

## KI's approach to Special Needs Education

At KI the first goal in our educational programs is to give students and their families a warm, comfortable atmosphere where they can enjoy Jewish life and develop positive relationships. Following educational psychologists like Maslow and Dewey, and great rabbis like Hillel, we know that once kids love being Jewish, and love their Jewish environment then we can fill them with all sorts of knowledge and create lifelong connections. Based on these goals, KI uses the principles of **Universal design** – seeking to design our educational program from the start so that it is accessible to everyone regardless of ability. Universal design minimizes the need for special needs “programs” and personnel as individuals are able to thrive in typical settings.

In our Hebrew prayer program, Hebrew is taught in multiple ways – through aural repetition in Tefillah, through movement and object based activities in *Hebrew Through Movement*, through individual, small group, and at home computer based activities. In this way students with different abilities to process letters and symbols, as well as different time frames for movement, attention or different comfort levels with group learning or anxiety can access Hebrew in multiple settings. No one needs to ask for an accommodation as the program is designed for maximum success.

Our Judaica program, which is project based, and our chugim learning, where students choose the way they want to learn material, operate using the same universal design theory.

For students who need help monitoring their behavior, we have partnered with Jewish Learning Venture to train and employ a group of teens who are able to support them with positive behavior systems, and who are able to help them take breaks when they need them. In addition, we always have a site supervisor or special needs coordinator who is available to assist if a student is overwhelmed or having a challenging day.

Our teachers participate in regular trainings from Jewish Learning Venture or from amazing congregants, who are professionals in the field, on how to best support students. They use tools in their classroom such as posting schedules, offering fidget toys, or choice of seating, offering individual pocket schedules as we travel throughout the day, or moving the classroom spaces if students have physical impairments. Each year we add to our toolbox to better meet the needs of our students and their families.

When you walk around our education program you won't see a special needs classroom or specific labels; what you will see is students with teachers and teens who are working hard to meet each of their needs – physical, educational and emotional. You will see a program that seeks to include everyone and to make KI a place where everyone belongs! It's not perfect, but we are committed to doing our best to partner with parents, students, and teachers to meet the needs of all our learners in a way that is inclusive and creates a positive environment. Have an idea or suggestion? Just let us know!