

“Shabbat Shalom”

Beth Shalom’s New Shabbat School & Community Program

What is this new Shabbat-centered program about?

We are working to enrich our children’s Jewish education and our Jewish communal lives by sharing joyful, meaningful, and consistent Shabbat experiences.

What does this mean for the religious school?

Our new model means that students will attend religious school on Shabbat (Saturday) instead of Sunday. They will also attend one additional day during the week to study more of Hebrew, holidays, and Jewish lifecycles (K-1 will have a weekday option).

Why are we doing this?

We want to deliver a curriculum that is more powerfully rooted in our core values of Torah, Tefillah (prayer), community. After many months of research and discussion we are confident that our community is ready for Shabbat.

What will the students learn?

In our new spiral Torah curriculum, students will revisit the annual Torah cycle on a higher level each year. Student will also develop more in-depth knowledge and familiarity with the Shabbat morning service. The weekly rhythm of Shabbat’s intergenerational ritual and study will become deeply imprinted in their Jewish memory.

What will students do?

Students will actively participate and learn the Shabbat morning service and the weekly Torah portion in age-appropriate groups and through games and activities. Different grades will participate and/or lead various parts of the main service. At noon, they will come together with their parents and the whole congregation to actively participate in Kiddush.

What will parents and other adults get out of it?

After morning circle, parents will be able to join the adult service, the family service, study Torah with our rabbis, nosh and schmooze with a friend over a cup of coffee in the garden, and close the morning with more schmooze, nosh, and song at our community-wide Kiddush.

Why Shabbat? What’s wrong with Sunday?

Shabbat is the center of Jewish life and to our synagogue’s stated core values. Yet, our current model essentially forces families to choose between Sunday school and Shabbat. As a result, most of our students currently are unfamiliar with the Shabbat morning service when they begin their B’nai Mitzvah studies, and unfamiliar with the life, faces and cadence of our broader community.

What will a student be able to do by their Bar/Bat Mitzvah year?

- Lead and understand the core of the Shabbat and weekday morning services
- Lead the Torah service including blessings for aliyat haTorah and Haftarah
- Prepare and deliver a D'var Torah (sermon) from traditional Jewish sources
- Lay tefillin and wrap tallit
- Read and write Hebrew fluently

What will change?

The 2nd grade will begin attending one weekday. Students will learn Torah via a spiral curriculum (studying each week's portion) instead of a linear curriculum (move to a different chapter each year). Finally, we'll have a much more consistent schedule – Shabbat happens every week – and we won't cancel or change that even for special holiday events.

What if my child has sports events on Saturday?

Sports events on Saturday are a reality of life in our city. Our more consistent/predictable curriculum will make attendance disruptions less of a problem, and our Rabbis are prepared to work with families to work out acceptable arrangements.

What if I don't want to be here with my child?

While our program is designed for all age groups, and our ideal is to have the entire family attend we understand that this is not always possible. We encourage parents to attend the whole program, but if that's not possible, we ask you to at least join us for morning circle at 9:30 and Kiddush at noon.

Is there a similar program anywhere else?

Yes. Many Conservative synagogues have already made the switch to a Shabbat-centered program, including local synagogues like Congregation Kol Emeth in Palo Alto; Congregation Netivot Shalom in Berkeley; and Ikar in Los Angeles. We've spoken to and visited these congregations. They've all shared valuable information with us along with the certainty that they would never return to a Sunday school model.

Have we ever done anything like this?

Yes! This year many of you participated in the Ten Commandments of Community "Thou Shalt Pun" Shabbat morning experience. Parents and children raved about how magical and fun that day was and how much they learned. In our on-line survey one parent wrote, "It was great to see so many congregants of all ages there." Another parent wrote, "My son's never enjoyed a Shabbat at Beth Sholom more than this. THANK YOU THANK YOU THANK YOU!!!!"

YOU'RE INVITED!!!

Please contact our new Program Coordinator and School Administrative Assistant Marnie Krell mkrell@bethsholomsf.org to set up an appointment with Rabbi Philmus and develop an education plan for your unique child.