Welcome to JCDS
Middle School Curriculum Overview

Introduction
At JCDS, we:

- Honor the uniqueness of each of our students and nurture them as they develop and navigate adolescence
- Recognize that central to our students' curiosity, emotional well-being and acquisition of 21st century skills, is an environment of derekh eretz (respect), tolerance, and empathy
- Put great emphasis on our students' knowing the importance of being upstanders and understanding the 'other'
- Value that our students graduate with quick minds, compassionate hearts and a love of learning

Middle School Structure

Fifth Grade
Fifth grade is a transition year into the JCDS Middle School. Students gain greater independence and have additional classes and electives, while remaining in their own advisory/classroom.

Sixth through Eighth Grade
Sixth through eighth grade students belong to mixed-grade homeroom advisory groups. Advisories create meaningful student engagement and foster a deeper sense of community. A nurturing environment of multiage grouping enables students to enter the community as equals, while sharing common curriculum, developing a common language.

Middle School Curriculum

English
Students work to refine the crafts of writing and critical thinking. Mastering writing conventions and working with a variety of literature, our integrated approach gives students the opportunity to compare and contrast themes from both Judaic and general studies texts. Teachers continually encourage students to appreciate spoken and written language and look at English materials in more sophisticated and abstract ways.

History
Students explore how and why events in history occurred, the impact these events had and different interpretations and perspectives of these events. Students also learn to find reliable sources for information through research. Students learn how to become lifelong researchers and gain an appreciation for the themes that history teaches and how these themes relate to themselves and the world around them.

Math
We foster mathematical thinking through studying logic, operations, geometry, measurement, data collection and probability. Students are taught that math is all around us in our everyday lives. Students learn and practice calculations and learn the concepts behind the strategies they are learning to help them better explain why they are using certain strategies to solve certain problems. Our math curriculum is designed to help students use perseverance and creativity when solving problems which helps them become critical thinkers who think outside of the box to solve problems.
Science & Engineering
Science in the Middle School builds on the scientific method learned in the Lower School. Students focus on questioning, observation, and discovery as modes of expanding on their interests in both engineering and science. Students continue experiencing hands on projects that foster engagement with the topics. In addition, students in the Middle School learn what issues involve science through research projects and in class lessons. Students are more fully engaged when they are then better able to see how science relates to them and the world around them.

Hebrew
Students are divided into Hebrew groupings: 5th and 6th grade and 7th and 8th. Each grouping is subdivided into three sections by Hebrew level. New students who lack prior background in Hebrew language will learn in a separate group for their first year with the intention that they will be integrated into the regular program in their second year.

Tanakh
The Tanakh serves as a shared history in a diverse community at JCDS. Tanakh is an acronym for Torah, the Five Books of Moses; Nevi'im, Prophets; and Ketuvim, Writings. JCDS aims to produce students who will become independent readers of the biblical text in Hebrew and who develop a love for Torah study and embrace it as a resource for a way to experience the world. We provide a respectful environment that allows diverse ideas and cultivates an ability to contend with the multiple outlooks and evolving values in the Torah. JCDS has a commitment to the teaching of Jewish social and moral values and the promotion of a strong Jewish identity through the study of the Tanakh.

JCDS partners with the AVI CHAI Foundation and the Jewish Theological Seminary (JTS) to develop standards and benchmarks for the teaching of Tanakh in grades K-8. To help teachers reach their goals, JCDS chose three standards to focus on in teaching Tanakh at JCDS:

- Students will become independent and literarily astute readers of the biblical text in Hebrew.
- Students will be engaged in the learning of ancient, rabbinic, and modern modes of interpretation of the biblical text and will see themselves as a link in this ongoing chain of interpretation.
- Students will develop a love of Torah study for its own sake and embrace it as an inspiring resource, informing their values, moral commitments and ways of experiencing the world.

