

March 15, 2006

Dear CBH Members:

The Religious School Committee created a Visioning Group in order to address the question of what will happen to the structure of Religious School (RS) once we move into our own space (which we now understand may not be until the 2007-2008 school year). Our task was to consider the various options and fully flesh them out – not to select which option would be better.

This group of has worked hard to define and analyze the options for the near-term (1-3 years) future of Religious School as well as options for the long-term (beyond 3 years). In doing so, we also felt it important to acknowledge the primary drivers for CBH members when considering these issues. Please note that none of the options presented would become effective until we are in our new building.

We engaged in this process beyond the choice of “Saturday v. Sunday RS” because the resolution of that debate does not completely address our issues. The fact is, even once we are in the new building, we face potential space issues in 2008, regardless of whether RS meets on Saturday or Sunday (see chart attached as Appendix A). Thus, in thinking about re-structuring because of the move, it seemed to us to make sense to explore longer-term, more creative options as well as near-term ones. All of the options are presented in the following pages.

For the near-term (next year) the options include:

- Saturday RS and Shabbat Services
- Sunday RS and Service

For the mid-term (able to implement the following school year), the options include:

- Maintain Saturday RS but move RS to Sunday just for 7th Grade (mid-term)
- Menu/Credit Model for RS (mid-term)

For the long-term, the options include (in addition to mid-term options):

- RS on both Saturday and Sunday

The Board has decided that the options should be presented to the congregation as a whole at the Congregational Meeting on May 9. Then, the members would be invited to 1 or 2 additional meetings at which they could ask questions of the RS Committee and provide feedback on the options. Thereafter, a recommendation would be made by the Board and a vote taken of the full congregation.

In closing, I would like to thank all of the members of the Visioning Group for their hard work and commitment.

Thank you,

Liza Kirschenbaum

Visioning Group:

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With input from Nancy Yacker, Archie Gottesman, and Liz Miller

Drivers

These are the issues that drive us in how we structure our RS as well as the things that are at stake for congregants. Accordingly, we start the conversation here and try to reflect the varying perspectives of the CBH members.

1. Growth: Congregants who are aware of the issue have a strong sense that the congregation is strained in trying to sustain itself at its current size. (There are varying contributions from members in terms of time and money; the congregation constantly finds itself compensating for deficits in both time and resources.) By growing in size, the congregation can better spread the work as well as the costs of the building and staff. There is also a sense that growth will help us establish ourselves in the community. However, a tension exists in that growth can potentially clash with our focus on a sense of community and also raises concerns over whether we will be adding members who may contribute financially but participate less. Furthermore, even in our new building, growth will still have an impact on our space issues. For example, even the new building will have a defined amount of space; therefore, growth will affect the number of classrooms that will be needed for RS students and may even result in there being more students than classrooms available.
2. Rabbi's Engagement: There is a recognition that the Rabbi has a central role in RS. However, there are also many competing pulls on the Rabbi's time and attention during Shabbat each week. It is unrealistic to expect the Rabbi to be available for everybody all of the time. While congregants want to feel connected to the Rabbi, we must recognize the many different pulls on her time and attention on Saturdays, such as:
 - a. Leading Shabbat Shacharit service (morning/opening)
 - i. Full service
 - ii. Kids' service
 - iii. B'nai Mitzvah
 - b. Leading Adult Learning
 - c. Conducting B'nai Mitzvah
 - d. Consultation and interaction with congregants (this is often when the Rabbi has informal interactions and as-needed consultations with the congregants and their families)
3. Personal perspectives on RS and Shabbat. This is where congregants' personal preferences weigh strongly. However, we must recognize that preferences must be considered in light of both the growth factor and the Rabbi's engagement.
 - a. Preference that RS meet on Saturday:
 - i. Because of connection with Shabbat as an emblematic Jewish experience: For many congregants, there is a view of the Saturday RS and Shabbat service as the thing that connects them with Shabbat, the Jewish experience, and our CBH community. These people believe that Shabbat is better spent at RS and other congregation-related activities than doing chores or other secular activities.

