks from home become a distraction in the classroom, our teachers might place limits on this privilege. For any students who need additional snacks during the school day for whatever reason, extras are always available in the school office.

We invite all families who are able to assist in the purchase of snacks for our religious school community. Families can sign up to purchase snacks through a sign-up sheet on Remini or by contacting Calle directly by email. All snacks must have an approved *hechsher*, and we prefer items that do not need to be refrigerated. Additionally, **all snacks must be nut-free**. We thank you in advance for your support in ensuring our school is allergen-safe.

Financial Aid

At Temple Beth-El, we are committed to ensuring that every child in our community has access to a quality Jewish education. We believe that finances should never be a barrier to participation in our religious school, and we are dedicated to supporting our families in a manner that upholds the dignity, privacy, and trust of all involved. Our approach to financial aid is rooted in the Jewish

values of *tzedakah* (righteous giving) and *kavod* (respect), reflecting our commitment to creating an inclusive and supportive community.

Temple Beth-El is committed to meeting the demonstrated financial needs of all families who seek assistance for their child's religious education. We recognize the sensitivity of financial matters and, therefore, do not require families to disclose financial documents such as tax returns or other sensitive personal information as part of the financial aid application process. Instead, we trust that the information provided by families in their requests will be sufficient for us to make informed decisions. Our aim is to make the financial aid process as accessible and respectful as possible, maintaining the highest standards of confidentiality and care.

To request financial aid or to learn more about the process, please do not hesitate to reach out to Aitan at director@tbeithaca.org.

Health & Well-Being

The health and safety of our students, staff, and families are of utmost importance. To ensure a healthy learning environment for everyone, we ask that you follow the guidelines below when determining whether to keep your child home from religious school due to illness. Please keep your child home if they exhibit any of the following symptoms:

- **Fever:** A temperature of 100.4°F (38°C) or higher. Your child should remain at home until they are fever-free for at least 24 hours without the use of fever-reducing medication.
- **Coughing or Shortness of Breath:** Persistent coughing, difficulty breathing, or other symptoms suggestive of respiratory illness. Please keep your child home until these symptoms have improved.
- **Sore Throat:** If your child has a sore throat, especially if accompanied by fever or swollen glands, they should stay home. They may return to school when symptoms improve and they are fever-free for 24 hours.
- **Vomiting or Diarrhea:** If your child has vomited or experienced diarrhea within the past 24 hours, they should remain at home until 24 hours after the last episode.
- **Rash:** Any unexplained rash, particularly if accompanied by fever or other symptoms, should be evaluated by a healthcare provider before your child returns to school.
- **Red or Irritated Eyes:** Eyes that are red, irritated, or have drainage could indicate conjunctivitis (pink eye). Keep your child home until they have been evaluated by a healthcare provider and are cleared to return to school.

Additionally, if your child has been diagnosed with a communicable disease (such as strep throat, influenza, chickenpox, or COVID-19), please inform the school office. This allows us to take appropriate steps to protect the health of other students and staff. Your child is ready to return to religious school when they are free of fever, vomiting, and diarrhea for at least 24 hours without the use of medication, symptoms such as coughing, sore throat, or rash have significantly improved, and they are well enough to participate fully in school activities.

To help prevent the spread of illness, please encourage your child to practice good hygiene, including frequent handwashing, covering their mouth and nose when coughing or sneezing, and avoiding close contact with others when feeling unwell.

We also recognize the importance of mental health in our students' overall well-being. If your child is experiencing significant stress, anxiety, or emotional distress, we encourage you to consider whether a day of rest at home might benefit them. We are committed to supporting the emotional health and safety of all our students, and we encourage open communication between Temple Beth-El staff and families about any mental health concerns. By following these guidelines, you help protect the health and well-being of our entire community.

Community *Brit* (Covenant)

It is the goal of the Rabbi Felix Aber Religious School to provide a safe, supportive learning environment in which all of our students can thrive and grow into their Jewish identities. While we emphasize classroom learning, there are additional goals of building a sacred community of learners through *kavod*, *chesed*, and *derech eretz* (respect, loving-kindness, and decency, literally "the way of the world"). Our educators are dedicated to treating all our students with compassion and respect, and we approach discipline issues in ways that preserve the dignity of our students.

