

Sunday, May 19 was the last day of Temple Emanu-El Religious School classes for 5779. We celebrated our religious school teachers, faculty assistants, substitute teachers and students. We are so grateful to all of them, for their energy, enthusiasm and commitment all year long. We feel good about all that we accomplished together. We also appreciate the support that school parents gave to us during the year.

Many of the staff members, including the two of us, were new in our roles this year. We also welcomed 8 new students this year, who represented a 14% increase in our student population. It required a lot of willingness on everyone's part, to jump into the unknown, to be flexible, to learn to ask for help, to tap into resources around us, to live with the discomfort of not always knowing all the answers right away and to simply trust our instincts on the spot.

After special presentations to the staff, we continued the tradition of recognizing perfect and excellent attendance among our students (as we know, successful learning and good attendance go hand in hand). We enjoyed a lovely barbecue picnic outside on the grass and the first row of parking spots, which we closed. Staff, parents and children enjoyed socializing and playing basketball, frisbee, badminton, ladder ball, sidewalk chalk and even soccer volleying. Many thanks to Brotherhood members Jonathan Rowe, Scott Zettler, Mike Reinhard and Geoff Hausmann and the faculty assistants and parents who helped with set up and clean up. Even the weather cooperated. It was a perfect way to cap a great year.

This year, we introduced some new things such as the tzedakah song during morning greetings, additional school security procedures and monthly family events to encourage more community interactions such as the Family Bingo Night, our two Havdalah pajama movie nights and the Basket Bonanza Sock Hop.

We reconfigured mid-week Hebrew classes so that they could practice Hebrew reading skills, including practicing Hebrew prayers and learning new modern Hebrew vocabulary or expressions. They also enjoyed learning some modern Hebrew through movement activities, such as when they made Israeli salad with Roy while learning the names of the ingredients and action games in the social hall.

More recently, to honor our beloved teacher Terri Goldsmith, the students planted pink lily bulbs in the garden along the walkway to the school atrium doors. Those will bloom beautifully next year among the daffodils that the students planted previously in that garden in honor of the Holocaust children on Yom Hashoah. This year, they also planted gladiola bulbs along the fence in front of the Noah's Ark playground as part of the Yom Hashoah assembly activity.

The children practiced Mitzvot through action and tzedakah. Students helped to honor school parents and Temple members who served the armed forces at a special Veteran's Day assembly. They donated toys to families in need at Chanukah. They put together Mishloach Manot bags filled with toiletries and snacks, which were donated to

Safe Futures (benefits victims of domestic violence) at Purim. And at the end of the school year, the children voted to donate a total of \$750 in tzedakah that they collected all year to three local non-profit organizations: Safe Futures, High Hopes Therapeutic Riding (benefits people with disabilities) and the New London Meal Center.

We appreciate all of the positive and constructive feedback we have been receiving from parents with the school survey. If you haven't yet submitted your survey response, please send it in. We are sharing results with the Religious School Committee so that we as a team can continue to work together to improve the school to address the needs and concerns of our students and their families.

Many thanks again for the consistent support of Rabbi Ekstrand and Sherry Barnes, the Religious School Committee, all of our dedicated teachers, faculty assistants, and substitute teachers, and all of our room parents who volunteered their time and energy whenever called upon. We hope you will all return in your roles next year.

We also give our special thanks to our amazing Young Israeli Emissaries Liron and Roy for the fantastic ideas and creative lessons which they brought to life for our students all year long. We wish them all the best as they return to Israel to embark on their next chapters.

Religious School parents will soon receive their 5780 school registration packets with their Temple membership packets. Please fill out that paperwork and submit it at your earliest convenience so we can plan for the school staffing and resources accordingly.

Wishing you all a great summer!

Armi and Jennifer
Co-Administrators
Temple Emanu-El Religious School