

Frequently Asked Question about Kehila JCDS

1. What's the advantage of sending my child to a Jewish Day School vs. public school?

Our school's philosophy is rooted in a strong commitment to developing Jewish values and identity. Our students and their families grow to feel a strong connection to the school and to their Judaism. It happens as a natural part of life, a component of everyday learning and growing, without the need for supplemental Jewish education.

2. What makes your school unique?

Kehila Jewish Day schools offers a curriculum and program which is special and unique. Our combination of high academic standards, integrated Judaic and general studies curriculum, arts focus, frequent field trips and progressive materials and approach to education distinguishes us. Our low teacher to student ratio affords our teachers the opportunities to provide a more customized and personal learning experience, thus addressing each student's strengths and weaknesses in a more comprehensive manner.

3. What does 'academic excellence' mean?

Kehila Jewish Community Day School maintains the highest academic standards. It is our mandate to build upon and surpass the core skills outlined in the Ontario Ministry of Education and Training guidelines. Critical thinking skills are woven through all aspects of curriculum development and delivery. We provide a solid foundation in Hebrew language studies and integrate Judaic studies into both Hebrew and Core programs. The school recognizes and addresses a broad spectrum of learning styles, Jewish practice and individual needs, enabling children to grow and flourish. Our school provides an environment where children love to learn, are engaged in their learning, think critically, work both independently and cooperatively, and approach tasks creatively.

4. What is an integrated curriculum?

Kehila Jewish Community Day School is an exciting place to learn. Our approach to instruction through integrated units allow us to provide meaningful learning experiences while ensuring children develop essential skills. We are able to offer our students a broad foundation of knowledge, leading to an understanding of relationships amongst concepts. Resources go beyond textbooks, to include a wide range of books, speakers, and community connections. An integrated classroom is a place where meaningful, interdisciplinary connections are made and experiential learning is encouraged. This offers the students the opportunity to discover what it is they already know about the topic, what they might be interested in learning, and where to look for the answers to their questions.

With the development of our Global Education program we have connected our students to the needs and concerns of the whole world, integrating our Tikkun Olam and Social Studies curriculum to incorporate an understanding of global issues and what our school can do to help repair our world.

5. Do you do formal assessments and tests?

We administer the Canadian Achievement Test (CAT) from Grade 1 up to assess student achievement in Math and Language Arts. Depending on the grade level, students do have spelling tests, math tests and end of unit tests in Science and Social Studies.

6. How do you foster critical thinking skills?

Our students are encouraged to constantly question what they are learning and experiencing in school. They learn to use past experiences and apply them to new knowledge. They are taught not to take things for granted. Problem solving strategies are taught throughout the curriculum.

7. What is 'art-enhanced'?

Our arts enhanced curriculum encourages creative expression as a tool for learning. Our teachers create opportunities for students to explore subject areas through music, drama, visual arts and dance. In addition to the integration of arts by our classroom teachers, our music and art specialists facilitate hands on learning opportunities, further enriching our curriculum. Trips to museums, art galleries, theaters, concerts and festivals highlight the relevance of arts and culture (locally and globally) in the lives of our students.

8. How much Hebrew language instruction do the students receive?

One and a half hours per day is devoted to Hebrew language study. The children learn to read, write and speak in Hebrew using the Tal Am Program.

9. How religious is the school?

We are a non-affiliated, pluralistic Jewish day school, welcoming students and their families from a spectrum of Jewish affiliation and observance. We believe that a positive Jewish identity emerges from a deep knowledge of tradition, values and history. By integrating Jewish content into all aspects of our students' learning experience, we foster in them an appreciation of their heritage and the rich fabric of Jewish life. We enjoy celebrating all Jewish holidays throughout the year, including Shabbat each Friday and a monthly Rosh Chodesh. We engender a love, knowledge and appreciation of prayer, striving to create meaningful and personal connects for our students.

10. When my child leaves, will he or she be able to fit into another Jewish or non-Jewish day school?

Given our integrated curriculum and high academic standards, Kehila JCDS prepares students for success at any school they choose to attend. Our students do not have trouble fitting in elsewhere and are successful through these transitions.

11. How can I get involved as a parent?

We encourage parents to become involved in their child's education by helping their child with homework, attending school functions and communicating with the teachers. Above and beyond this, many of our parents volunteer in the school. From chaperoning field trips to volunteering on a committee, there are many ways parents can be involved in the school and we welcome this. Some of our parents have said that when they enrolled their child in a school, little did they know that they were becoming part of a community. Parent involvement, although optional, is a defining aspect of the school community.