Our guidelines for our students, families, and staff are grounded by a commitment to the basic respect due to all members of our community. We will only achieve our educational goals if there is mutual understanding and cooperation amongst educators, students, and caregivers. Our expectation is that students will treat their educators and classmates with kindness and consideration, putting Jewish values into action at all times. Effective learning results when students, educators, and caregivers are working together to implement these policies.

Expectations for Students

Each class will begin the school year by establishing a classroom *brit* (covenant) that will promote community-minded behavior. This *brit* will be completed through the mutual efforts of the educators and students in language appropriate for the developmental level of the students and will be posted in the classroom each week. Some of the expectations for students which may be identified in the *brit* are as follows:

- Keep your hands, feet, and objects to yourself
- Demonstrate respect for yourself, educators, classmates, property, and materials
- Follow all safety rules
- Work to the best of your ability
- Treat others respectfully and with kindness

In addition to the terms of each classroom *brit*, the Rabbi Felix Aber Religious School has established the following list of behaviors that will necessitate intervention:

- Disrespect of others, including both educators and fellow students
- Inappropriate physical contact of any kind among students or between a student and an educator
- Use of offensive or abusive language in class
- Defacing school or synagogue property of any kind
- Possession of illegal or inappropriate items (e.g. weapons, drugs, alcohol, tobacco products) of any kind on synagogue property
- Bullying. We greatly value our positive, inclusive, and caring learning environment. Bullying in all its forms, whether verbal, physical, or psychological, is unacceptable. We

encourage caregivers and students to speak with us at any time concerning bullying issues.

Expectations for Caregivers

All caregivers are expected to:

- Send their children to school ready to participate and learn
- Encourage *kavod* (respect) for educators and peers
- Cultivate positive and supportive attitudes about Judaism and Jewish learning
- Know school rules and help their children understand them
- Encourage their children to respect the Temple Beth-El building and staff
- Keep in touch with their children's educators and be aware of upcoming activities and events

Expectations for Educators

All educators are expected to:

- Maintain a climate of mutual respect and dignity, promoting confidence to learn
- Promote Jewish identity and love and appreciation for Jewish life and learning
- Know school policies and rules and enforce them in a fair and consistent manner
- Communicate regularly with students, caregivers, and Temple Beth-El staff concerning growth and achievement
- Use emails, phone numbers and addresses that are provided by caregivers for school-related purposes only

Addressing Disruptive Behaviors

The first instance of a violation of a classroom *brit* or of the behaviors listed above will be handled at the classroom level between the educator and the student(s) involved when possible, in consultation with the Director of Education and Engagement. In dealing with students, educators will display *kavod* (respect) for the student while providing the appropriate level of discipline for the situation, beginning with a warning.

Consequences will be administered after a child is reminded of the class rules more than once. These consequences will be handled in an appropriate manner, at the discretion of the educator and in consultation with the Director of Education and Engagement, including, but not limited to, any of the following means:

- Removal from the classroom so that the student can regroup and rejoin class for an appropriate time period as determined by the educator.

- The Director of Education and Engagement, the educator, or other members of the Temple Beth-El staff, speaking with the student to address the behavioral concerns.

- The creation of a personal *brit*, or covenant, between the student and the educator outlining specific expectations and agreed upon consequences.

- A phone call to caregivers during the school day; may require immediate pick-up from school.

- The Director of Education and Engagement arranging a conference with the caregiver(s) in order to discuss the student's behavior.

- The Director of Education and Engagement, the caregiver(s), and the educator developing an action plan for the student that will help improve the student's success within the classroom.

- Restricted activity or losing a privilege, such as attending a field trip.

- In situations resulting in damage to synagogue property, the family/student may be responsible for its restoration or replacement.

These community guidelines will ensure that the Rabbi Felix Aber Religious School is a safe, nurturing, and welcoming space for all our students. We thank you for your partnership in building this sacred community.

