



B'Yachad, Temple Adat Elohim

THOUSAND OAKS, CA

WHO ARE THE LEARNERS? THE TEACHERS?

- Children in 4th-6th grade and their parents, approx. 40 families.
- Parents teach children and children teach parents.
- Professional teachers facilitate learning.
- Educator teaches and leads learning regularly.
- Rabbi and cantor also available to support learning.

Initially the congregation provided childcare for younger siblings and included older siblings in the learning. However, having younger children present proved challenging for many families even with the childcare option.

WHEN DOES THE MODEL TAKE PLACE?

- Twice a month on the first and third weekends plus Hebrew one day a week.
- The first weekend families participate in a Shabbat experience – Friday night or Saturday morning.
- The third weekend families participate in a tikkun olam project.
- Families attend a retreat together in the Fall from Friday evening to Sunday afternoon. In addition, children attend one grade level retreat during the year, also Friday evening to Sunday.
- Families also celebrate holidays together.

WHERE DOES THE MODEL TAKE PLACE?

- Shabbat learning and Hebrew instruction take place at the synagogue.
- Both family and grade level retreats take place at camps in the area.
- Tikkun olam learning and action involve off-site locations that vary according to the project each month.

HOW IS THE LEARNING DESIGNED?

- Each learning session includes an opportunity for families to connect to one another, to learn together, and to reflect on their learning.

- Text study is a core component.
- The content follows the themes of the traditional religious school program in grades 4-6 – Torah, Middot, Life Cycle – with lessons intended to engage both parents and children.
- Learning is designed to be accessible so that families can begin to imagine doing Jewish rituals and observances on their own as well as at the synagogue.

Core to the learning in B'Yachad is providing opportunities for families to learn together rather than separately as adults and children. Learning modalities vary from month to month but typically involve an experiential component.

WHY IS THE LEARNING DESIGNED THIS WAY?

- To create opportunities to for families to experience key elements of the congregations' educational vision – Shabbat and Tikkun Olam.
- To inspire families to live an intentional Jewish life and to provide them with the tools to do so.
- To enable families to connect to the congregation in multiple contexts and to identify meaningful ways to become more involved.

In creating the educational vision, it became clear that the friends people made, the activities they did together and the places they went helped ground and preserve their Judaism. B'Yachad incorporates all of these elements by design.

KEY FIRST STEPS TOWARD IMPLEMENTATION

- First Steps committee created a brochure that included a description of the new model and a calendar with all dates for the coming year.
- Holding several Open Forums enabled the educator to talk about what interested families could expect and to answer their questions. In the second year, B'Yachad parents attended and shared their experiences with 3rd grade families considering the model.

- Ongoing communication with the congregation about the model through a variety of media keeps all members informed.
- Hiring an appropriate facilitator for the model in order to maintain existing educational offerings in addition to the new model.

Finding the right person for the job proved both challenging and critical to the success of B'Yachad. Families wanted someone with whom they could identify, someone who was warm and nurturing with the children and open to dialogue with and feedback from parents.

GOVERNANCE STRUCTURES PROVIDING SUPPORT FOR B'YACHAD.

- The First Steps Committee worked to implement the model in its first year.
- Once the model was up and running a new group formed to provide feedback meeting four times a year.
- Currently feedback comes directly from families participating in the model.

The educator developed an open channel of communication for parents to provide feedback, insights, and suggestions as the model evolves. Families also complete surveys to capture their experience in data.

BUDGET/RESOURCES

- Initial resources included a two-year Legacy Heritage grant as well as money from the Los Angeles Bureau of Education.
- The congregation now funds the B'Yachad Facilitator.
- New teachers hired to help facilitate learning.

The infusion of additional funds in the first two years of B'Yachad meant that everything was possible. That will now begin to shift. However, the Board of Directors approved a budget that included the Facilitator position.

INTEGRATION OF B'YACHAD FAMILIES AND THE LARGER CONGREGATIONAL COMMUNITY

- Family programs often coincide with congregational worship so that they community can be together.
- B'Yachad children study Hebrew on Wednesdays so that the 6th graders can learn trope together with their traditional religious school model peers. They also worship together on Wednesdays.
- B'Yachad children participate together with their peers during Shabbat services led by specific grades.
- During holiday celebrations, B'Yachad families study together first and then join the rest of the community for the actual celebration.

The congregation seeks opportunities for B'Yachad children and their families to create connections to the rest of the community, especially the other children. This enables them to transition smoothly to 7th grade learning which does not have a family learning component. It also allows families to feel comfortable joining in congregational life beyond their B'Yachad cohort experiences.

IMPACT ON LEARNERS, TEACHERS, CONGREGATION.

- B'Yachad families appear much more comfortable in Shabbat services and more knowledgeable about Torah.
- They appear to be taking more ownership around Tikkun Olam opportunities.
- Some former congregants returned in order to participate in a one-mid-week day model even though it means much more family involvement.
- Anecdotal evidence suggests an increase in ritual practice for B'Yachad families.
- For some one day of Hebrew instruction is insufficient while others appear to be thriving in this structure.
- Attending family and grade level retreats motivated some children to explore Jewish summer camp for the first time.