

# Agudas Achim Religious School

## Parent Handbook

### **Welcome to Agudas Achim Religious School**

We are delighted to welcome you and your family to Agudas Achim Religious School! We look forward to partnering with you in creating a strong Jewish community in Iowa City.

Agudas Achim is a diverse community including people of various backgrounds, family structures, gender identities, and relationships to Judaism. At the school, we create a warm and cohesive community of children and adults. Outside of the synagogue, our children will often have the experience of being the only Jewish kid in a class. At Agudas Achim, they can feel secure in an environment that supports their exploration of Judaism.

In our educational program, our children learn and participate in Jewish culture, heritage, history, ethics, and liturgy so that our children can feel confident in a Jewish setting anywhere in the world.

### **Partnership with Parents**

Raising a Jewish child is the work of the entire community. Children learn best by doing and experiencing, so that all communal activities are an immersion in Jewish learning. In this sense, the child's experience with family and friends is just as important as the experience in a synagogue setting.

The congregation and the school offer support to families who wish to learn more about Judaism. There is a monthly *Havurah* (fellowship) potluck Shabbat dinner for families with young children. The rabbi offers a regular Introduction to Judaism course, and there are often child-friendly celebrations of holidays.

We also invite parents to partner with us in the education of all of our children.

Parents may volunteer at the school to teach a unit, provide appropriate ritual foods for the holidays, and by joining the Education Committee. Parents are warmly invited to join their children in the short service that is a regular feature of Hebrew School in addition to all school-sponsored special events. Every family's attendance at these events creates the community that supports all of our children and upholds their Judaism.

### **The School**

The school is divided into Sunday and weekday programs. The weekday program focuses on Hebrew and liturgy, while the Sunday program focuses on religion and

culture. But, of course, questions of culture and values will arise when we delve into the meaning of the liturgy. Prayer is part of the program on Sundays.

In addition, we offer an extra hour of Hebrew enrichment on Sundays from 12:00-1:00 for children ages nine and older.

Classes are typically taught by university students, although the principal, the rabbi, and members of the community also teach.

## **Sunday School**

Sundays begin with bagels, which give the students an opportunity to practice saying *Ha-Motzi*, the blessing over bread. We will be done with bagels by 10:15, so please bring your child on time so that she has a chance to eat.

The Sunday schedule may vary for special events. A typical day goes as follows:

10:00-10:10 Students assemble in class – bagels and warm-up activity  
10:15-10:30 Whole school in Sanctuary for *Hineh Ma-Tov* Time – prayers, songs, stories  
10:30-12:00 Class time with an optional 10-minute break  
12:00 Dismissal

### Sunday Hebrew Enrichment Hour, Ages Nine and Up

12:00-12:15 Snack in classrooms  
12:15-12:35 Vocabulary building through movement  
12:40-1:00 *Tefilah* (prayer) practice  
1:00 Dismissal

## **Hebrew School**

Hebrew School meets Mondays and Wednesday from 4:15 – 6:15. In Hebrew School, students learn to understand the key vocabulary in prayers, to understand prayers holistically, and to sing, chant, and lead prayers. Once this foundation is in place, students learn to read Hebrew.

A typical Hebrew School schedule is as follows:

4:15-4:30 Students assemble in the Social Hall for snack and say *Birkat* (blessing after meals)  
4:30-5:15 Class  
5:15-5:30 Break  
5:30-6:00 Class  
6:00-6:15 Students and rabbi lead short service in Sanctuary

This short service is open to anyone. Members of the community sometimes attend.

Parents are warmly invited to attend the short service at the end of the day.  
Students love seeing their parents in the service because their parents' presence demonstrates support for their hard work.

## **Post-B'nei Mitzvah**

People who have had a bar or bat mitzvah at Agudas Achim *and who have attended the school* are invited to apply for jobs as *madrichim* (guides) assisting the teachers and the principal in the Sunday School and Hebrew School.

## **Sharing Jewish Culture:**

There are many ways to engage with Jewish culture outside of the synagogue. Kids may experience Jewish culture through summer camps, movies, books, plays, museums, art, restaurants, and concerts, to name only a few possibilities.

If your child has had a Jewish cultural experience, please share! Ask your child to recommend the experience to other kids by filling out a short form. Or fill the form out for your child. We will publish the students' recommendation by grade on the synagogue's website or Facebook page.

## **Jewish Camps**

Camps offer a lively and immersive experience of Jewish culture. For many children, this experience is transformative, creating deep connection to Judaism and fostering friendships that last a lifetime.

Representatives of a number of camps make presentations at the school during the year. Parents will receive an email notifying them of a visit.

The synagogue and the Jewish Federation offer some financial assistance to support students who wish to attend camp. Inquire at the synagogue office for more information.

## **Weather and Security Policy**

The outer doors to the synagogue are kept locked at all times. Someone in the office will buzz students in. Please escort children into the building, especially if they come late. Likewise, please come into the building to pick children up.

If someone who is not a parent will pick a child up, please contact the principal in advance.

If the public schools are closed or delayed because of snow or ice, the Hebrew School is closed. In that event, the principal will send an email to all parents no later than 3:30.

If the public schools have delayed opening or early dismissal because of extreme cold or heat, but there is no precipitation, the Hebrew School will meet as usual.

If there is snow or a forecast of snow on Sunday, the school will be closed. The principal will email all parents no later than 9:00 am.

In the event of a tornado or a tornado watch during school hours, the students will take shelter in the basement. The principal will remain with the students until the last one is picked up. Parents should not take any unnecessary risks trying to reach the synagogue for pick up.

### **Contacting the Principal**

The principal is available for conversations by appointment. She will make every effort to accommodate your schedule. To make an appointment email:

[Principal@AgudasAchimIC.org](mailto:Principal@AgudasAchimIC.org).

The principal is usually also available for short, impromptu conversations on Sundays after 10:30 and on Mondays and Wednesdays after 4:30, unless she is engaged in teaching a class.