



SOLOMON
SCHECHTER
SCHOOL *of*
MANHATTAN

SOLOMON SCHECHTER SCHOOL
OF MANHATTAN

PARENT HANDBOOK

2009 – 2010
5770

**Parent Handbook
Table of Contents**

	Page No.
THE SCHOOL	3
Mission	3
Educational philosophy	3
History	3
Faculty	4
Board of Trustees	6
Education Committee	7
Rabbinic Advisory Committee	7
Parents' Association Executive Committee	7
 THE CHILD AT SCHOOL	 8
School hours	8
Weather-related closures	8
Attendance	8
Punctuality	8
Security	8
Emergency communication system	9
Health	9
Allergies	10
Uniform	11
Outdoor clothing	11
Lost and Found	12
School lunches and snack	12
<i>Kashrut</i> guidelines	12
Student behavior	13
 RELIGIOUS PRACTICES	 14
Introduction	14
<i>Talmud Torah</i>	14
<i>T'filah</i>	15
<i>Shabbat</i> and Jewish holidays	15
Non-Jewish holidays	15
<i>Kashrut</i>	15
<i>Kippot</i>	16
<i>Tz'dakah</i> and <i>G'milut Chesed</i>	16
 SPECIAL EVENTS	 17
Field trips	17
Classroom events	17
Birthday parties	17
<i>Bar/Bat Mitzvah</i>	18
 TRANSPORTATION	 20
School bus	20
Arrival and dismissal	20

THE PARENT AND THE SCHOOL	21
Home-school communication	21
Curriculum Night	21
Written progress reports and parent-teacher conferences	21
Visiting the classroom	22
When parents have questions	22
Parents' Association	23
In-school parent volunteer opportunities	23
Family education	23
Teacher gift policy	24
Annual Fund and Annual Benefit	24

THE SCHOOL

Mission

Our mission is to cultivate textpeople.

A textperson is someone who finds meaning in the world through confident, active, and skilled learning. We value understanding – *Torah*, scientific discovery, the arts, worldly experience, and knowledge of every kind – both for its own sake, *lishmah*, and because it grounds our search for significance in the rigorous pursuit of truth. At the same time, the textperson is a full person, a *mensch*, whose learning and knowledge are grounded in moral sensitivity.

We believe as Jews that the act of study is itself of moral significance. To cultivate textpeople, we educate in this spirit, promoting intimate, child-centered learning that is also profoundly respectful of the subject matter. As individuals and as a community, we strive to model this link between learning and *menschlichkeit* in our classrooms, in our financial aid policy, and in all interactions among our students, teachers, parents, and friends.

Educational Philosophy

Our approach to teaching grows out of these core educational principles:

1. The most fundamental task of schooling is to help children learn to use their minds well.
2. There are many types of important learning experiences for children. Creative and guided play is among the most serious, challenging, and constructive activities that school-age children can engage in. Literacy and numeracy, for example, are most effectively mastered when approached both playfully and systematically.
3. The study and experience of Jewish life and texts is as important as investigating the other realms of knowledge and skill that children encounter in school. It is no more or less “academic” than reading and math, no more or less “playful” than movement and art.
4. To help each child excel in his or her studies, the school’s task is to offer enough varied activities to let every child shine in as many ways and domains as possible, and to design learning opportunities specifically geared to each child’s needs, interests, and styles.
5. The primary means by which teachers come to know children is by closely and sensitively observing them.
6. Children never stop learning. The school and the home are equal partners in a child's development.
7. Calm discourse, sympathetic listening, and profound respect for others are keys to mutual understanding.

History

The Solomon Schechter School of Manhattan was conceived in 1994 as an initiative of the United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism and the rabbis of nine Conservative synagogues

in Manhattan. As they conceived it, the school was to fill a gap in the spectrum of Jewish day school options in Manhattan: a school with a Conservative movement affiliation, alongside existing schools with Orthodox, Reform, and community orientations. A group of dedicated parents and community leaders came together to develop its mission, and in 1996 the school opened its doors with a kindergarten of 14 students, housed at the Park Avenue Synagogue, under the leadership of Dr. Steven C. Lorch as Head of School.

Since September of 2000 we have also had a West Side campus for our Upper Elementary division, now located on West 86th Street at the Society for the Advancement of Judaism. Our Middle School opened in 2003; our first eighth grade class was graduated in June 2006. Enrollment in 2008-09 was 140 in kindergarten through eighth grade.

The school has repeatedly received recognition: in 2006, as the outstanding elementary school in New York City among all the religious schools, Jewish and non-Jewish, in recognition of which it received the Blackboard Award; for its innovative vision and its programs in teaching Jewish Studies, in moral and spiritual education, and in parent involvement from the Partnership for Excellence in Jewish Education; and for its exemplary program of *t'filah* (prayer) education from the United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism. In 2008, two of its teachers, Aline Linden and Lorie Quint, received the Blackboard Award for outstanding teaching. The school is chartered by the New York State Board of Regents and accredited by the New York State Association of Independent Schools; it is also chartered by the national Solomon Schechter Day School Association and is a member of the New York Guild of Independent Schools and the Independent Schools Admissions Association of Greater New York (ISAAGNY).