Curriculum

Judaic Studies

Throughout the course of the year, our vibrant *kehillah* (community) of learners will engage in meaningful conversations, participate in hands-on justice projects, and deepen their connections to the past, present, and future of Jewish life. All-school programs and special events will mark significant moments in the Jewish calendar, and our experiential portions of the school day will emphasize the value of *tikkun olam*. Each class will also focus on a particular theme, becoming experts on that aspect of Jewish life:

- Kitah Gan (Kindergarten): The primary goal of the Kitah Gan curriculum is to warmly welcome learners into our religious school community. Through art, stories, conversation, and movement, learners are introduced to Jewish life in a joyful and supportive environment that encourages curiosity and connection. Throughout the year, learners will explore core Jewish subjects with a focus on *mitzvot* and Torah. Kitah Gan helps set a strong foundation for our learners, empowering them to build confidence and enthusiasm for Jewish education, and to understand from the very beginning that being Jewish is meaningful, creative, and fun!

- Kitah Aleph (1st grade): In Kitah Aleph, learners continue shaping their Jewish identities by exploring the foundational elements of Jewish life, community, and language. They will learn how Jewish lives are shaped by unique rituals, values, and mitzvot, and begin to understand the responsibilities and joys of belonging to a community rooted in compassion, connection, and shared purpose. Through stories, creative projects, and hands-on practice, learners will explore their place in the local and global Jewish World while discovering how they personally contribute to Jewish communal life.

- In Kitah Bet (2nd grade), learners will explore how Jewish lives are marked by specific, uniquely Jewish rituals and practices, which contain both individual and communal *mitzvot*. Learners will understand how *mitzvot* enrich our lives by exploring both *mitzvot bein adam l'makom* (*mitzvot* between a person and God/the universe) and *mitzvot bein adam l'chaveiro* (*mitzvot* between a person and their fellow human beings). By examining *mitzvot* in both categories, students will come to understand how Judaism provides a spiritual and ethical framework for living with intention, compassion, and responsibility. Learners will also begin to explore the concept of Jewish Peoplehood and what it means to belong to a global and local Jewish community. They will reflect on their role in communal and ritual life, and begin to see themselves as active participants in the traditions and responsibilities that shape Jewish living.

- In Kitah Gimmel (3rd grade), learners study the Hebrew calendar over the course of the year, experiencing and examining significant moments in the Jewish year. Learners will

explore each Jewish holiday and its *mitzvot*, traditions, and customs through art, song, and other creative projects. Learners will also gain a familiarity with core liturgy, key Hebrew vocabulary, and Jewish texts associated with each holiday, beginning their introduction to rabbinic literature.

- The Kitah Dalet (4th grade) curriculum provides learners with a comprehensive introduction to the significant milestones and rituals that mark Jewish life. Learners will investigate how Jewish life cycle rituals and their liturgy have evolved over time. Learners will also examine how ritual serves as a reflection of communal values and identity, and how egalitarian communities can adapt traditional practices in meaningful and inclusive ways. Throughout the year, learners will be encouraged to think critically about the evolution of ritual, the balance between tradition and innovation, and their own role in shaping Jewish life today.

- In Kitah Hey (5th Grade), learners will explore the TaNaKh, with the goal of highlighting the complexity and continued relevance of the narratives and themes found within. Learners will approach the TaNaKh with a critical eye, analyzing and dissecting the text, and will feel empowered to ask questions of the TaNaKh, its themes, and its lessons through full class debates and creative group projects that will expose them to essential rabbinic questions, challenges, and commentaries. Through deep understanding, debate, and regular *chavruta* (partner) study of the text and its commentaries, learners will be able to construct a more thorough understanding of the TaNaKh and their relationship to it in preparation for their B'nei Mitzvah.