12. How would you describe your school community?

Our school community is built around the concept of Tikkun Olam, the imperative to repair the world. By stressing fundamental Jewish values regarding our responsibility to ourselves, our community (locally and globally) and the earth, we inspire students to become responsible citizens and leaders of their generation. Students learn responsibility for the broader community through the weekly Shabbat tzedakah program and through hands-on experience assisting others at Shalom Village, and within communities less fortunate than our own. Our students have supported organizations such as the United Jewish Appeal, Jewish Social Services, CODE – Project Love, Pencils for Kenya project, Sechafim School in Israel, and Connections Israel – Adopt a Soldier program. A love for Israel is encouraged through academic program, art projects, social action and community event participation.

13. What is the plan for the school's growth in the next few years?

Over the next few years we will be adding a grade each year into our Middle School – ultimately realizing our vision of a Kindergarten to Grade 8 program. Our new Grade 5/6 Middle School welcomes students with or without prior Jewish day school education. Currently, our school offers a blended Kindergarten (JK/SK) to Grade 6 curriculum and all of our classrooms are split leveled. Our location at Temple Anshe Sholom is temporary, and we are hopeful that soon our vision of our own building, with a gym, a playground and science lab facilities will come to fruition. Our excellent reputation in our growing community and our connection with the Berlin School of Excellence has helped us grow and we look forward to building on our successes in the future.

14. What is a blended Kindergarten program?

Blended programs are different from “split-grade” programs because there is only one curriculum taught. Kehila Jewish Community Day School has designed a Kindergarten curriculum based on the Ministry document, “The Kindergarten Program”. Our document follows the design of this two year continuum, providing for a range of developmental abilities as students begin school. Using a blended JK/SK model builds on student strengths and diversities. Having the same teacher for two years, wherever possible, reduces the stress of school entry and fosters a feeling of extended family and community. Blending Kindergarten is not a new idea. Many Ontario schools have had blended JK/SK classes for years. Using a blended approach facilitates consistent classroom management from year to year. At the start of each school year only a portion of the class will be new members. The seasoned Kindergarten students will benefit from their leadership role as they model for the newest students.

15. What is the difference between a "blended classroom" and a "split grade" classroom?

The program in a “blended” classroom is based on one curriculum, whereas a “split grade” classroom involves teaching two separate curricula to two different grades in the same classroom.

16. How will blending JK/SK benefit my child?

Current research supports children of different ages learning together. Having an accepted range of levels in the class allows for children's development. (Theilheimer 1993)

A child's age is not an accurate indicator of his/her ability (Katz 1992). At four, most children are just developing their ability to distinguish the sounds heard in spoken language (phonemic awareness). Some five year olds, on the other hand, may need continued practice in this area to gain competence. By creating a dual-aged learning group we increase every child's appreciation and acceptance of learning differences. By mixing the range of abilities, more opportunities for cooperative learning, student collaboration and leadership are created. (Anderson and Pavan 1993 and Katz, Evangelou and Hartman 1990).

All students will have the benefit of flexible academic groups which will allow for continued practice, skill consolidation and extension. There will be JKs needing extension activities, as there will be SKs who need extra practice. Learning opportunities are structured to provide interactive activities for whole group, small group, partners and independent learning.

17. **Will the progress of SK students be hindered by the JK students?**

Most teachers and parents perceive that Junior Kindergarten students benefit from being the younger group in a blended JK/SK classroom. Researchers have demonstrated that there are important benefits for the older student as well.

- **Teaching/Learning Style** – The teaching style in a blended classroom centres around instructional groupings of students according to their developmental needs. Teachers choose learning activities that are focused and purposeful. These activities are flexible for all children because of the variety of tasks and their multi-level nature.
- **Metacognition** – Explaining “how” or “why” is a learning opportunity for both the child learning and the child explaining. The process of explaining a concept to another classmate reinforces the learning in the more experienced student’s mind. It requires the “expert” student to synthesize, organize and communicate his/her learnings. For example, imagine an SK student has been given the job of demonstrating to a JK student how he/she knows that the number 4 is less than the number 7. This requires the student to use words and concrete examples. The process of explaining reinforces the concept in the mind of the SK child. The exercise becomes an oral math journal, as the child thinks through and verbalizes the problem-solving process.
- **Reading Practice** – Paired reading is another example of an activity that benefits both the JK and SK child. Imagine the more senior student reading a familiar book to a more junior classmate. While the younger child benefits from observing reading behaviours, the older one practises skills and grows in confidence.
- **Behaviour** – Senior Kindergarten children have many opportunities to learn and practice social skills in their interactions with their younger classmates. Lifelong skills such as sharing, helping, turn taking and leadership are developed every day. The high energy, less academically interested SK student will still have a chance to shine as he/she shows a younger classmate how to hang up a jacket or locate a library book in a backpack. Helping in this manner gives the older child focus and the resulting sense of achievement can help strengthen self-confidence and improve behaviour.