Faculty

Steven C. Lorch, *Head of School*

B.A., Rutgers College; Ed.M., Harvard University; Ph.D., Columbia University;
Rabbi, Yeshiva University

Yael Even-Moratt, *Head, Lower Elementary Division*

B.A., Hakibbutzim College of Education; M.A., Tel-Aviv University

Gary Pretsfelder, *Head, Upper Elementary Division*

B.A., New York University; Ed.M., Harvard University

Benjamin Mann, *Head, Middle School*

B.A., University of Pennsylvania; M.A., Jewish Theological Seminary; M.A., Teachers College

Uri Cohen, *Director of Development*

B.A., University of Pennsylvania

Jonathan Chimene, *Business and Operations Manager*

B.A., Brandeis University; M.A., University of Chicago; M.B.A., Northwestern University

Laurie Katz Braun, *Director of Admissions and Rabbinic Counselor*

B.A., University of Pennsylvania; M.A., Rabbinic Ordination, Hebrew Union College

Shira Jacobson, *Library/Media and Program Coordinator*

B.A., Barnard College; B.A., M.A., Jewish Theological Seminary

David Libchaber, *Technology Coordinator*

B.A., University of Chicago; M.B.A., Columbia University

Stuart Smith, *Math Coach, Upper Elementary Division*

B.A., Baruch College; M.S.Ed., Bank Street College

Ellen Alt, *Art*

B.F.A., Massachusetts College of Art; M.A., New York University

Kurt Bolotin, *Humanities Core and Director of Placement*

B.A., Kent State University; M.F.A., Old Dominion University; M.A., Columbia University

Sarah Kay, *Third Grade*

B.A., University of Rochester; M.A., Jewish Theological Seminary

Jennifer Kraemer, *Learning Specialist*

B.A., Eastern Oregon University; M.Sp.Ed., University of California Northridge

Avital Lazar-Paley, *Jewish Studies Core*

B.A., Occidental College; M.S.M., Cantorial Investiture, Jewish Theological Seminary

Nicole Levy, *Kindergarten*

B.A., Connecticut College

Aline Linden, *Fourth Grade*

B.A., University of Chicago

Elisa Marcus, *Second Grade*

B.A., Washington University; M.A., Hebrew University

Vanessa Miller, *Second Grade*

B.A., Cedar Crest College

Robert Olive, *Humanities Core, Science*

B.A., Belmont University; M.A., University of Massachusetts in Amherst

Daniel Ori, *Music*

Amanda Pogany, *Jewish Studies Core*

B.A., Barnard College; M.A., Hebrew University

Naama Potok, *Fifth Grade*

B.A., Harvard University; M.Phil., Oxford University; M.F.A., DePaul University

Eti Rozen, *Music*

B.M., New York College of Music

Mitchell Sadowsky, *Athletic Director*

B.S., M.Ed., Memphis State University

Jacob Sirman, *Middle School Mathematics*

B.A., University of Delaware; M.S., Drexel University

Aliza Slosberg, *Third Grade*

B.A., Barnard College; B.A., M.A., Jewish Theological Seminary

Deanna Stecker, *Kindergarten*

B.A., Barnard College; M.A., Teachers College

Edna Vaisben, *Hebrew Learning Specialist*

B.A., Beit Berl College; M.A., Tel-Aviv University

Alisa Weisser, *First Grade*

B.A., Binghamton University

Ilana Wolfe, *First Grade*

B.A., Barnard College; M.A., Teachers College

Ruth Servi Zimmerman, *Jewish Studies Core*

B.A., M.A., Hebrew University

Board of Trustees

Jane Rosenberg, *President*

Daniel Labovitz, *Vice President*

Jonathan Gordon, *Treasurer*

Howard Rubin, *Secretary*

Daniel Bernstein
 Dr. Alan Davidson
 Dr. Laurie Dien
 Lilly Icikson
 Dr. Samuel Klagsbrun
 Susan J. Lorin
 Leonard Mayer

Ronald Morris
 Freema Gluck Nagler
 Lesley Palmer
 Gregory Porges
 Rabbi Laurence Sebert
 Robin Adelson Shinder
 Elisheva S. Urbas

Education Committee

David Cohen
 Dr. Jane Davidson
 Yael Even-Moratt
 Dr. Lisa Gordis, *Chair*
 Ruth Kentor
 Dr. Henry Kronengold
 Dr. Steven Lorch
 Benjamin Mann

Laura Norwitz
 Daniella Phillips
 Gary Pretsfelder
 Amy Schindler
 Dr. Sharon Seiler
 Rabbi Mychal Springer
 Kara Tav
 Elisheva S. Urbas

Rabbinic Advisory Committee

Rabbi Daniel Alder
 Rabbi Julia Andelman
 Rabbi Marcelo Bronstein
 Rabbi Elliot Cosgrove
 Rabbi David Gaffney
 Rabbi Jeremy Kalmanofsky
 Rabbi Joshua Katzan

Rabbi Rolando Matalon
 Rabbi Allan Schranz
 Rabbi Laurence Sebert, *Chair*
 Rabbi Robert Sommers
 Rabbi Michael Strassfeld
 Rabbi Jan Urbach
 Rabbi Harlan Wechsler

Parents' Association Executive Committee

Lilly Icikson, *Co-President*
 Susanna Kochan-Lorch, *Co-President*
 Tara Fersko, *Vice President*
 Linda Roberts, *Vice President*
 Shawna Kelleher, *Treasurer*
 Deborah Gillman, *Secretary*

THE CHILD AT SCHOOL

School Hours

School is in session for kindergarten and first grade from 8:15 a.m. to 2:35 p.m. The hours for second through fifth grade are from 8:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m.; students are expected to arrive in their classrooms and attend to their morning routines no later than 8:20 a.m. School hours for sixth through eighth grade are from 8:15 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., Monday through Thursday, and 8:15 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. on Friday; students are expected to arrive in their classroom no later than 8:05 a.m. Between October 16 and March 19, the entire school is dismissed every Friday at 1:30 p.m. During the first week of the school year for kindergarten and on or preceding some holidays throughout the year, school is dismissed earlier. Details of early dismissals appear on the school website (www.sssm.org), in the school calendar, and in *Daf Keshet*.

