

TEMPLE ISAIAH – ANNUAL EDUCATION REPORT 2021-22

Submitted by: Sharon De Mayo, Vice President of Education

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The Temple Isaiah Preschool is entering a transformative period in its operations. What began with a school closure from March 2020 - August 2020 due to Covid has now become a process of re-imagining what our preschool offers to families, what families in our community are looking for, and how the education landscape in general is going to affect our program in the years to come.

The last 12 months have seen a shift in how and what elementary schools look like. For the better part of a decade, public school enrollment has been in a steady decline in California mostly due to a lack of affordable housing, education officials across the state said. When the pandemic reached California, early job losses collided with that trend, making the decline worse. How does housing affect school enrollment? Families that live, for example in the Westwood Charter area raise their children, and then stay in those homes because moving would mean an increase in property tax as well as higher mortgage rates. Many cannot afford a house at the current market level and so they stay in the homes they have owned because they purchased them at a much lower rate than they are worth today. As such, there are fewer homes available to families with children in elementary school to move into the Westwood Charter neighborhood. Enrollment suffers. Beverly Hills has a similar issue in that a few years

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ago they voted to no longer allow children outside of Beverly Hills to permit into the BHUSD schools. Enrollment suffers. And when a home does become available for lease or purchase, the price is usually too high for a young family. Enrollment suffers.

Our two's program is also lower than traditionally with 35 children enrolled in a program that normally had 64. This is due to two factors:

1. Eliminating our 9-1 offering in the hopes of attracting more working parents who seem to be more of the population that sees Temple Isaiah as a long-term home
2. Many teachers from schools in the area have opened up pods just for toddlers at a price point of approximately \$1000 per month per child. The teacher earns approximately \$6-7,000 per month and that is substantially less than our "all in" price of \$2000 per month.

So how does this affect our preschool?

The schools get paid per student attending the school. Fewer children = less income. And so, the schools are now resorting to offering school to younger and younger children. Children that could have been in our PreK programs can now go for free to the public schools. Temple Isaiah Preschool enrollment suffers. As a result of the USD's offering younger classes, we lost almost 100 children as of today that would have been in our PreK and DK classes.

A possible solution?

We, in turn, offer younger classes, to children 18-36 months old in a newly designed Toddler Suite. Discussions are underway to see if this is a feasible project.

We are still able to offer a profitable preschool program to the children of our community. We are still able to employ award-winning teachers (several of our teachers have won teaching

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awards through the Bureau of Jewish Education and more). Our teachers are highly educated and highly skilled and very much sought after by families.

We are also bringing back many of our community building events and activities to highlight our warm and cohesive community that many families are yearning for in a post-Covid city...and while Covid is not yet gone, we have been able to provide a truly high level of protection to our community which includes frequent testing, Covid protocols, and more.

We are also discussing possible preschool alternatives including programming for children currently enrolled in secular preschools as well as a religious school type of offering on Sundays.

We have rethought how we offer our internationally recognized STEM program and repurposed two rooms for that including one that is a Science and Math room and another that is an Engineering and Technology room.

This year will see the inauguration of our 12-month school year that will begin in June 2022 and end June 2023. We also now offer preschool from as early as 8 am and as late as 5 pm.

Our PAC and PPA have been tremendously supportive both for ensuring Covid protocols as well as supporting teachers and families. Teacher morale is high and while we had hoped for a higher enrollment, what we are experiencing is being felt nationwide. We are, however, optimistic that we can pivot, examine our practices and re-imagine a changes in our operations to bring us to a level of enrollment that keeps us whole financially as well as to a critical mass necessary to feel “complete.”

For more information on the Preschool Program at Temple Isaiah, please feel free to reach out to Dr. Tamar Andrews at tamar@templeisiah.com

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K-12 Program

Carla Kopf, Director of K-12

K-12 Enrollment

Students in grades K-6th: **186**

Students in grades 7-12th: **43**

Rosh Hodesh and Shevet groups (Number of students: 18)

These groups are part of a program called Moving Traditions. Teens meet once per month with a group leader and learn and discuss current events and how they are affected by them, as well as growing up Jewish in the 21st century and much more.

Students in One-on-One Hebrew Tutoring: 23

Most of these students are not enrolled in either of our Sunday or Tuesday classes but have chosen to learn with a tutor, mostly online, on their own. Most of the tutoring is for Hebrew, but several are also learning prayers and blessings and some Judaica.

