

CHILD DEVELOPMENT CENTER @ CONGREGATION BETH ISRAEL

CURRICULUM GUIDE



Revised March 2026

Jewish/ Reggio

The founding of the Child Development Center at Congregation Beth Israel stemmed from the recognition of a vital need for exceptional early childhood education that would not only engage families with young children but also foster a deep connection to Judaism. In pursuit of this mission, we designed a unique educational model that draws inspiration from two extraordinary sources: the renowned early childhood schools of Reggio Emilia, Italy, and the rich tapestry of Jewish ideas and values.

The Reggio Emilia approach was selected for its reputation for educational excellence, alignment with Jewish values, and ability to stimulate creativity and learning. This approach is based on the belief that young children deserve experiences that support their multifaceted potential and cultivate a love of learning. Teachers in a Reggio-inspired program prioritize mutual respect with students and families, and use children's interests to customize learning experiences. The process and outcomes of children's projects are carefully documented using words and images, which serve as valuable tools for reflection and dialogue.

The Reggio Emilia approach uses an emergent curriculum. Emergent curriculum is based on the premise that children are most successful at learning when experiences account for their interests, strengths, needs, and lived realities. Educators use observations of children throughout their day as a tool for constructing curriculum content. Meaningful learning opportunities are then provided in support of key developmental skills relevant to a specific age group. When ongoing opportunities for practice lead to skill mastery, educators respond by enriching the learning experience through the planning and implementation of increasingly difficult tasks. As children repeatedly confront and master these “achievable challenges,” they come to view themselves as competent learners. In addition, the alignment of curriculum content with individual interests and social realities serves to validate all forms of diversity and inspires a lifelong passion for learning.

In emergent curriculum, both adults and children have initiative and make decisions. This power to impact curriculum decisions and directions means that sometimes curriculum is also negotiated between what interests children and what adults know is necessary for children's education and development. Ideas for curriculum emerge from responding to the interests, questions, and concerns generated within a particular environment, by a particular group of people, at a particular time. Thus, emergent curriculum is never built on children's interests alone; teachers and parents also have interests worth bringing into the curriculum. The values and concerns of all the adults involved help the classroom culture evolve.

We have developed a comprehensive framework that reflects our identity across multiple perspectives, incorporating our Jewish heritage, inspiration from the Reggio Emilia approach, emphasis on emergent curriculum, and dedication to fostering essential developmental skills.

Image of the Child

In our approach, children are regarded as capable, inquisitive, brimming with potential, and driven to engage with their surroundings. Our educators hold a deep appreciation for the abilities and promise of each child, and they shape both the learning environment and their teaching strategies to best suit the children's needs and interests.

Collaboration & Interaction

We purposefully design the system to foster interconnectedness and relationship-building, with nothing left in isolation. All components of our learning environment are alive and connected, and everyone - children, educators, and families - work together to enhance the system that supports our school community. This ongoing collaborative effort is integral to our continuous improvement and growth.

The Environment

In our educational philosophy, we view the physical space of the school environment as a vital component that plays the role of the "third teacher". Our educators purposefully design and arrange various spaces within the school to support children's learning and growth. We carefully plan the daily schedules to ensure a balance between a range of activities, including individual, small and large group activities, child-directed and teacher-initiated activities, and both indoor and outdoor experiences. Our aim is to provide a rich and diverse learning environment that meets the needs and interests of each child.

Children, Families and Teachers

At the core of our educational philosophy is the understanding that ensuring the well-being of children is paramount for their learning and development. Children, parents, and teachers all have inherent rights that we strive to uphold, including the right to safety, care, and welfare, the right to be involved in the learning process, and the right to grow and develop professionally. By upholding these rights, we create an environment that is nurturing, supportive, and conducive to optimal growth and development for all members of our community.