Weather-Related Closures

In the event of a snow emergency or other weather-related emergency that necessitates the closing of school, the Solomon Schechter School conforms to the schedule of the New York City Board of Education. When the city's public schools are open, so are we; when they close due to inclement weather, so do we.

New York City Board of Education school closing information is carried on all the major radio and TV stations. The most frequent radio announcements tend to be carried on WCBS (880 AM) and WINS (1010 AM).

Attendance

It is important for children to attend school regularly so they can feel part of the daily life at school. Parents are asked to call the school as early as possible to report all absences.

In particular, parents are asked to plan family vacations so that they coincide with school vacations.

Punctuality

One of the keys to maintaining the calm, purposeful atmosphere of the school is a punctual, unhurried start to each school day. To facilitate this, parents who bring their children to school, and middle school students traveling on their own, should plan to arrive at least ten minutes before the start of the school day; children traveling by school bus or van will adhere to a similar schedule.

Security

A security guard is stationed at both school campuses to supervise the arrival and departure of guests in the building.

Parents who have made arrangements to take their child out of school early are asked to report to the school office at the designated time and sign their child out, or be signed out by a staff member. Children are not allowed to wait in the lobby.

Emergency Communication System

How to contact the school in the event of a family emergency: First, please try the main school switchboard, (212) 427-9500. If you cannot get through to the office directly (West Side – ext. 10; East Side – ext. 18), each campus has a cell phone that is used for incoming emergency phone calls only. These phone numbers are: East Side campus – (646) 957-4234; West Side campus – (212) 202-0313.

Please note: These numbers are intended for **family emergencies only**, not school emergencies. During an emergency at school, all staff members will be responding to the emergency itself, including communicating with families to keep them fully informed. Incoming calls from parents, while their motivation is completely understandable, will only slow down our ability to respond to the emergency and to set the communication plan in motion. Therefore, please do not initiate calls to the school or any staff member during a school emergency.

How the school will contact you during an emergency: Schechter Manhattan has contracted with SchoolsOut.com to use their newest product, TheCampusWire.com. TheCampusWire.com allows Schechter to quickly and efficiently post messages to their website (www.thecampuswire.com) and to also send both email and text message alerts. The Campus Wire also has the ability to send a voice alert to a home or cell number. We will supplement and repeat the communication provided by this service whenever possible, by posting updates on our own website (www.sssm.org), sending listserv emails, and phone calls from our parent “telephone-tree.”

In the event of a crisis in which students need to be evacuated from Schechter Manhattan premises, we have agreements in place to relocate the children to the following locations: for the East Side Campus, an evacuation would go to the Park Avenue United Methodist Church at 106 East 86th Street (between Lexington and Park).

A West Side evacuation from the SAJ would go to The Jewish Center at 131 West 86th Street (between Columbus and Amsterdam).

In the event of an evacuation, the communication from the school (on thecampuswire.com as well as our internal channels) will inform you about dismissal and pick-up, or, if that is information not yet known, will advise you when to expect the next communication with further updates. Again, please do not call the school, school staff, or the evacuation site while the emergency is in progress.

Health

Children coming to school in the morning are assumed to be healthy enough to attend the full day’s program, including recess and physical education. If a child is ill or injured, parents will be notified immediately. If a parent or the designated emergency contact person cannot be reached, the Head of School or, in his absence, the staff member in charge will contact the family

doctor and take appropriate action. Parents are asked to ensure that the medical records and emergency information on file in the school office are kept current.

As a rule, school personnel cannot assume responsibility for administering medication to children. If a child requires prescription medicine during the day, parents should address their request in writing to the division head, Yael Even-Moratt, Gary Pretsfelder, or Benjamin Mann, and enclose documentation from the child's doctor. The medication must be brought to school in its original labeled container, stating the child's name, drug, dosage, and time to be administered. On the medical information form submitted at the beginning of each school year, parents may request that the school administer non-prescription medication for pain relief (Tylenol or Advil) or allergies (Benadryl). Children are never permitted to administer their own medication without adult supervision.

When a child contracts a contagious disease, the school must be notified at once. As appropriate, this information may be shared with the parents of other children. The school's consulting pediatrician has advised us to request that students with strep throat not return to school until 24 hours have passed *in between* the day that antibiotics was started and the day of return. For example, if a child began antibiotics on Monday morning and is otherwise symptom free, s/he should nonetheless remain home on Tuesday and not return until at least Wednesday.

The New York City Department of Health has advised that the procedures instituted during the H1N1 flu epidemic in the spring will continue to be in effect this fall. Therefore, a child who has flu symptoms (a fever of 100.4° or more, headache or body aches, congestion, sore throat, cough, chills, or fatigue) should not attend school until seen by a doctor. A child diagnosed with flu may not return to school for seven days or until s/he has been symptom-free for 24 hours, whichever is longer.

Further, we ask that in the case of illness, even a virus or a cold, parents be conservative about returning their child to school. Unfortunately, too often students come back and present a further risk to both students and staff.

