

STATEMENT *of* RELIGIOUS VALUES





Preface

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The Solomon Schechter Day School of Nassau County and High School of Long Island represent a Conservative Jewish school community committed to providing students with a high quality and lasting Jewish Education. As a kindergarten through twelfth grade school, we affirm our commitment to Judaism and to the performance of mitzvot, while also recognizing our involvement in contemporary American society. Given the diversity of tradition and varying levels of knowledge and observance among our member families, it is critical that there be a single statement of values that underlie our school's commitment and that guides the Schechter community in the exploration and presentation of the Jewish experience.

Judaism is an all-encompassing way of life. We study Judaism through the ages hoping to gain greater understanding with each new era of study. We are committed to a pluralistic view of Judaism as outlined by the Conservative Movement. We hope to encourage a positive identification with Judaism while providing our students with the tools required to be educated and practicing Conservative Jews.



God



Jewish tradition is deeply rooted in a strong belief in God. While there is no unanimity regarding God's true nature, we continue to maintain and teach that the relationship between Jew and God is one of great importance in our daily lives.

Through various subjects, students explore different ways to articulate the human-divine relationship. Contemporary and historical views are studied together to expose students to a variety of viewpoints.



The Conservative Movement recognizes the power and joy in observing and fulfilling *mitzvot* and thus sees the obligation to fulfill *mitzvot* as both an honor and a privilege. In keeping with Jewish tradition, Schechter teaches the obligation to observe *mitzvot* not as a burden to bear, but as a sacred honor to fulfill.

Mitzvot are divine commands that help us create the unique moral, ethical and interpersonal relations that define Jewish community. Moreover, *mitzvot* create the rich ritual life that has sustained the Jewish people for centuries. We seek to make clear from our teaching that there is no profound distinction between ethical and ritual commandments. Both are critical to Jewish life. Students are taught that during the performance of their daily activities, they often fulfill certain *mitzvot* without even realizing that they are doing so. In the classroom we teach *mitzvot* in a manner that reflects its importance in the classroom, in the school community and in society at large. If personal behavior that contradicts the practice of *mitzvot* is introduced by a student, such behavior might be noted, however no student will be chastised for a personal practice that his or her family observes at home. We strive to create an atmosphere wherein Jewish law and *mitzvot* are taught in a sensitive manner, while maintaining the strong connection to Conservative Jewish tradition, which we as a Conservative school strive to uphold.



Shabbat & *Holidays*

micrene zay

The observance of Shabbat and Jewish holidays is a mitzvah. It is our objective as a Conservative Jewish Day School to encourage our students and their families to embrace Shabbat and the holidays and assure all our activities guard their sanctity. To this end, all school programs will honor the limitations of Shabbat and the Jewish holidays. Such programs will begin after Shabbat or a Jewish holiday concludes and end before Shabbat or a holiday begins. Students are not permitted to travel to and from these events on the Shabbat.

Family smachot of a Schechter student such as a Bar or Bat Mitzvah often take place on Shabbat. However, if a celebration is to take place on Shabbat, travel is not permitted from the synagogue to the party. In addition families should make arrangements for students who are Shomer Shabbat and need accommodations in order to attend the service on Shabbat. Birthday parties and other celebrations may not be scheduled on Shabbat or Jewish holidays.

The days immediately following Jewish holidays are treated as homework and test-free days. No tests may be given and no assignments may be due on any of these days. We also recognize that the observance of holidays and *Shabbat* is centered around the family. Consequently, we aim to educate the family as well as the individual student in this pursuit. The school is committed to presenting Jewish holidays and *Shabbat* as regular occasions for celebration. We approach *Shabbat* and Jewish holidays from an intellectual as well as an experiential perspective.



Kashrut

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The observance of *Kashrut* is a *mitzvah* that we, as a school community, are committed to uphold. Religiously, educationally, and practically we consider *kashrut* to be of central importance. In both SSDS and the High School there are lunch programs, which adhere strictly to the laws of *kashrut*. We encourage parents to participate in the lunch program, but if a family decides to send lunch to school with a child it must be a kosher-dairy or *pareve* lunch. No meat or non-kosher food products may be brought into school at any time. No foods prepared at home, including baked goods, may be brought in to be shared with other students. There are many bakeries in the area, which are certified kosher and may be used for any school functions.