The Power of Documentation

Documentation serves as a valuable tool for collecting information, observations, and insights into the learning process. This documentation can take many forms, such as written observations, photographs, videos, transcripts of conversations, or visual mediums like paint, wire, clay, or drawing materials. Our educators use documentation to identify and reflect upon the strengths and interests of each child, generate new ideas, and determine the next steps for supporting their learning and development. By actively engaging with documentation, we can gain a deeper understanding of each child's unique needs and tailor our teaching approach to best support their growth.

Emergent Curriculum

At the heart of our approach to teaching and learning is the Emergent Curriculum, which emphasizes the importance of observing and listening to children. Our educators actively engage with the children by asking questions and listening carefully to their ideas, hypotheses, and theories. By closely observing the children in action, our teachers engage in ongoing comparison, discussion, and interpretation of their observations. Based on these observations, our educators plan activities, studies, and long-term projects that align with the interests and needs of the children. This process of inquiry, which we refer to as the Cycle of Inquiry, is a collaborative partnership between teachers and children. Our educators use their own interpretations, intentions, and goals - social, emotional, and academic - to guide their choices and share them with the children. We view learning not as a linear process but as a spiraling progression, where each child's unique journey is honored and supported.

The Hundred Languages of Children

Our Art teacher collaborates closely with other teachers and the children to facilitate learning through the use of the Studio - a dedicated space filled with a diverse array of materials and tools that encourage exploration and creativity. However, our approach to working with these materials is not solely focused on creating art. Instead, we view children's use of these materials as an integral part of the overall cognitive and symbolic expression process of learning. Our Art teacher works to facilitate opportunities for children to engage with materials in a way that encourages their natural curiosity, creativity, and critical thinking skills. Through this process, children are able to construct their own knowledge and develop a deeper understanding of the world around them.

The Role of the Teacher

The image of the child shapes the role of the teacher and involves four major components.

Teachers are:

- Co-constructors: partners, guides, nurtures, solves problems, learns, hypothesizes
- Researchers: learns, observes, revisits
- Documenters: listens, records, displays, revisits
- Advocates for children: involved in the community, politics relating to children, speaks for children and presents work to other educators and community members

Jewish values

Incorporating Jewish values at cdc@cbi helps children develop a strong sense of identity, positive character traits, and a connection to their community and history. It also lays the groundwork for a lifelong engagement with Jewish culture and religion.

Identity

By learning about Jewish values, traditions, and culture, children develop a strong sense of their Jewish identity, which can help them navigate their place in the world as they grow up.

Character

Values such as respect (Kavod), gratitude (HaKarat HaTov) , and giving (Tzedakah) are universal and can help children develop positive character traits that they will carry with them throughout their lives.

Community

We create a sense of community among children and their families by celebrating holidays, participating in charitable activities, and encouraging children to support and care for one another.

Connection

We create a connection to the past: Learning about Jewish history and tradition helps children feel a connection to their ancestors and the generations that came before them.

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A Day, Month, Year at a Glance

We have intentionally designed a daily schedule that provides both structure and flexibility to support our staff and students. Our curriculum is allowed to emerge within this framework, guided by our focus on 7 key areas of development. These domains serve as a foundation for our educational trajectory and are incorporated into every classroom in the following ways:

Literacy

1. **Storytelling:** Our educators believe that storytelling is a powerful tool for developing language and literacy skills. Children are exposed to a wide variety of stories, both orally and in written form, which helps to build their vocabulary, comprehension, and imagination.
2. **Play-based learning:** Our classrooms are designed to promote imaginative and creative play, which is seen as a key component of early childhood literacy. Children engage in activities such as drawing, painting, and building, which help to develop their fine motor skills and prepare them for writing.
3. **Multisensory activities:** We emphasize the importance of engaging all the senses in the learning process. Children are exposed to a wide variety of materials, such as natural fibers, wool, and wood, which help to stimulate their tactile and visual senses.
4. **Rhythm and repetition:** We follow a predictable daily and weekly rhythm, which helps children to feel secure and grounded. Repetition is also seen as an important part of the learning process, as it helps to reinforce new concepts and skills.