The school does periodic lice checks on students' hair. In accordance with policies of the National Association of School Nurses, and the American Academy of Pediatrics, as well as in keeping with current New York City public school procedures, any child with live lice will be asked to leave school until all lice have been removed. Children with nits (lice eggs) will not be sent home or excluded from school; parents will be notified and advised how to perform the necessary head wash at home, and the school will monitor until all nits have been successfully removed.

Allergies

If a child has an allergy that the school needs to be aware of and/or to monitor, it is the parents' responsibility to alert the school in careful detail to the nature and severity of the allergy and the steps that school personnel may be required to take to manage a reaction. This information should be listed on the medical information form submitted at the beginning of the school year. Depending on the severity of the allergy, the school may request advice from the child's doctor.

In consultation with a child's doctor, the school is prepared to adapt the school environment in order to reduce the risk of exposure to life-threatening substances, including

providing allergen-free areas, establishing safe eating-area procedures, and taking special precautions during events such as field trips, holiday celebrations, and extracurricular events.

Members of the school staff on each campus have been trained in emergency response to allergic reactions.

Uniform

In kindergarten through fifth grade, the school uniform for boys consists of a navy v-neck sweater (pullover or cardigan) with emblem, light blue polo shirt or button-down Oxford shirt (white on Fridays), gray or navy slacks or shorts, solid navy, gray, black, or white socks, and all-black shoes or sneakers (or all-white sneakers on gym days). Visible designer logos are not permitted.

For girls in kindergarten through fifth grade, the school uniform consists of a navy v-neck sweater (pullover or cardigan) with emblem, white polo shirt or button-down blouse, navy jumper, skirt, skort, slacks or shorts, solid navy or white socks or tights, and all-black shoes or sneakers (or all-white sneakers on gym days). Visible designer logos are not permitted.

In the middle school, slacks and shorts for boys and, for girls, slacks, shorts, skirts, or skorts may be either navy, gray, or khaki. Shirts or blouses may be button down, polo, or turtleneck, in either white, blue, or gray (white button-down on Fridays). However, visible designer logos are not permitted. Shoes may be all black or all white throughout the week. The school sweater is the same as in the lower grades – navy v-neck, pullover or cardigan, with emblem.

On gym days, boys and girls are permitted to wear all-white sneakers throughout the day. Students in third through eighth grade must wear the school's uniform phys. ed. t-shirt. There will be an opportunity to change into and out of it at the beginning and end of the gym period.

Uniforms, including sweaters with emblems, are available from a number of uniform suppliers, including Lands' End. The Parents' Association's more extensive guide to uniforms and uniform suppliers is mailed together with the parent handbook each summer.

All items of uniform clothing should be labeled. Parents of children in kindergarten and first grade are asked to send a complete change of clothes, including underwear and socks, for unexpected situations.

Parents are also asked to send a smock or old large shirt to school for children to wear over their uniform when working on art projects.

Students who are out of uniform, and their parents, will receive reminders. Persistent offenders will be excluded from class until they are appropriately attired.

Outdoor Clothing

Children play out of doors every possible day. Therefore, parents should ensure that their child has proper clothing for sudden changes of weather conditions, including hats, gloves, and boots, when appropriate. All outdoor clothing should be labeled.

Lost and Found

Parents are asked to label all clothing. All unlabeled items found in school will be placed a container near the school office. Children and parents should look there for missing articles. The contents of the container will be donated to a charitable organization from time to time.






School Lunches and Snack

Children bring a dairy or *pareve* (non-meat) lunch to school each day. Lunches should be carried in paper or cloth bags clearly marked with the child's name. In kindergarten and first grade, the school supplies a nutritious snack for children each morning, as well as milk and water as a supplement to the lunch brought from home. Students in second through eighth grade bring their own nutritious snack each day.

Parents are expected to use foods with kosher ingredients only and to prepare lunches in accordance with standards of *kashrut*. Guidelines for purchasing and preparing kosher food follow.

Kashrut Guidelines

The laws of *kashrut*, to which the school adheres, are important means of sanctifying the act of eating. To ensure *kashrut* in school lunches, children must bring a dairy or *pareve* lunch each day, free of all meat ingredients and meat by-products.

All store-bought foods, with the sole exception of fresh fruits and vegetables, require *kashrut* supervision. The *kashrut* symbols , , and Kof K  are all reliable *kashrut* endorsements; the letter K (by itself) and the  symbol are **not** always reliable. Unless a package is marked “*Pareve*” or “*Dairy*” (or D, as in ) , the listing of ingredients must be read to verify that it does not contain meat or meat products. Food bought in a kosher bakery or a kosher dairy restaurant under rabbinical supervision is also considered kosher. Parents should feel free to contact Dr. Lorch to clear up any uncertainty about the *kashrut* status of a product. *kashrut* supervision.

In addition to using kosher ingredients, lunches must be prepared in accordance with *kashrut* standards. Families whose kitchens are kosher (with separate sets of meat and dairy plates and utensils) can simply prepare school lunches as they normally would any *pareve* or dairy meal. Families whose homes are not kosher are asked to take the following additional precautions:

1. Use plastic and/or paper products to prepare school lunches, or purchase a separate set of utensils for preparing lunches and hand-wash and -dry and store them separately from other kitchen utensils.
2. Send only cold items that have not been cooked or heated.
3. Spread a plastic cover over kitchen surfaces on which school lunches are being prepared.