In an effort to be sensitive to all Schechter families, any program that involves Schechter students or families held outside of school, must provide only kosher food. This includes birthday parties, *b'nai-mitzvah* celebrations and any other type of reception. We educate about *kashrut*, by teaching both students and families alike about the intricacies of observing the laws of *kashrut*. Any questions about acceptable *kashrut* designations will be brought to and decided by to our Mara D'atra or Rabbinical Advisory Council.



Prayer

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The *mitzvot* of *Minyan* and *Tefilah* are performed by Schechter students on a daily basis. Traditional Jewish prayer is primarily a communal experience. Praying with a *Minyan* reflects a recognition of the traditional role and value of prayer in Jewish life and a desire to make prayer a viable and meaningful mode of expression. Our commitment to prayer is educational as well as experiential. Males and females are required to participate in, and are encouraged to take a leading role in *tefillah*. Males are required to wear *talit and, tefilin* during *minyan*. Females are encouraged to do so and supported in this regard. Males must wear *kipot* during the entire school day and during extra-curricular activities. Females are encouraged to do so and supported in this regard.

It is our belief that knowledge of the mechanics of traditional prayer, in conjunction with a discussion of the content of the prayers will foster the religious development of students. Regarding the mechanics of prayer, we recognize the necessity of teaching and using correct *nusach* (melody, mode) and *trope* (cantillations). Neither ideological nor mechanical instruction is adequate in isolation. Our goal is to develop in our students an ability to connect to God, bond with the prayer community and explore modes of spiritual self-expression. In addition we hope to assist students in developing a sense of awe and wonder about the universe as well as a sensitivity to the unique position that human beings hold in the world. We encourage both formalized communal prayer based on the traditional liturgy, as well as individual expressions of prayer.



Tzedakah ***& Social Justice***

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As Jews we have a responsibility to the community at large. Our students engage in the *mitzvah* of *tzedakah* by performing a variety of charitable activities throughout their Kindergarten through twelfth grade years at Solomon Schechter. Acts of loving kindness (*Gemilut Hasadim*) are performed, paying specific attention to our responsibilities to the Jewish community, but not ignoring the community at large. Formal, school-supported activities are introduced in the early grades. These increase in frequency and durations, culminating in a yearly community service requirement for high school students.



Kavod (*respect*)

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As a Jewish community we encourage all students and family members to strive to act with the highest level of *kavod* at all times. The elements of secularism of Schechter are acknowledged but must be viewed within the context of respect and reverence for traditional standards i.e *tzini'ut* (modesty) Our academics follow a secular approach but our life is about *kedushah* (holiness). The *mitzvah* of *Kavod* extends to the manner in which students relate to each other and also to faculty. It also includes the manner in which faculty relate to students and to parents and the manner in which parents relate to faculty.

Kavod and *tzini'ut* (modesty) also mandate that students dress and speak appropriately at all times. No revealing clothing or clothing with any questionable writing may be worn in any of the schools. No foul or abusive language (*lashon harah*) is tolerated in the Schechter community. Furthermore, students are actively encouraged to refrain from such behavior outside of school as well.



Organized Study

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Throughout their course of study, our students are exposed to the richness of Jewish texts, literature and rabbinic ideas. We are committed to teaching Bible as the central work that gives insight into God, the Jewish people and also into human conduct and behavior. Biblical statements and concepts are explored while always teaching a contemporary understanding of the historical contexts in which they were written. Clear distinctions are made between the actual words of the text and the interpretations made by later generations, keeping in mind that the scholars making these interpretations were also influenced by the time periods in which they lived. In traditional terminology, we aim to study both the *peshat* (the contextual) and *derash* (the interpretive) together, in order to derive the most meaning from the text.

Rabbinic literature is an important area of study within the ideology to which the school subscribes. We assert that the study of texts such as *Mishna*, *Gemara*, *Midrash* and various other Jewish law codes are an integral part of a complete Jewish education, as they comprise the backbone of the Jewish legal system and provide insight into Jewish values and theological concerns. As with all other Judaic study, our goal is that the study of Bible and Rabbinic texts will bring students closer to God and Judaism as well as emphasize their historical, ideological, and ethical content. In addition, students are encouraged to appreciate the Jewish value of study for its own sake. (*Torah Lishmah*)



Conclusion



This statement of religious values embodies those values of the Solomon Schechter Day School of Nassau County and High School of Long Island. It is intended to serve as a guideline to assure that all members of our community enjoy an enriching Jewish experience during their years at Schechter.





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