We view literacy as a holistic process that involves the development of language, imagination, creativity, and fine motor skills. By providing a nurturing and supportive environment, our educators seek to lay a strong foundation for future literacy development.

Math

1. **Practical activities:** Children are given opportunities to engage in practical activities that involve math concepts, such as measuring ingredients for cooking or sorting and counting objects.
2. **Movement and rhythm:** Our approach recognizes that movement and rhythm are important aspects of math learning. Children may engage in activities that involve movement and counting, such as skipping while counting or clapping out rhythms.
3. **Nature exploration:** We believe that math concepts can be found in the natural world, and they encourage children to explore and observe patterns in the environment.
4. **Creative play:** Our approach values imaginative and creative play as a way for children to learn about the world around them. Children may use blocks or other materials to create patterns and shapes, or they may engage in imaginative play that involves math concepts, such as playing store and using money to buy and sell items.

Our approach to math in early childhood emphasizes experiential learning, movement, and creativity, while recognizing the importance of practical skills and an appreciation for the natural world. By engaging the whole child in the learning process, our educators seek to foster a love of math and a lifelong interest in learning.

Fine and Gross Motor (Physical)

Fine motor skills involve the use of small muscles in the hands and fingers, and include activities such as drawing, painting, and manipulating clay. Fine motor skills are developed through activities such as finger small world play, beading, drawing, and painting with different size brushes and sponges. These activities help to promote hand-eye coordination, spatial awareness, and concentration.

Gross motor skills involve the use of large muscles in the body, and include activities such as running, jumping, and climbing. Gross motor skills are developed through activities such as free play, outdoor exploration, yoga, and movement games. These activities help to promote physical coordination, balance, and spatial awareness.

Spiritual Values

1. **Modeling:** Teachers model spiritual values in their behavior, such as kindness, compassion, honesty, and respect for their students. Children often learn through imitation and seeing positive examples of spiritual values in action can help them internalize these values.
2. **Storytelling:** Stories and myths are powerful tools for conveying spiritual values and teachings. Stories from the torah are told orally, read from books, or acted out through puppet shows and plays. Children can learn about values such as love, forgiveness, gratitude, and courage through stories.
3. **Rituals and traditions:** Our rituals and traditions provide a sense of structure and meaning for children and can help reinforce spiritual values. These rituals can be simple, such as lighting the shabbat candles or saying a prayer, or more complex, such as celebrating holidays and participating in ceremonies.
4. **Nature connection:** Connecting with nature provides a sense of awe and wonder that can inspire spiritual values such as gratitude, respect, and interconnectedness. Activities such as gardening, nature walks, or simply spending time outside can help our children develop a sense of wonder and reverence for the natural world.
5. **Mindfulness practices:** Mindfulness practices such as breathing exercises, meditation, and yoga can help children develop a sense of inner calm and focus and can help them develop spiritual values such as self-awareness, empathy, and compassion.

Teaching our spiritual values involves creating a nurturing and supportive environment that fosters positive character traits and behaviors. By modeling positive values, telling stories, engaging in rituals and traditions, connecting with nature, and practicing mindfulness, children develop a strong foundation for spiritual growth and development.

Holidays

1. **Storytelling:** Teachers will read stories or tell stories to introduce children to the themes and traditions of each holiday.
2. **Projects and activities:** Children will engage in projects and activities that relate to the holiday. For example, they may make decorations or crafts that are symbolic of the holiday, such as a Hanukkah menorah or a Passover seder plate.
3. **Songs and music:** Music is an important part of our Jewish holiday celebrations through daily songs and and shabbat services music plays a big role in our day to day.
4. **Food:** Most holidays are associated with special foods or meals. Children may have the opportunity to help prepare special snacks or foods that are associated with the holiday.

Holidays cont'd

5. **Community celebrations:** We organize many community celebrations of Jewish holidays, such as Hanukkah parties, Purim parade, and Passover Seders. These celebrations provide an opportunity for families to come together and celebrate the holiday with their children in the school setting.