Food that, unlike an individual child's lunch, is brought in to be shared with the class – for example, cupcakes or cakes for children's in-school birthday celebrations – may not be prepared at home, even if the family has a kosher kitchen, but rather should always carry reliable *kashrut* supervision.

Dr. Lorch will be happy to respond to any question concerning preparation of food or the *kashrut* guidelines in general.

Student Behavior

The interpersonal atmosphere of the school is shaped by the following six guiding principles:

1. Everyone has a right to feel safe in school.
2. Everyone has a responsibility to treat others and their belongings with respect and consideration.
3. Children learn in their own way and at their own pace. Individual learning styles are encouraged and respected.
4. Being part of a learning community obliges one both to strive to help others learn and not to do things that interfere with others' learning, or one's own.
5. In any community, misunderstandings and disagreements will arise. A key skill of living with others is the ability to talk out one's problems directly with the other party to the conflict and resolve how things could be handled differently and more productively in the future.
6. Look, listen, and think; then act.

The school reserves the right to ask a child to leave the classroom if necessary to maintain a safe, productive learning environment.

RELIGIOUS PRACTICES

Introduction

Religious practices play a central role in the life of the school. For us as Jews, *mitzvot* are the means by which we sanctify the world around us. By intruding on our daily routine, they remind us of the higher purposes to which we choose to dedicate ourselves, they ennoble us, and they reinforce our connection with other Jews who share our aspirations, life style, and values.

As Conservative Jews, we believe that *mitzvot* are more than simply good deeds that we may or may not perform, as we wish. Rather, they are part of *halachah*, a continuously evolving system of law and practice to which we are committed by virtue of our identification as Conservative Jews.

In the school, students learn about religious practices both by engaging in them and by studying about them. We believe that their participation in a community in which faithful performance, thoughtful reflection, and personal example are valued will enable them to discover their own personal connection to a life of *mitzvot*.

The school does not attempt to regulate a family's home practice, except in those cases in which it impinges on the school community (for example, school lunches and birthday parties involving classmates). However, parents and school need to be attuned to responses that children may have from time to time to differences that they perceive between school practice and home practice and be prepared to help them negotiate their way between the two without disparaging or delegitimizing either.

Talmud Torah

The main business of the school, study and learning, is itself a cardinal *mitzvah*. *Talmud Torah* (the study of Torah) occurs every time a student reads a book, performs a science experiment, draws a picture, writes an entry in a journal, or engages in any other positive learning experience – and not only when he or she opens a *chumash*, a *siddur*, or another Jewish book. Students come to appreciate not only that learning is necessary, challenging, rewarding, and often fun, but also that it enables them to attain their intellectual and human potential, which is what makes it a religious obligation.

T'filah

Of all the *mitzvot* observed in the school, *t'filah* (prayer) is the one which most directly nurtures and promotes the child's spiritual growth. To this end, each child participates in a daily service geared to his or her developmental level. The service includes both the chanting and recitation of portions of the liturgy and educational activities that promote understanding and a personal appreciation of the prayers. The religious life of the school, like all other aspects, is fully egalitarian; girls and boys participate equally. Boys and girls serve as *chazanim* (in which role they wear a *talit katan*), receive *aliyot* (wearing a *talit*), and read *Torah*. They receive an introduction to the practice of wearing *t'filin* a month prior to *bar* or *bat mitzvah*.

Lunch and snacks are accompanied by appropriate *b'rachot* (blessings). All students participate in these activities and experience and contribute to the atmosphere of *k'dushah* (holiness) and joy that they promote.

Shabbat and Jewish Holidays

The school steps to the rhythm of the Jewish calendar. It strives to imbue in children a sense of the sanctity of *Shabbat* and the Jewish holidays and their place in Jewish tradition.

The school week builds toward *Shabbat* as the highlight of the week. In addition to classroom-based learning about *Shabbat* and *parashat hashavua* and each Friday's *Kabbalat Shabbat* celebration, the school sponsors an annual family *Shabbaton* retreat.

All festivals and special periods of the year are noted and observed in the school setting. As the holiday nears, the entire building takes on the ambience of the approaching *Yom Tov*. All classes are involved in appropriate learning activities, observances, and school assemblies.

Families are strongly encouraged to enhance their home observance of *Shabbat* and *Yom Tov* by participating in synagogue services and sharing *Shabbat* and holiday meals on a regular basis.

Classes and school activities are never scheduled to conflict with *Shabbat* or holidays, and school personnel are unavailable for consultation on these days. We also ask that student-to-student and parent-to-parent contact regarding school matters (e.g., schoolwork, Parents' Association activities, transportation arrangements) not occur on *Shabbat*.

School is dismissed early in winter on *erev Shabbat* in order to ensure that all members of the school community arrive home in time to prepare for *Shabbat*.

Non-Jewish Holidays

The school avoids observance of all holidays with non-Jewish religious origins (such as Halloween and Valentine's Day), regardless of their widespread acceptance. National holidays, such as Thanksgiving and Martin Luther King Day, are marked by special programs and are taught as part of the curriculum.

Kashrut

The laws of *kashrut* are important means of sanctifying the act of eating, elevating it from a biological function to a sacred one. The school adheres strictly to the laws of *kashrut*, and all food brought into the school or consumed at school-related functions must be kosher. Please refer to the *kashrut* guidelines on pages 12 and 13 for a more complete description of the school's *kashrut* practices.