- Kitah Vav (6th grade) and Zayin (7th grade), In Temple Beth-El Ritual Lab, learners will explore the rituals, practices, and synagogue skills that enable meaningful participation in Jewish communal life. Through hands-on experiences, learners will investigate the origins, meanings, and purposes of Jewish rituals while developing practical competencies that prepare them to participate confidently in synagogue life. Learners will examine how rituals connect Jews across time and place, explore the diversity of Jewish practice, and build familiarity with the prayers, customs, and communal norms that shape Jewish life. Learners will engage in experiential learning, practice leading and participating in rituals, and reflect on how Jewish rituals shape identity, community, and belonging.
    - There are ten unit plans included in this curriculum, each including a selection of activities for the educator. Framing for each unit is pulled from *Teaching Tefillah*, *Teaching Mitzvot*, *Teaching Jewish Holidays*, and/or the Temple Beth-El website. Additional resources for specific activities may also be linked in the unit plan. The educator should plan to supplement unit plans with additional, original activities. Each unit will include these integrated components:
        - **Ritual exploration and discussion.** Learners will study the sources, practices, and meanings of the ritual through interactive activities.

        - **Practical ritual skills.** Every unit will include a defined set of concrete ritual skills connected to the ritual theme. Learners will practice these skills repeatedly so that they become familiar and comfortable with them.
        - **Historical inquiry.** Some units will include a history component that situates the ritual in the broader Jewish story.
    - This curriculum is at its best when families have the opportunity to engage with their students' learning. Three or four times during the year, plan to invite families into classroom projects and shared experiences. For example, families should be included before and while students immerse in the *mikveh* (Unit Five). Another possibility is inviting them to tie tzitzit with their child (Unit Three). The educator should consult with the Rabbi to identify meaningful family engagement opportunities aligned with the unit plans.

Hebrew

Our approach to Hebrew learning is designed to meet students where they are and support their growth toward confident, fluent reading of liturgical Hebrew and a deeper understanding of prayer. At the beginning of each school year, students will be assessed and placed into small groups based on their current skill level—whether they are learning the Hebrew letters for the first time, building decoding skills, or ready to focus on fluency, comprehension, and synagogue participation. These skill-based groups allow for individualized instruction, meaningful progress, and a supportive, engaging learning environment.

Students who are just beginning their Hebrew learning start with *Let's Discover Alef Bet,* which introduces the Hebrew letters through hands-on projects, engaging activities, and key vocabulary words. This program includes an at-home component to reinforce learning and create family connections to the Hebrew language.

Once students have a basic familiarity with the alef-bet, they move into *Kadimah*, which reinforces letter recognition, introduces Hebrew vowels, and builds early decoding skills. *Kadimah* strengthens foundational skills by reinforcing sound-symbol correspondence and guiding learners through decoding simple syllables and words. As decoding skills develop, students transition into the *Shalom U'vrachah* curriculum, which supports decoding fluency and print lettering. Students practice reading longer Hebrew words and begin to connect with key prayer vocabulary and Hebrew in ritual and cultural contexts.

Students who are comfortable decoding Hebrew and reading with fluency focus on liturgical Hebrew using *Hineni: The New Hebrew Through Prayer*. This curriculum supports students in reading directly from the siddur, translating key words and *shorashim* (grammatical roots), and understanding the structure, themes, and meaning of core prayers from Shabbat morning and evening services. In addition, these students begin their study of Torah trope (cantillation).

Throughout every stage of Hebrew learning, Hebrew Through Movement, Hebrew songs, and games are used to reinforce vocabulary, promote listening and comprehension skills, and create an active, meaningful connection to the Hebrew language. With regular practice and thoughtful, level-appropriate instruction, each student is supported in becoming a confident, fluent Hebrew reader who can engage meaningfully with Jewish prayer and tradition.

Shabbat BaBoker

We're trying something new this year! Once a month during the school year we will hold Shabbat BaBoker on Saturday morning! This experience can be likened to a "Junior Congregation" or "Kids' Service" experience but with our signature TBE flair! Shabbat BaBoker will begin at 10:30am with students helping to parade the Torah around the main sanctuary. Then students will head off with Aitan for Shabbat prayers and songs, as well as activities based on the week's *parsha* (Torah portion). By the time students come back upstairs, it will be time for them to help lead the end of the main service before we all head to the social hall for a special *kiddush* lunch! This is a fabulous way for students (and families) to get familiar with the rhythms of a Shabbat morning service, and build a wonderful community. We're excited to see you there! Below are ALL the dates for Shabbat BaBoker this year. Get them in your calendar now and...see you in *shul*!

