

## GAN AMI MISSION STATEMENT

The **core mission** of Gan Ami Early Childhood Education Program is to build a thoughtful Reform Jewish program dedicated to:

- Developmentally appropriate Judaic programming based on the key values of Reform Judaism (God, Tikkun Olam/Repairing the World, Tzedakah/Charity, Hebrew, Torah, and K'lal Yisrael/Community of Israel)

- Respect for the dignity, worth and unique needs of each individual child and family member within the construct of their total family

- Recognition that everyone has a unique mind and a unique appearance.

- Educating families about Jewish practice in the home, in the synagogue, and in the Jewish communities of the world

- Providing community-building activities that welcome all families' active participation both in the classroom and in the larger Beth Am Community

- Demonstrating leadership in the Jewish Early Childhood Education Community and being a model for others to look toward

In pursuit of these objectives, we dedicate ourselves to constant innovation, creative new approaches and methods, as well as regular assessment of our development and outcomes. We dedicate ourselves, as well, to developing and maintaining the processes required to achieve our mission.

## **Vision Statement: Jewish Classroom Life at Gan Ami**

We create loving, nurturing, child-centered classrooms that help families connect with Judaism, extend children's learning, and complement the spiritual atmosphere of the synagogue environment. We dedicate ourselves to preserving the honor of emergent Jewish curriculum rather than following practices that can lead to teacher-directed programming. By expanding the Jewish aspect of the Early Childhood Education classroom, we wish to enrich the individual religious lives of our families.

### **Loving and Nurturing**

- We are a community- Gan Ami family members participate in classroom activities, support each other when they have outside obligations, and know and care about each other
- Families and their children are kindly welcomed before class and during Chavurot
- Families are encouraged to remain at Beth Am after class time and socialize; the classroom environment brings people together in friendship
- All types of families are made to feel welcome
- Class sizes are small (12 or fewer, staffed by 2 teachers) so that each child can receive specialized attention from teachers and discover a sense of his or her own uniqueness

### **Participatory**

- Staff create a classroom environment that provides families with opportunities to be actively engaged in the classroom
- Parents can lead and participate in chavurot
- Shabbat and holiday celebrations are participatory and engaging

### **Peaceful, Joyous and Celebratory**

- The classroom is beautiful in look and sound
- Staff listens to individual children and each child has an opportunity to develop his or her own voice
- Staff is a source of comfort, strength, and support to children and families. Staff provides Jewish resources so that families can better understand the background of Judaism and the many Jewish holiday stories.
- Families celebrate life-cycle events together within the context of a caring community
- Families walk out at the end of the class able to discuss the classroom day with their children

## **Learning and Jewish Connection**

- Children are intellectually stimulated in the classroom- they learn about Torah and Jewish tradition
- Jewish books and ritual objects are present in the classroom
- Children are exposed to Hebrew through books, songs, and rituals
- Children develop a comfort level with clergy and with sacred space; clergy visit the classroom, and children visit the chapel and sanctuary regularly
- Gan Ami staff use developmentally-appropriate, play-based, emergent Jewish curriculum that enables children to acquire new social and cognitive skills at their own pace

## **Spiritually Renewing**

- The classroom helps families and children experience and appreciate the presence of God and the blessings in their lives
- Shabbat and holiday experiences in the classroom expose families and children to Jewish spirituality and Jewish practices
- Children say prayers before snack and for special occasions

## **Integrity of Jewish Classroom Life**

- The classroom has a consistent routine so that children understand what to expect each day
- There is an engaging Chavurah every Shabbat
- Special occasions are integrated into classroom life rather than changing the consistent routine
- Jewish values, traditions, and Israel live in the classroom everyday

## **Vision Statement: Parent Community and Support at Gan Ami**

Gan Ami creates a loving, nurturing and inclusive Early Childhood Education environment in which families feel strongly connected to the program and participate actively in the life of the classroom and the congregation. Staff is dedicated to caring for families in visible and genuine ways: accepting newcomers, rejoicing with each other at times of happiness and helping each other through times of sadness. Staff members are dedicated to socially responsible parenting within the context of Reform Jewish traditions. We are open to feedback from parents regarding Gan Ami communication, demeanor, and programming. Our program is served by exceptional lay and professional leaders who work dynamically together to fulfill our mission.