- ii. Because there is a good feeling that we have now about what goes on during our current Saturday RS and Services: These people feel a strong sense of community that they identify as deriving from the Saturday RS and service experience (the families are together with each other and with other families, whether engaged in Jewish learning or observance).
- b. Preference that RS meet on Sunday:
 - i. For religious reasons: Some of what occurs now at RS flies in the face of religious observance (such as handling money, doing business, having meetings, doing creative work). Accordingly, some people may have an expectation that RS and other committee business should take place on Sunday in order to respect Shabbat. Additionally, some have noted that Reconstructionism values traditional practice and what we do right now on Saturdays is not traditional Shabbat practice.
 - ii. For reasons relating to scheduling: Some congregants would prefer Sunday RS because of sports and other secular activities that tend to be scheduled on Saturdays. These people also cite the new flexibility that our own space now gives us in terms of doing things the way we want (i.e., no conflict with church schedules if we are in our own building).

Finally, we must recognize that congregants are coming to CBH for a diverse array of reasons. This leads to differences in what we want the congregation and RS experience to be as well as differences in our views of:

1. Jewish culture
2. Familiar ritual
3. Sense of Community

Hopefully, this understanding of the drivers and congregants' variety of reasons for wanting different things from RS, we can move on to discuss the various options that we have before us.

Saturday RS and Shabbat Services (near-term option)

What it looks like:

Would entail the same set-up that we have now with RS, Shabbat Services, and B'nai Mitzvah all on Saturdays, as well as continuing the mid-week learning (class and/or pods). This model works well for next school year but we encounter space and time issues the following school year due to 14 B'nai Mitzvah (see point 2 below).

Challenges:

- 1) RS may be suffering from additional absenteeism because of students' secular activity schedules (NOTE: we cannot be certain that this is the case or that it would be less the case on a Sunday)
- 2) Saturday RS could continue next year and look much like it does now. However, the following year (the 2007-2008 school year) we will have 14 B'nai Mitzvah. This will impact on the Rabbi's time and availability, the available space, and instructional time in at least some of the following ways:
 - a) Rabbi would be unable to connect with everyone because of being pulled in too many directions
 - b) B'nai Mitzvah students would lose critical class time by attending each others' B'nai Mitzvah
 - c) Space issues arise even in the new building as the B'nai Mitzvah will take up the Sanctuary and possibly the kitchen and Oneg room as well
- 3) We would still be unable to have a full Shabbat Morning Shacharit Service (which is significantly longer than the family service we currently do on Saturday mornings) if we continue with RS and the current abbreviated Service on Saturdays.
- 4) We may not be getting additional membership that we'd otherwise get because of:
 - a) Not having a full Shabbat Morning Shacharit Service
 - b) Secular activity scheduling conflicts with Saturday RS
- 5) Although never a problem in the past, some people may not want to teach on Shabbat

Alternatives to Compensate for Challenges:

- 1) Switch B'nai Mitzvah to weekday service
 - a) Note, however, that families usually prefer a weekend Bar/Bat Mitzvah.
- 2) Switch B'nai Mitzvah to a Havdalah service
 - a) Note, however, that this could have a negative impact on the child, the family, the community, and the Rabbi as follows:
 - i) Child impact: must learn extra prayers for Havdalah
 - ii) Family impact: extra learning plus extra costs of set-up/break-down/clean-up
 - iii) Community impact: B'nai Mitzvah are no longer a community event. Also, volunteers have extra burdens relating to set-up and break-down/clean-up.
 - iv) Rabbi Impact: This model is very taxing for the Rabbi to be "on" for Friday night, Saturday, and then Saturday night as well. Currently, the arrangement concerning Havdalah B'nai Mitzvah is that the Rabbi does not attend the Shabbat morning service on the day of a Havdalah Bar/Bat Mitzvah service.
- 3) Supplement Leadership: Employ Rabbinical student or assistant Rabbi to assist Rabbi