- **Saturday, October 17, 2026**
- **Saturday, November 7, 2026**
- **Saturday, December 12, 2026**
- **Saturday, January 16, 2027**
- **Saturday, February 6, 2027**
- **Saturday, March 13, 2027**
- **Saturday, April 17, 2027**
- **Kitah Vav/Zayin Class Service: Saturday, May 15, 2027**

Field Trips

Over the course of the year, the entire religious school will be taking part in field trips across Ithaca to experience Jewish learning outside of the classroom. Families will be notified of field trips well in advance of scheduled trip dates, and each field trip will require a separate permission form to be signed by a guardian. Our field trips require support from our community to be successful, and caregivers are invited to become involved with their children’s experiences by

serving as chaperones. Trip times will occasionally differ slightly from customary arrival and/or dismissal times.

Family Engagement

Jewish education is a joint venture between the family, the synagogue, and the religious school. Caregivers are encouraged to become involved in as many ways as possible, including opportunities to:

- Participate in school-wide activities and in class-specific programs, including Shabbat BaBoker, our monthly Shabbat morning Junior Congregation.

- Volunteer at least once a year by chaperoning a field trip, helping a teacher with a special class project, sharing your own special talents with faculty and/or students, or assisting Calle in the office.

- Plan and attend class get-togethers for your child's classmates and their families as a member of our Social Committee.

- Model lifelong Jewish learning by attending programs for caregivers, taking or teaching an adult education class, and/or engaging in the family extension activities sent home by educators.

- Model active engagement in Jewish ritual! Involving your family in the ritual life of Temple Beth-El helps ensure students feel welcomed in the sanctuary and excited about exploring their own spirituality. Research in Jewish education and identity development consistently shows that children who attend services regularly, especially alongside their families, are more likely to develop a deep, lasting connection to Judaism. They are more comfortable participating in communal rituals, more confident in their Jewish knowledge, and more likely to see the synagogue as a spiritual home. **This year, we ask families with students in K-6th grade to commit to attending one ritual event at TBE a month, whether that be family Shabbat/holiday services or services in the sanctuary.** Seventh grade families should plan on attending at least one Friday evening and one Saturday morning service per month, as outlined in the B'nei Mitzvah Handbook. The Youth Library is always available during Shabbat services as a place for kids (and grown-ups!) to take a break, and kept stocked with snacks, fidgets, books, and games!

Remini

Much of the family communication for the religious school takes place over Remini (https://remini.me/site/). Remini is available as an iOS or Android app and can also be accessed on a desktop. Families can select to receive notifications by email, text, or in-app alerts.

- **Messaging:** Remini provides instant educator-caregiver communication via an in-app secure messaging system. Caregivers can also easily reach out to teachers and staff with any updates, questions, or concerns using the Remini app or website. Staff will also be about to send emergency messages or other time-sensitive announcements, with caregivers receiving notifications through text, email, and/or in-app alert.

- **Media Sharing:** Educators and staff can easily and securely share photos and videos from the school day with the entire school, specific classrooms, or individual families. Photos and videos will not be hosted outside of Remini's classroom platform, can be tagged to specific children only, and will only be accessible to enrolled families.

- **Student Profiles:** Each child's individual portfolio carries from one year to the next, ensuring that everything from fun photos to inclusion information is saved securely.

- **Forms:** Remini hosts permission forms and sign-up sheets that can be completed and signed digitally.

- **Calendar:** The calendar feature allows staff to create events for the entire school or specific classrooms. Remini will automatically send reminders to families prior to any event!

- **Stories:** At least once a month, classroom teachers will send a newsletter using the Story feature recapping what has been covered in class. These newsletters will often include discussion questions or other activities for you to complete at home with your children.

Families will receive invitations to log into Remini and create their profiles before the beginning of the school year. Additionally, a Remini Guide will be sent out alongside this Family Handbook outlining how to complete your child's profile and the key features of the platform. If you have any questions about Remini, please reach out to Aitan at director@tbeithaca.org.