### **Inclusive Community**

- Gan Ami is regarded, by families inside and outside the program, as “a family-friendly program.”
- Parents participate in Gan Ami events and workshops in order to be with friends and make new friends
- Program newsletters educate parents about Jewish values and traditions and inform parents about classroom activities and events
- We reach out to affiliated and unaffiliated Jewish families of all types
- New families are warmly welcomed to the program and quickly connect to other Gan Ami families through chavurot, parent workshops, and Gan Ami events
- The program encourages families to make Jewish choices for their children
- The program offers occasions for parents to engage in Jewish learning and connection with each other
- Parent discussions take place in an atmosphere of civility, thoughtfulness, and mutual respect

### **Parent Involvement**

- Every parent feels attached to the Gan Ami community, and participates in some aspect of the program
- Staff get to know parents and are familiar with information about parents' talents and interests. They use this knowledge to be responsive to parents' input and needs
- Parents form a parent council which links Gan Ami to the Congregation Beth Am community through sponsored events and informal gatherings
- The Gan Ami parent council actively seeks input from Gan Ami families, and are readily accessible and responsive to parent concerns
- The Gan Ami parent council receives support, supervision and recognition for their service to the program

-New parent council leaders are effectively cultivated, recruited, trained and oriented

-Parent Council service is perceived as an honor and a pleasure

-Parent Council leaders demonstrate their commitment to Gan Ami and Congregation Beth Am by actively participating in our unique Jewish community

-Gan Ami is constantly reaching out to families offering many different social and educational activities

### **Commitment to Jewish Parenting**

-Parents are encouraged to participate in clergy- and staff-led educational programming related to traditional Jewish values and their connection with Reform Jewish parenting

-Staff model Jewish practices in the classroom that parents can learn about and in turn practice in the home

-**All parents** are involved in giving tzedakah and educating children about this commandment along with teachers.

### **Communal Support and Pastoral Guidance**

-Gan Ami parents can receive pastoral guidance at times of joy and sorrow, regardless of membership status

-The Gan Ami and Beth Am community offers practical support and assistance to parents who are facing difficulties such as illness, death, divorce, family stress, the birth of a baby, or other difficult personal circumstances

-Parents can visit each other when they are sick and when there is a need for a shiva minyan

## **Vision Statement: Quality Early Childhood Educators at Gan Ami**

The primary goal for the Gan Ami professional staff is to create an Early Childhood Educator community in which individual workers are valued and supported so they may be committed, knowledgeable members of the wider ECE community. They are provided with professional development opportunities that educate them on general ECE practices as well as specific Reform Jewish traditions. We employ a variety of professional development practices making it easy for all members of the Gan Ami staff to engage. We commit ourselves to recruiting and retaining high-quality educators. Staff is included in the ever-evolving vision of Gan Ami so that no member is intimidated by new branches of our Gan Ami plan.

### **Staff Communication**

- Staff members have information about Beth Am and Gan Ami events so they may share that information with parents.
- Staff meets weekly to discuss calendar items and specific classroom incidents
- Staff teams meet every other week to plan curriculum together
- Communication from staff to parents takes place in a timely manner, through verbal interactions, bulletin board displays, paper newsletters, e-newsletters, and individual emails that are clear, accessible and attractive. These communications include information about individual children's development, classroom activities, Beth Am and Gan Ami events, and other pertinent information for parents of young children.

### **Jewish Professional Development**

- We endeavor to create a staff that is highly motivated to engage in Jewish learning
- Staff has opportunities for text study and specific tradition and holiday learning at regular weekly staff meetings
- Staff members are encouraged to pursue Jewish learning both for its own sake and because they see it as relevant to daily classroom life
- Staff make their own Jewish learning a priority because they find it to be engaging, life-enhancing, and fun

### **Early Childhood Education Knowledge**

-We provide staff with a basic understanding of Early Childhood Education through literature, on-line resources, and visits at other programs

-Staff have the opportunity to focus on skills and knowledge they want to develop more, giving them a sense of personal empowerment

-Staff have the chance to observe themselves through video Investigations

-Gan Ami provides resources to staff so that they may engage in professional organization workshops

### **Learning Styles and Inclusion**

-Gan Ami Professional Development is based on staff needs and desires, employing a variety of teaching styles and methods designed to engage all types of teachers

-Development opportunities include engaging and meaningful opportunities for learners from different backgrounds

-We make every effort to ensure that professional development programming is accessible for all Gan Ami staff

### **Integration**

-Our staff is integrated into the Beth Am community and learns about the values that Beth Am professes

-Staff feel comfortable living Jewish life at Beth Am and feel like they belong here

-Staff are welcome at Beth Am events, services, and study sessions

### **Recruiting and Retaining Staff**

-Gan Ami hires and retains the professional Early Childhood Educators necessary to realize our Gan Ami vision

-Staff are recruited from within the congregation and from the local community

-We support staff with mechanisms that enhance their development and growth