Celebrating Jewish holidays in school provides us an opportunity to introduce children to Jewish traditions and values in a way that is accessible and engaging. By incorporating storytelling, crafts, music, food, and community celebrations, our teachers can create a meaningful and memorable experience for all our children.

Social and Emotional

1. **Collaborative learning:** Our approach emphasizes collaborative learning, where children work together in small groups on projects and activities. Through collaboration, children learn to communicate, negotiate, and problem-solve with others, developing social skills and emotional intelligence.

2. **Project-based learning:** Learning is often centered around long-term, project-based investigations. These investigations are child-led and designed to encourage curiosity and exploration. As children engage in these projects, they learn to work collaboratively, express their ideas and feelings, and develop empathy and respect for others.

3. **Responsive environments:** Our classrooms are designed to be responsive to the needs and interests of the children. The environment is seen as the "third teacher," and is carefully crafted to encourage exploration and discovery. This approach helps children feel valued and supported, which in turn fosters social and emotional development.

4. **Documentation:** In our classrooms, teachers document the children's learning through photographs, videos, and other artifacts. This documentation is used to reflect on and analyze the learning process, and to provide feedback to the children. This approach helps children develop a sense of pride and ownership in their learning, as well as a sense of responsibility and respect for others.

5. **Positive relationships:** Positive relationships are seen as essential to a child's social and emotional development. Teachers work to build strong relationships with each child, creating a sense of trust and security that enables children to take risks and explore new ideas.

Social and emotional learning is a central component to our approach to early childhood education. By providing a collaborative and responsive learning environment, encouraging project-based learning, and fostering positive relationships, Teachers help children develop the social and emotional skills needed to thrive in school and in life.

Specials & Enrichment

In addition to the excellent core curriculum provided by the classroom teacher, our students benefit from the expertise of enrichment specialists providing onsite sessions in a variety of subjects. These specialists meet with each class once or twice a week, depending on the age group, to enhance the educational experience and provide several creative outlets to express themselves and their feelings. Enrichments can include subjects such as Art, Music, Yoga, Hebrew, Spanish, Nature, and more.

Our Enrichments are designed to offer children a comprehensive and balanced education, with a focus on language acquisition, creativity, cultural understanding, mindfulness, and diverse learning experiences.

Professional Development

Professional development is highly valued in our approach to early childhood education, as it supports the ongoing growth and learning of educators and promotes high-quality care and education for young children. Here are some reasons why professional development is so important in our approach:

Deepening understanding: Professional development allows educators to deepen their understanding of the Reggio Emilia approach and its principles, which are based on the belief that children are capable and competent learners who should be actively engaged in their own learning.

Developing pedagogical skills: Professional development provides opportunities for educators to develop their pedagogical skills, such as how to facilitate inquiry-based learning, create a stimulating learning environment, and use documentation to support learning.

Collaborating with colleagues: Professional development allows educators to collaborate with colleagues, share ideas, and work together to improve teaching practices and enhance the learning experiences of young children.

Supporting ongoing learning: Professional development supports ongoing learning and growth for educators, which in turn supports the ongoing learning and growth of young children.

Promoting reflective practice: Professional development encourages educators to engage in reflective practice, which involves reflecting on their teaching practices, documenting children's learning, and making adjustments as needed to support children's ongoing learning and growth.

Professional development is essential in our approach as it supports educators in deepening their understanding of development, honing their pedagogical skills, collaborating with colleagues, supporting ongoing learning, and promoting reflective practice, all of which contribute to high-quality care and education.

The importance of our thoughtfully designed curriculum lies in its ability to provide a structured framework that supports the growth and learning of children during their crucial early years. This curriculum facilitates growth in all developmental areas, promotes school readiness, fosters engagement and motivation, encourages healthy attachments, and warmly welcomes parents into the education journey.