- a) Note, however, that either of these options would be costly, and perhaps prohibitively so.
- 4) Use congregant-led services as a way around the issue of the Rabbi's availability.
- 5) Implement various options for 7th Graders alone in order to compensate for the 14 Saturdays missed for B'nai Mitzvah:
 - a) Have the 7th grade meet on Sunday (still would have a requirement for attending Shabbat services)
 - b) Replace the Shabbats that the 7th graders will miss with on-line learning modules.
 - c) Employ primarily mid-week learning, independent study, or other supplemental learning.
 - d) Revise 7th Grade Curriculum to incorporate some of the items noted in the Menu/Credit Option as a way of supplementing the RS classes missed.

Benefits to this RS model:

- 1) We keep the sense of Shabbat community that we have now with RS families attending a Shabbat service together and then having an Oneg Shabbat afterwards.
- 2) Students all get to see a Torah service (which has religious, cultural, and instructional value) and feel a connection to the Shabbat service.
- 3) This model also allows families to continue to do the usual household chores on Sundays (laundry, shopping, etc...).
- 4) We bring people into religious observance and learning on Shabbat as opposed to on a different day.

Costs related to this model:

- 1) Would include the current set of costs
- 2) However, if we were to seek to employ a rabbinical student or an Assistant Rabbi, significant additional costs would be incurred.

Sunday RS and Services (near-term option)

What it looks like:

Would entail the same set-up that we have now with RS except that: RS would meet on Sunday rather than Saturday and would include a Weekday Shacharit family service. There would also be a Shabbat Morning service attendance requirement (to be determined) so that students still have the opportunity to experience the service that they are learning about in class and preparing for in B'nai Mitzvah.

Challenges:

- 1) There is a risk of weakening our sense of community that is afforded by a family Shabbat service in conjunction with/as part of RS.
- 2) Could affect family participation – families may not participate in the Sunday service as they currently do with Saturday's Family Shabbat service:
 - a) Because Sunday Shacharit service is not a Shabbat service (includes songs, Shema, Amidah, Announcements, and Closing, but does not include a Torah Service portion).
 - b) Because some congregants feel that Sunday is a time when people are used to either doing their chores or staying in bed. Thus, this option might foster more drop-offs and less of a community observance – the concern is that parents will not come back to a service with their kids but will just drop off and pick up.
- 3) Older students would still be required to attend Shabbat services as well as Sunday RS and some families may view this as too much of a time commitment.
 - a) The Shabbat Service Requirement must still be finalized but would likely entail the following: 3d graders to attend services 4 times a year; 4th graders to attend services 6 times a year; 5th graders would attend services 8 times a year; and 6th and 7th graders would attend services 9 times a year.
- 4) There is a question about whether the students will still feel the significance of or a connection to Shabbat the way they do now (such as when one child was heard saying “this is so cool” when she got to hold the Torah).
- 5) The fact that students won't get exposure to a Torah service on a regular, built-in basis (as the Torah service is not part of the weekday Shacharit service) will have a direct impact on their preparedness for their B'nai Mitzvah.
- 6) Would need to do some type of Oneg but this would be in addition to the Friday night and Saturday Onegs (so getting volunteers would become even more difficult).
- 7) We would need new Siddurim for a Sunday service or we would have to create them.
 - a) New Siddurim are an expense and we would also need a place to store them.
 - b) Students would not get exposure to or feel a connection with the Shabbat Siddur – this could also have an impact on preparedness for B'nai Mitzvah. This is one of the reasons for incorporating a Shabbat service requirement.
- 8) There is some concern that the Saturday Shabbat service might be lost completely if RS families are not there to attend.
 - a) Alternatives would be to create a Shabbat morning service designed for families and children to attend even though there's no RS or to simply offer a full Shabbat morning Shacharit service.
 - b) However, we're unsure that we'd have sufficient attendance for any such service.