Kippot

The *kippah* is one way to signify our awareness of the sanctity which surrounds us. In addition, it can serve as an important symbol of identification with Judaism and with other Jews. In recognition of the school's status as a *beit midrash* (house of study), boys and men wear *kippot* at all times, and girls and women are encouraged to do so if they choose.

Tz'dakah and G'milut Chesed

Tz'dakah (charitable giving) and *g'milut chesed* (acts of kindness) have never been considered optional for Jews. They are religious obligations that give tangible expression to the concepts of *arevut*, the mutual responsibility of Jews for each other, and *rachmanut*, compassion for those in need.

The school conducts a weekly *tz'dakah* collection on *erev Shabbat*, the proceeds of which are distributed to agencies and causes that the students help to select each spring in class-wide *Tz'dakah* Roundtables. In addition, the school participates each fall in the Common Cents Penny Harvest.

In the younger grades, *g'milut chesed* is promoted through acts of consideration towards classmates and family members. As students mature, the circle of concern is extended beyond the school, and they learn to provide help to needy individuals and groups in the local community and beyond. Students in third through eighth grade participate monthly in community service projects, through which they engage in volunteer work in the local community.

SPECIAL EVENTS

Field Trips

The school sponsors frequent field trips that complement children's classroom learning experiences. Field trips in the local area take place on foot or public transportation; buses are provided for travel to more distant destinations.

Parents sign a field trip permission form prior to the start of the school year to enable their child to participate. Thereafter, a notice indicating the date and destination is printed in *Daf Keshet* or sent home by teachers prior to each field trip. In many cases, parents are invited to join their child's class for the field trip.

Classroom Events

Each school week is punctuated by two special events for which a standing invitation is extended to parents in every grade: on Monday and Thursday, morning prayer in the Park Avenue Synagogue chapel or SAJ Social Hall (beginning in the middle of the kindergarten year). Parents who plan to attend are asked to apprise the school office two school days in advance. In addition, parents are invited to attend selected grade-wide or division-wide *Kabbalat Shabbat* celebrations on Fridays through the year.

From time to time, special events are scheduled, usually either to celebrate the successful culmination of a period of intensive learning or to mark an important date in the American or Jewish calendar. In the middle school, students participate in several exhibitions each year to demonstrate their mastery of essential skills and knowledge. Parents will be informed of such events in advance.

The school encourages families to share their celebration of Jewish life cycle events with their child's class. Parents wishing to schedule and plan a life cycle event involving the class are asked to call Dr. Lorch. For example, if you are having a *b'rit milah* or a *simchat bat* and wish to include your child's classmates, please let the teachers know so that they can send home a note.

Birthday Parties

As a matter of course, the school marks each child's birthday in the classroom. Parents should contact the teachers in order to coordinate arrangements for a party at school. Please remember that all food brought in to share with other children at school must carry reliable *kashrut* supervision, and all utensils (including the knife to cut the cake) must also be strictly kosher. Home-baked goods are not permitted, even if they come from a kosher kitchen.

In planning birthday parties outside of school, parents are asked to be sensitive to the following important considerations:

1. Children who are excluded are likely to feel hurt. As a rule, all the children in a class, or all of the boys, or all of the girls should be invited. One child from a class may be invited to a family-only celebration. Only in cases where the entire class is invited may invitations be distributed at school.

2. The food served must be kosher. Parties may not be held in non-kosher restaurants, and food brought in to party spaces or to homes from the outside should always carry reliable *kashrut* supervision. Dr. Lorch is happy to help parents plan the food service arrangements for parties.
3. Parties should not be held on *Shabbat* or *Yom Tov*. If a party is planned for Saturday night, it should be scheduled to begin at least an hour after *Shabbat* ends so that children will not have to travel on *Shabbat* in order to arrive on time.

Bar/Bat Mitzvah

The school is a full partner with the family and the synagogue in planning, preparing for, and celebrating a child's *bar* or *bat mitzvah*. The following guidelines are intended to increase the clarity of the school's role:

1. To the extent possible, the school tries to avoid conflicts in the dates of *bar* and *bat mitzvah* celebrations. Any time after the commencement of fourth grade, as soon as a child's date is set, parents are asked to share it with Gary Pretsfelder, who will enter it in the school's *bar/bat mitzvah* calendar.
2. The family and synagogue celebrations of a girl's *bat mitzvah* may be scheduled for her 12th or 13th birthday, according to the family's tradition or preference. In school, girls are treated as *b'not mitzvah* following their 12th birthday.
3. Children learn to read *Torah* during fifth grade and practice this skill in school beginning in sixth grade. It is the family's responsibility to arrange for the child to learn *haftarah* cantillation, as well as specific preparation for reading his or her *parashah*. Similarly, the skills of writing and delivering a *d'var Torah* are taught as part of the school's *B'nei Mitzvah* program in sixth and seventh grade; however, the preparation of the child's actual *d'var Torah* must be provided for outside of school.
4. In the month preceding the child's *bar* or *bat mitzvah*, he or she will practice laying *t'filin* every day in school. For boys or girls, *t'filin* may be purchased through the school or privately. The families of some girls purchase *t'filin* before the month of preparation; other families wait until after the *bat mitzvah* before buying *t'filin*. The school has a limited number of pairs of *t'filin* to lend to girls during the month of preparation.

After the *bat mitzvah*, it is part of the school's religious mission for all girls to continue wearing *t'filin*, and, in practice, many girls do. Those who choose not to continue may return the *t'filin* that they borrowed at that point.

Boys are required to wear *t'filin* every morning in school once they are *b'nei mitzvah*.