Total Student Enrollments: 270

Teaching Staff: 17

Rishonim fellows: 22

Additional Programs

Hebrew Enrichment Class: In addition to the traditional Sunday classes, this year we had a wonderful Hebrew enrichment class for 4th and 5th grade students. We've offered this class for several years, but this year in addition to Hebrew, the students experienced classes about Israeli culture in song, food activities and fun things that Israeli children engage in.

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Social Justice for 6th grade: A group of seven 6th graders engaged in learning about the importance to Judaism of social justice and being engaged in acts of social justice. They learned from a temple member who works at the Mazon, an organization that provides different forms of aid (food, funds, etc.) for underserved community members. Students wrote letters of support to children who had to flee the war in Ukraine; they put together gift bags for residents of a facility run by PATH and more.

Together with a member of the Temple Isaiah Board of Trustees we launched the first **Future Voters Club**. This club was led by two senior high school girls who have grown up at our synagogue. They both attended religious school, became B'not Mitzvah, were part of ITY and NFTY and were in the Rishonim program. The FVC (Future Voters Club) met once per month on Sundays after religious school. After lunch and some social time, they heard from speakers and participated in different activities that taught them about different issues related to voting and registering to vote in the U.S.

Kindergartners – 4th graders: This group enjoyed hands on workshops with Rabbi Aron and Jewish Crafts thanks to a wonderful donation from the Ayala and Jason Scott family in memory of his brother. Our students made multiple Jewish artifacts, such as their own shofar, Havdallah candles. They learned how olive oil is pressed to make oil for lighting the Hanukkah, how a Torah is made and made their own matzah.

As part of a Fellowship, I have been doing this year with the Pardes Institute of Jewish Studies of Jerusalem, I wrote a set of five lessons on difficult stories from the Torah. I've taught most of the lessons to our Confirmation class (10th graders). This was completely new material as well to the Confirmation class. It was a great experience for all of us and I know the teens learned from this because a week after one of the classes, the teens were speaking about the story and what they had learned during a class with Rabbi Jaclyn. She mentioned that during a meeting

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with other clergy and me and was surprised that the teens were speaking about a story from the Torah. I was thrilled to hear that, and it confirmed that the material they learned stayed with them.

Challenges

Returning to religious school in-person after spending more than a year on zoom presented a few challenges but also wonderful opportunities.

Our students were so excited to be back in person, spending time with their religious school friends, that it gave the opportunity to our teaching staff to try new things. I wanted to ensure that students felt the warmth and love that the community has for them. I wanted them to feel safe and feel held by us and their peers and so I encouraged a lot of teaching about kindness, caring, and justice, and how much easier it is to be kind and friendly, than not.

A challenge we encountered was adding children to school as parents felt more comfortable letting them participate in person and having another place where children could potentially catch the virus. We wanted to limit the number of students in classes, but we also did not want to turn anyone away who wanted to begin the process of getting back to normal, because we are a part of their community and community welcomes everyone with open arms.

Dealing with the different Covid variants and positive cases was nerve-wracking and scary. The thought of not being able to continue meeting in person after all the work we put in to prepare for the year kept me awake many nights. But, thanks to preparation ahead of time, the support of the main office staff and the willingness of our school families to be patient with changes in dropping off and picking up their children, wearing masks and submitting test results this

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enabled us to continue teaching in person most of the year. We only had to return to zoom classes for 2 sessions at the beginning of January due to the large number of cases of the Omicron variant.

Personal Notes

I am very proud to share that our distinguished teacher Elizabeth Genatowski. She was chosen to receive the Simha and Sara Lainer Distinguished Educator Award for Religious School Education, which is given annually to up to three veteran teachers – those who have been teaching for at least six years. Elizabeth is an asset to our team, bringing her expertise and skills to share with the students. She approaches her lessons with efficiency, but also with a brightness that captivates our students.

As difficult as this year was, especially at the beginning and then dealing with another COVID variant, it has been so wonderful to teach and learn with all our children and teens once more. The faces of our children as they walked into the temple for the first time after 18 months of not being here was an experience difficult to put into words. Children were sad not to have bagels and challah, but they quickly got over it when having different yummy snacks served in individual packets each week. Everyone got to spend a lot of time outdoors on our different spaces, Vollmer deck, Miller courtyard, the sandbox and our front yard were used regularly for different activities, practicing Hebrew Through Movement, Hebrew letters yoga, snack time, break time and music with Danny, Mateen and Jonah.