- 9) While the model eases the Rabbi's schedule on Saturdays, it creates other time issues as the Rabbi would now be working on Sundays as well. The Rabbi's time would have to be restructured with the approval of the Board and the Rabbi.
- 10) This would interfere with Sunday weddings and funerals.
- 11) We would have some difficulty recruiting teachers on Sunday as many of our current teachers have other teaching jobs, work or commitments on Sunday.

Alternatives to Compensate for Challenges:

- 1) Add in some Family Shabbatonim as an alternative to RS on some weekends.
- 2) Encourage family and community participation on Sundays by offering fun and interesting family programming along with the Shacharit service.
- 3) Build in Shabbat connection through a requirement for attendance at a certain number of Shabbat morning services (with the number varying according to grade level).

Benefits to this RS model:

- 1) Since B'nai Mitzvah would be on Saturdays, this model eliminates that conflict for the Rabbi and the lost instructional time for 7th graders.
- 2) Accommodates families with sports activities, or other classes and activities on Saturdays.
- 3) Might attract new members because of accommodating students' activity/sports schedules and potentially offering a full Saturday Shabbat service.
- 4) Keeps more closely to traditional religious observance by not having RS on Shabbat.
- 5) Allows us to offer a full Saturday morning Shacharit service (assuming there would be a demand and a Minyan).
- 6) Increases the Rabbi's availability to congregants since she would be at CBH on both Saturday and Sunday (however this does not ease her schedule as she would be here BOTH Saturday and Sunday).
- 7) Allows for adding new activities such as fundraisers when RS students and families are around since those activities are not allowed on Saturdays.

Costs related to this model:

- 1) Would include the current set of costs.
- 2) Would include additional costs of keeping building open and running an extra day (custodial and building costs).
- 3) Would need new weekday Siddurim and a place to store them.
- 4) Would lose the opportunity to rent the space out on Sundays.

Menu/Credit Model for RS (long term option; however, we could begin piloting certain elements in a staggered phase-in while implementing any one of the other models)

What it looks like:

This model would entail setting up a menu system whereby RS could be completed based on a combination of activities, including but not limited to: classroom learning, shabbatonim, attendance at Shabbat services (Friday or Saturday), completion of mini-courses, attending a Jewish-content camp such as Camp JRF, participation in community-wide Jewish activities, participation in Young Judea, pod-based Hebrew, engaging in Jewish social action, travel to Israel, Jewish book group, credit for tutoring for B'nai Mitzvah, planning CBH Spiritual Life activities, and on-line learning.

Why we would consider this model:

Studies have shown that traditional Hebrew school does not effectively foster a love of Judaism or Jewish tradition that is life-long. However, if young people are engaged in Jewish activities with family and other Jewish friends, this is far more effective in not only teaching but also in creating life-long Jews. Those concerned with these issues have identified the modification of traditional religious school as a key to addressing these issues. If we can accomplish at least a partial menu model, CBH would be at the forefront of religious education.

Challenges:

- 1) Design and administration of this model is more challenging in that you would have to be sure that students are getting a lot of individual attention, and you would need to set up individual learning plans, provide an “educational counselor” for each student, and probably have more staff.
- 2) There is a risk of losing our sense of community that is afforded by a congregational Shabbat.
- 3) There is a risk of losing the bonding between the students in each grade level if they are not spending class time together.
- 4) We would need more pod teachers for Hebrew as well as pod or other teachers for other group learning menu items.
- 5) We would need to clearly articulate an educational core for students and be sure that activities have a strong relation to that core.
- 6) Some menu options could pose problems for inter-faith couples or couples where one partner is non-observant.
- 7) Could have significant financial implications such that families that could afford it would have an easier time meeting the requirements.
- 8) Questions arise as to whether this would be attractive to the whole congregation.
- 9) Would require different management and authority structure (and a different way to handle non-compliance).
- 10) Could potentially require more complex transportation and scheduling issues for families as well as a greater level of community volunteer commitment.
- 11) This model may not lend itself to implementation for the full congregation and may necessitate different tracks, including traditional classes as a supplement.