5. The school does not intervene in the planning of the *bar* or *bat mitzvah* ceremony and celebration itself. However, much as with birthday parties, parents are asked to be sensitive to certain religious and social considerations:
 - *Kashrut* and *Shabbat* should be strictly observed. See the section on birthday parties (pp. 17-18) for details. In addition, for a ceremony on *Shabbat*,

families must be sensitive to the needs of classmates or families that do not travel on *Shabbat* and may require, or appreciate, home hospitality.

- To avoid excluding children, all of the students in the class should be invited to both the ceremony and the celebration. If this presents a financial hardship, parents may wish to consider a lower-key celebration.
 - Parents need to take active responsibility, particularly during the ceremony, for monitoring the behavior of the student guests, even when they are not their own children.
 - To avoid discomfort or embarrassment, parents are asked to consider age-appropriate standards of modesty and propriety in dress, particularly of a *bat mitzvah* girl, and in the character of the celebration and its activities.
6. During the week following a boy's 13th Hebrew birthday and a girl's 12th Hebrew birthday, the school holds a celebration for the student and the middle school. Parents and other family members are asked to attend *t'filah*, at which the student receives an *aliyah* and/or reads from the *Torah* and/or leads the prayer service. Following services, the family sponsors a light snack for the middle school.

TRANSPORTATION

School Bus

Some families send their children to school on New York City Department of Education yellow school buses. This arrangement is subject to the number of children traveling to the school on a particular route. Other families choose to send their children to school via private vans. Parents should contact Jonathan Chimene for the names of the school's bus companies, telephone numbers, or with questions and comments.

Arrival and Dismissal

Children may arrive at any time beginning at 8:00 a.m. For kindergarten and first grade, if the child is not traveling on a school bus, the parent or other adult must accompany the child to the classroom floor, where adult supervision will be provided. If a child arrives early, the parent or caregiver must wait with the child until 8:00. Students in second through fifth grade may be dropped off in the lobby, where they will assemble before proceeding to class as a group at 8:15. Middle school students may arrive at school without parents.

At dismissal time (2:35 p.m. for K-1; 3:30 p.m. for 2-5; 1:30 p.m. on short Fridays for all grades), many children in the elementary divisions go home by bus or attend a school-coordinated after-school activity. All other children must be met in the designated pick-up area by an adult. Names of adults authorized to pick up a child should be submitted by parents in writing and will be maintained on file in the school office. Middle school students are permitted to leave school at dismissal time on their own, with parent permission. An arrival and dismissal information sheet is enclosed with this handbook for parents' convenience.

If there is going to be a change in the routine of who picks up the child or where the child is going after school, parents are asked to notify the school by leaving a message (East Side – ext. 18; West Side – ext. 10), by fax (East Side – 212-427-5300; West Side – 212-595-3146), or by e-mail (East Side – yolandaguzman@sssm.org; West Side – roseniplaza@sssm.org) **before 12:00**. Children will be supervised in the pick-up area until fifteen minutes after dismissal time; thereafter, they will be brought to the waiting area outside the school office.

The Park Avenue Synagogue building closes on Friday at 3:00 p.m. throughout the year.

Students who arrive late (after 8:15 a.m. in kindergarten, first grade, and the middle school; after 8:30 a.m. in second through fifth grade) or who leave earlier than dismissal time must check in or out of the office. In addition, on the West Side campus, if your child leaves the building, s/he is required to hand the security guard a release form from the office. Without it, your child (even if accompanied by a parent or babysitter) will not be permitted to leave the premises. Your cooperation in this matter, as with all security matters, is greatly appreciated.

THE PARENT AND THE SCHOOL

Home-School Communication

A weekly newsletter, *Daf Keshet*, is published and distributed by e-mail each Friday. Upcoming dates to remember are printed in each week's issue.

Other than the newsletter, school circulars are kept to an absolute minimum. From time to time, teachers send home e-mail notices and/or hard-copy fliers with children. As a general rule, reminders of calendar events are e-mailed to parents.

Other means of receiving information about the school include the school's website, www.sssm.org, and the Parents' Association-sponsored listserv.

Parents and teachers are encouraged to be in frequent contact with each other about matters of individual interest or concern. As a general rule, classroom teachers in the elementary grades and advisory teachers in the middle school will make phone contact with parents early in the school year and will initiate periodic contact by phone and/or e-mail at other times. For parent-initiated contact, teachers will indicate early in the year whether they prefer to be contacted in such cases by phone, e-mail, "backpack express" note, or by any other means. Please respect teachers' privacy by refraining from calling them at home.

Voicemail boxes will be assigned over the summer. A sheet with the 2009-10 voicemail box assignments will be distributed at the start of the school year.

All teachers have a school e-mail address consisting of their full first name, their full last name, at sssm.org (for example, garypretsfelder@sssm.org).

Teachers are available to meet with parents, by prior arrangement, during their planning periods. While a teacher is with a class, his or her first responsibility is the children's well-being; therefore, class time is not available for unscheduled meetings or consultations. In addition, generally speaking, it will not be possible for teachers to give their undivided attention to parents with questions or with an important matter to discuss at arrival or dismissal time.

Curriculum Night

Early in the year, an evening meeting is planned for parents and teachers to meet each other. Teachers will present a curriculum overview, explain the weekly schedule, place learning materials on display, and communicate general expectations for the school year. In addition, the teaching specialists will be introduced, class parents will be identified, and the curriculum guide will be distributed.

