

# Oraynu in the News



## Jewish culture, values, history come alive at Oraynu Children's School

By Abigail Lapell

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With a unique approach designed to engage the whole family, the Oraynu Children's School takes Jewish learning beyond the classroom.

Founded in 1968 as part of the Oraynu Congregation for Humanistic Judaism, the school offers a secular humanist curriculum steeped in Jewish values, culture and history.

"We're teaching humanistic Judaism as values-based culture," explains congregational Rabbi Karen Levy, who co-wrote the curriculum. "It's not just something you do Sunday morning or Friday night for Shabbat; it's an entire way of life."

Through stories, music, arts and crafts, creative projects and community engagement, students from Junior Kindergarten to Grade 7 explore the role of traditional Jewish values in their own lives, all while developing creativity and critical thinking skills.

The school celebrates diversity, welcoming family members from a wide range of backgrounds – and, thanks to small class sizes and a faculty of qualified professional teachers, materials are tailored to each child's individual needs and learning style.

Each grade also includes an intergenerational learning component, with parents collaborating on in-class storytelling and research projects, plus congregation-wide programs centred around the holidays.

"Family education is all about kids and parents learning together," noted Rabbi Levy.

Central to the school's philosophy is the value of Tikkun Olam, making the world a better place. Field trips and extracurricular outings immerse children and their families in Jewish cultural and community organizations, while older students take on special community service tzedakah projects like a Passover food drive and tree-planting for Tu B'Shvat.

Ultimately, according to Rabbi Levy, humanistic ethics are deeply embedded in Jewish literature and culture – historically, she said, "these are the values that have enabled us to survive as a people – family, community, learning, tzedakah and seeing ourselves as good citizens of the world."

Through experiential learning within and beyond the classroom, Oraynu aims to bring those traditions to life in ways that speak directly to students and their families.

Classes take place Sundays from 10 a.m. to 12:30 p.m., from September through May. Students in Grades 6 and 7 can take part in the school's special two-year B'nai Mitzvot program, culminating in either a group ceremony or individual bar or bat mitzvah service.

New this year, the school also offers a caregiver-and-tot program, Oraynu-Tots, for preschoolers aged 18 months to four years. These groups include developmentally appropriate stories, art, music and movement activities.

For more information, visit [www.oraynu.org/school](http://www.oraynu.org/school) or contact Principal Steve Shabes at (416)385-3910 or [info@oraynu.org](mailto:info@oraynu.org).