I am still concerned with the mental health of our tweens and teens. The pandemic wrecked many important events in their lives and as much as adults can understand and deal with them, it is a different story for our teens. I know that with time almost everyone will be fine and return to normal, but we are closely listening and watching and paying close attention to those who might need our help, concern and care.

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This work brings me great joy and I look forward to continuing learning and teaching in our community, helping and welcoming all our families learn about our Jewish traditions and connections with Israel and the rest of the Jewish world and doing the social work that our community has always been happy proud to do.

For more information on the K-12 Program at Temple Isaiah, please feel free to reach out to Carla Kopf at carla@templeisaiah.com

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Adult Education

Rabbi Zoë Klein Miles

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Transitioning from all Zoom gatherings to in-person and hybrid meetings

It has been a careful dance with ever changing mandates, and the return to gathering face-to-face was a delicate process. Everyone is a little more cautious around others, and at the same time, so deeply appreciative when able to come together.

We are so grateful for the Joan and Ephraim Sales Community Center, its two living room spaces and open courtyard that allow us to gather in beauty and comfort! The state-of-the-art air circulation and large screens have made it easy to have hybrid gatherings, allowing people to smoothly choose whether to join in person or from home.

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Small Groups

Thanks to the work of Membership Coordinator Sheri Reynolds and a task force consisting of Danielle Ambrose, Natasha Bogopolskaya and Raphael Simmons, David Chiu, Linda Glaser, Caryn Friedman, Elan Levey, Beth Goss and Greg Michelson, and Connie Sommers, we launched our Small Groups initiative.

The Small Groups “Big Idea” is: *Small Groups will provide a variety of new pathways to connect our members to one another and the larger Isaiah community around shared interests.*

What are they exactly? *A Small Group consists of 3 – 18 people gathering together around shared interests. Group leaders will be fellow Isaiahs who will receive support and training to facilitate positive group dynamics. Small Groups will be time limited, with a start and an end date. The frequency, dates and location of meetings will be determined by the group. At the last scheduled meeting, the group can either end or renew. Small Groups are an opportunity to try something new and connect with members of the community.*

You can read all about our Small Groups here: <https://templeisaiah.com/smallgroups.php>. If you have questions or interest in joining or starting one of your own, talk with Rabbi Zoe or Sheri Reynolds.

Here is a list of Small Groups that were launched this year:

- Contentment – Marcia Albert
- Gardening for Fun – Harriet Shaham
- Secrets of a Hollywood Food Stylist – Nancy Goodman Iland
- Wole-Food Plant Based Eating – Harriet Shaham
- Weekly Running Group – Anthony Grey
- Crochet Sunday for Parents and their Tweens/Teens – Beth and Keira Mohammed

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- Bourbon Delight – Deena Goodman
- Canasta and Wine – A Fun Pairing – Karen Fisher
- Care Packages for Our College Kids – Diane Gross and Cindy Mori
- Cookbook Club – Jeff Winikow
- Dodger Hot Stove – Paul Goodwin
- Does Your Jewelry Tell a Story – Amy Philips and Linda Glaser
- Ethnic Eating – Dean Schenker
- Every Picture Tells a Story – Robert Freedman
- Introduction to Torah – Honey Kessler Amado
- Isaiah Role-Playing Gamers – Palvi Mohammed and Derek Lane
- Israel in the 21st Century – Michael Goldstein
- Jewish Geneology – Judie Rice and Barbara Algaze
- Kite Flying – Matt Hedges
- Los Angeles Craft Beer – Susan Bartholomew
- Mellow Mahjong – Karen Hedges

What did we learn?

It was exciting to have community members sharing their interests with others, and seeing so many congregants gathering in each other's kitchens, living rooms and backyards, along with on zoom. As Small Groups evolves, we see it as a place to build relationships, discover new leaders, and test out ideas.