Written Progress Reports and Parent-Teacher Conferences

Parent-teacher conferences are scheduled shortly after Thanksgiving and *Pesach*. A written progress report is prepared by the child's team of teachers twice a year, both of which coincide with the conferences in kindergarten through third grade. In fourth through eighth grade, the first progress report coincides with the conferences and forms the basis of discussion with

parents, and the second progress report is sent home at the end of the school year. At the second conference, parents of children in third through eighth grade are given the opportunity to review a portfolio of their child's work since the beginning of the year that reflects his or her progress. Students in fifth through eighth grade participate in the conference as a matter of course, third graders do not, and fourth graders are encouraged to take part, but not required to do so. For portfolio conferences, parents are encouraged to remain after the conference in order to review the portfolio more closely.

Visiting the Classroom

Parents are welcome to visit class by prior arrangement. In most cases, they will be asked to help out with designated activities.

When Parents Have Questions

The most efficient way for parents to ensure that their questions are addressed and problems are solved is to approach the right person with the right issue. As a rule, the staff member whose role it is to deal directly with a matter is the one best equipped to help.

Questions about a child's classroom work and progress should be addressed to the teachers.

Questions about the school's general studies curriculum should be directed to Yael Even-Moratt (kindergarten and first grade), Gary Pretsfelder (second through fifth grade), or Benjamin Mann (sixth through eighth grade).

Questions about Hebrew should be addressed to Yael Even-Moratt in kindergarten and first grade, Gary Pretsfelder in second through fifth grade, and Ruth Servi Zimmerman in the middle school. Questions about Jewish Studies should be addressed to Benjamin Mann.

Matters of school policy should be directed to Dr. Lorch.

Financial matters are handled by Jonathan Chimene.

Transportation issues can be addressed by Yael Even-Moratt (East Side campus) and Gary Pretsfelder (West Side campus).

Questions relating to development, fundraising, and marketing should be directed to Uri Cohen.

Admissions and placement issues are handled by Laurie Braun.

If, following contact with the appropriate person, the matter is not yet resolved, parents should contact Dr. Lorch.

Parents' Association

The school has an active and vibrant Parents' Association. The role of the Parents' Association is to:

- (1) encourage the involvement of parents in the life of the school,
- (2) build community between the school's adult constituencies – parents, faculty and staff, and Board of Trustees, and
- (3) assist in fundraising efforts for the school.

All parents are members of the Parents' Association, which is governed by an executive committee consisting of two co-presidents, two vice-presidents, a secretary, and a treasurer. Each class also has one or two class parents who assist teachers with class activities when asked, support the class community, and help make sure their fellow parents are aware of school and Parents' Association activities. The success of the Parents' Association hinges on the participation of all parents.

Specific Parents' Association community and fundraising events vary from year to year. Examples of activities that the Parents' Association engages in include the school picnic, collaborating in the annual benefit, acknowledging lifecycle events, *Mishloach Manot*, the school-wide family *Shabbaton*, and other fundraising and social events. The Parents' Association has a weekly column in *Daf Keshet* to keep parents apprised of its activities, as well as a listserv.

Parents interested in helping to plan particular events should contact any of the Parents' Association Executive Committee members: Lilly Ickson (lillyb1@verizon.net), Co-President, Susanna Kochan-Lorch, Co-President (sukeykl@gmail.com), Tara Fersko, Vice-President (taradlion@nyc.rr.com), Linda Roberts, Vice President (lindaroberts18@yahoo.com), Deborah Gillman, Secretary (dgillman528@yahoo.com), or Shawna Kelleher (shawnakelleher@yahoo.com).

In-School Parent Volunteer Opportunities

Parents are welcome to work as volunteers in the classroom, coaching children in the writing process, listening to them read, and sharing their interests and expertise with them during meeting time. Parents are also involved in the school outside of the classroom, where they assist in the library, join their child's class for field trips, and participate in morning *t'filah* (prayer) and occasional *Kabbalat Shabbat* on Fridays. To volunteer, parents should contact Yael Even-Moratt, Gary Pretsfelder, or Benjamin Mann, or their child's teacher.

Family Education

All parents participate in the school's family education program. Evening sessions are scheduled periodically throughout the year on topics relating to the school curriculum and children's developmental needs.

In addition, the family education program includes a year-round series of shared experiences for families, many of which are related to the Jewish holidays and *Shabbat*. These include an annual family *Shabbaton*, a *Chanukah* song festival (*zimriyah*), a *m'gilah* reading and carnival on *Purim*, a *Lag BaOmer* picnic and field day, and the annual school concert. As well,

interspersed throughout the year are occasional weekend programs for parents and children together.

Teacher Gift Policy

Collective gifts are given mid-year and year-end to the faculty, staff, and administration through the Parents' Association. Gifts are distributed to the class parents to be given to the teachers. Individual gifts are not to be bought for teachers; however, if children want to make a handmade gift or card for their teachers, that is always well received. In addition, handwritten notes, e-mails, or telephone calls to teachers to express your appreciation for something that has occurred in your child's class are encouraged.

Annual Fund and Annual Benefit

The Annual Fund campaign in the fall and the annual benefit in the spring play a vital role in maintaining the Solomon Schechter School of Manhattan's competitive edge. Tuition covers less than the full cost of educating each child. The Annual Fund and the annual benefit help to make up the difference.

Participating in the Annual Fund and the annual benefit is one tangible way for parents to express that they care about the school, as they help it grow from strength to strength.