



Federation Partner Spotlight: Talmud Torah Helps Students Thrive in Challenging Times

Since the start of the pandemic, Talmud Torah of St. Paul took precautions to ensure that the school is comfortable and safe for students by working with staff and parents, one of whom is an infectious disease doctor.

The Newman School of Talmud Torah of St. Paul is open with 27 students and limited class sizes. While the students meet in person, they have teachers and speakers who also Zoom in including Shira Lavintman teaching Hebrew from Israel, Earl Schwartz teaching Torah, and St. Paul Shlichah Keshet Berlinsky Edry teaching about Israel. Students also have been studying current events, learning about the elections, electoral college, anti-racism and the importance of inclusion. Even with restrictions, they still connect with the community.



The Newman School students on the playground.

“We had a virtual Sukkot celebration program with Keshet, who let us know how they celebrate Sukkot in Israel. We’ve had Federation’s PJ Library engagement specialist, Anna Burnstein Gillette, who coordinated an art activity,” said Heidi Tarshish, director of education. The students also do social service projects including sending letters to Sholom residents, participating in decorating ‘kindness cards’ for the clients of Jewish Family Service, and donating food to Neighborhood House.

The emotional needs of the students during this challenging time are also a priority. “We use a ‘Zones of Regulation’ program as a guide, along with a chart, checking in with students to see how they’re feeling every day,” Tarshish said. The chart has four colors related to four emotions and helps to teach the students about self-regulation and emotional control.

For the Midrasha and Afternoon School, virtual learning means a broadened student base. The program has expanded with 30 students Zooming from places like Atlanta, Boston and the western suburbs of Minneapolis. For many students, it’s a significant point of connection during a time of isolation. “I realized what I still know to be true today: The only constant through this pandemic has been Talmud Torah. When the world has walked out, Talmud Torah has walked in,” said recent Midrasha graduate Max Walker.



Max Walker

(more)

Talmud Torah also offers adult learning options with virtual Ulpan, parent COVID education and Hineini courses. “You don’t need to be a member of a synagogue; you don’t need to have any sort of other connections in order to be here. Our children come from all different places and some of our children don’t have affiliations other than here,” Tarshish said. “We are so appreciative for the support of the St. Paul Jewish Federation.”

– Michael Steifel Alperin