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Where we can improve is in better helping group leaders to promote their groups to friends and community. We also discovered that it wasn't necessary to assign every Small Group leader with a coach. Our team of coaches (Marcia Albert, Danielle Ambrose, David Chiu, Linda Glaser, Julie Grass, Connie Sommers and Bill Howell) were wonderful when called upon, but not every Group leader needed the same amount of guidance. Instead of matching leaders and coaches one-on-one, we will instead have a group of coaches available if and when leaders would like help with ideas, group dynamics, ice-breakers, etc.

We are excited to launch our second cohort of Small Groups!

Strong programming generated by congregant-led groups: Am Tzedek, ChaiVillageLA, Isaiah Women, Civics in the Synagogue, Green Team, Voter Engagement

Here is a sampling of the programming from this year generated by temple groups:

Isaiah Women:

- Cooking Demo: Scones and Jam
- Franklin Canyon Walk
- Writer's Workshop
- Women in Comedy
- Jewish Journalists
- Pink Hamentaschen Bake
- Book Club
- Rosh Hodesh
- Lunchin' and Learnin' with Rabbis' Sermons
- Seder

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ChaiVillageLA:

- 4-day retreat in Cambria
- Line Dancing
- Exploring the Getty Villa
- National Portrait Gallery Highlights
- Harbor Boat Tour
- Japanese Art of Cherry Blossoms
- Taste of Passover
- Discussion and Dessert
- Talmud for Everyone
- Understanding World News
- Short Story Discussion

Am Tzedek, Civics in the Synagogue, Voter Engagement:

- One-LA Delegates Assembly
- The Charlottesville Verdict with Alan Levine
- Reparation Generation
- Fighting White Supremacy
- City Council District 5 Candidates Forum

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Other events this year:

- What Judaism Teaches Us About Abortion
- Israel Book Group
- Hanukkah Film Festival
- Cryptocurrency & NFTs with Enrico Moses
- The Iran Nuclear Agreement and the Future of the Middle East
- Ukraine Under Fire: Safeguarding the Neediest Jews
- Mysticism and Mindfulness with Faither Haimer
- Daughters of Torah with Elaine Diamond
- Shabbat Morning Torah Study
- How Our Cities are Dealing with Antisemitism (May 22)
- Exploring Hypnosis and Past Life Regression (June 21)

A focus on Mental Health

The past couple of years have led to a mental health crisis, and we sought to provide safe spaces for people to talk including:

- Isaians Helping Isaians: Talk Saves Lives
- Isaians Helping Isaians: Remembering and Mourning Together
- Let's Talk About It! Mental Health and Our Students

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Partnership with The Braid

The Braid, the premier Jewish story telling theater company, brought three live performances to Temple Isaiah. The first on zoom, and the others in person. The Braid shows are always met with overwhelming appreciation and positivity.

- January: Sweet Tea and the Southern Jew
- March: Star Spangled Sabra
- May: Wide Open

What's exciting in the future?

- **Our first Isaiah Women's Retreat!**

SAVE THE DATE Friday, November 11 – Sunday, November 13

CONNECTIONS

Treat yourself to a getaway to meet new friends and enjoy rejuvenating activities for mind and soul. Mindfulness, hiking, discussions, games, yoga, singing, dining and much more. Open to women of all ages!

Registration will open in July. Spaces will be limited.

Estancia Hotel and Spa, La Jolla

Questions? Contact Rabbi Zoe at zoe@templeisaiah.com

CONNECT to each other, to spirit, to mind, to nature, to world

- **Exploring Hypnosis and Past-Life Regression**

June 21

5:00 pm dinner on the Vollmer deck

6:00 pm - 7:30 pm gather in the Social Hall.

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Do you ever wonder why you have a fear of something for no reason? Or why you might feel déjà vu in places that you have never visited? Or a pain in your body that has no origin? It could be that these experiences are not from *your* current past, but might be unresolved issues from a *previous* life's past. This is the core precept in Past-Life Regression Therapy. On June 21.

Temple member Steven Weiss-Smith will be sharing his knowledge of Hypnotherapy and Past-Life Regression as well as offering a fun, one-of-a-kind group hypnosis experience where you will walk away with tools for enhancing your life.

- **Launching our second cohort of Small Groups including “School Community Groups” for parents of children who go to the same local schools**
- **Israel Trip with Rabbi Jaclyn!**

For more information on the Adult Education program at Temple Isaiah, please feel free to reach out to Rabbi Zoë Klein Miles at Zoe@templeisaiah.com