Toshba
In addition to continuing their Tanakh studies, Middle School students begin to engage with rabbinic texts in their Toshba (Torah sheba’al peh), or Oral Law classes. Toshba is an acronym for the Hebrew words Torah sheba’al Peh, which refers to the entirety of Jewish law, thought, and practice beyond the Tanakh. In the Middle School, students build off of the values and the teachings they have learned to interpret from the Tanakh and apply these learnings to the laws and the life that some Jews base their choices on. Learning about these laws allows students to question and build their analytical skills. With exposure to Rabbinic thought, students are able to see their earlier biblical learnings in a more analytical and sophisticated light. This curriculum allows each student to connect their biblical and personal learnings and helps each student find the connection between their personal and communal beliefs.

Electives
In Middle School, students are able to choose from a wide variety of electives that meet twice weekly. JCDS offers dozens of electives such as dance, art, robotics, yoga, computer graphics, klezmer band, and fitness and drama.
The Advisory Program

Students in Grades 6 – 8 are divided into four multi-age advisories. Most students remain in their advisory groups for all three years.

Your child’s advisor is available for her/him throughout the school day. If you have general questions about your child’s life at school, you can call your child’s advisor, but you should call his/her teacher if you have subject-specific concerns.

Through an inquiry-based model in Advisory, we hope to challenge and help shape each child’s moral, intellectual and social awareness. We will create whole school learning opportunities and employ common vocabulary, principles and concepts that can guide the integration of academic, social, civic and Jewish identity outcomes for students and the school.

In addition, in Advisory we pursue other educational goals, including social justice using materials from Facing History and Ourselves™, Health Education, planning for Chaggim (holidays), discussing current events, conversations about school issues, getting to know students in different grades and preparation for both leading and participating in T’fillah (prayer).

The fifth grade (Tamar) has its own advisory group, led by Samara Hendin Soiref. During Advisory periods, Samara will lead Tamar students in “The Power of the Mind” curriculum, which is designed to help the students come to understand themselves as learners.

Milestones

During yearly “milestone” events that showcase students’ learning to family and friends, the children have the opportunity to study, teach and discuss Jewish texts together and as a larger community. The school gives each student a copy of a significant Jewish text to form part of the students’ libraries for life-long Jewish learning.

Below is a snapshot of each of our grade milestones:

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<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5th Grade</td>
<td>Pirkei Avot - Ethics of the Sages</td>
<td>When faced with hard choices about how to act toward, and react to, other people, one of the places that we turn for guidance and answers is to the wisdom of our rabbis. Join the fifth graders as they journey to the Batei Midrash of the rabbis of Pirkei Avot and learn who these great sages were and the wisdom and advice they have passed down through the generations to us.</td>
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<tr>
<td>6th Grade</td>
<td>M’dor L’dor - From Generation to Generation</td>
<td>As they prepare to become B’nei Mitzvah, our sixth graders stand ready to take their place in the adult Jewish community and continue the chain of Jewish traditions. To effectively shape the future, our students must first understand the past. Through the combined efforts of Tanakh, Toshba, and Humanities, the students explore the national, communal and familial legacies that they have been given. Standing on the shoulders of those who came before, these young adolescents will shape the future of the next generation of Judaism and of the world.</td>
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<td>7th Grade</td>
<td>Bar/Bat Mitzvah</td>
<td>Typically, between 6th and 8th grade, every student at JCDS celebrates her or his bat or bar mitzvah in some fashion. The JCDS community has developed a tradition for the middle school to hold B’nei Mitzvah community services for fellow students. The celebration includes Aliyot for parents, teachers and the community. The community honors the Bar or Bat mitzvah by embracing them in a tallit and having a teacher speak about their classmate.</td>
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<td>8th Grade</td>
<td>Reflections</td>
<td>The Reflections Ceremony is an annual milestone event preceding Graduation, at which each eighth grade student, in a powerful and uniquely individual way, expresses his/her personal passage through JCDS.</td>
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