- 12) Would need to ensure that menu options adequately prepare students for B'nai Mitzvah.

Alternatives to Compensate for Challenges:

- 1) We could ensure that group learning is still a key component
 - a) This would ensure that the bonding between students still takes place
 - b) This would also ensure that the students still get the educational benefits of group learning.
- 2) Menu options could create new ways of fostering a sense of community in addition to congregational Shabbat services.
- 3) We could create different financial models to compensate for financial implications, however, this may lead to procedures like reporting income or submitting tax forms which many feel should be avoided.
- 4) We can create different tracks that also include traditional classes.
- 5) Menu options could account for issues arising from inter-faith marriages or families where one parent is non-observant.
- 6) This model can be phased in as pilot programs in stages; different menu items could be added at different times for particular target populations.

Benefits to this RS model:

- 1) Avoids scheduling conflicts for the Rabbi and B'nai Mitzvah.
- 2) Avoids loss of instructional time for 7th Graders in attending B'nai Mitzvah.
- 3) Encourages experiential and family-based Jewish learning.
- 4) Eases issue of scheduling conflicts for families with sports or other secular activities on weekends.
- 5) Although there are concerns about students bonding with classmates, this model would likely foster cross-class bonding in that students from different grades will be participating in activities together.
- 6) This model best accommodates different learning styles.
- 7) Potentially provides a dynamic new way to educate children, with CBH at the forefront of this educational model. As noted above, this model responds to studies that indicate that traditional religious school is not the most effective way to raise engaged, life-long Jews.
- 8) Gives families (and the students) a greater sense of responsibility for and choice in the student's Jewish education.

Costs related to this model:

- 1) Would include some of the current set of costs
- 2) Would need to pay for various menu/credit activities
- 3) May result in added facilities costs depending on use of building for menu/credit activities.
- 4) Would need to cover the cost of administering the program:
 - a) Staffing in terms of teachers, their training, and necessary supplies.
 - b) We'd need more than just 1 person to track, guide, and evaluate student learning

If this model is to be piloted or phased in, we will address other outstanding issues such as:

- 1) Creation of lists of menu/credit activities and a point system or grid these activities.
- 2) Method of piloting or phase-in (i.e., choosing classes/age groups and menu/credit activities)
- 3) Assessing and addressing coverage of any added costs.
- 4) Determining details such as:
 - a) When would pods meet?
 - b) How are students prepared for B'nai Mitzvah?
 - c) How do we deal with economic disparities?

There are other ideas on the Menu/Credit Option that are related to distance/on-line learning and would be part of the potential menu

- 1) Could implement aspects of distance/on-line learning such as:
 - a) On-line class section of the CBH web-site
 - b) Blog-type learning
 - c) Joint learning project that involves groups of students.
 - d) Use of "Wiki" - a place where readers can contribute to the content
- 2) Could start phasing in with 7th grade and then work down in grade levels.
- 3) Could also start with social action projects.
- 4) This option could involve a rabbinical student without requiring him or her to travel weekly to CBH.
- 5) This option could also serve to prepare students for "real world" learning, where online study is important.
- 6) Output of learning projects can be presented by students to the congregation and to others.
- 7) This option potentially increases students' sense of accomplishment.
- 8) This option should not eliminate "face-to-face" learning, but can be part of the program.

Maintain Saturday RS But Move RS to Sunday just for 7th Grade (mid-term option – for 2007-2008 school year and beyond)

What it looks like:

Would entail the same set-up that we have now with RS except that we would have 7th Graders do RS on Sundays. They would still have their mid-week learning sessions. This model would still include a requirement for Shabbat service attendance.

Challenges:

- 1) This would require families with 7th graders to come three times a week (RS on Sunday, Shabbat Service, and mid-week learning).
- 2) This creates significantly greater weekend time requirements for families with students in multiple grades (they'd have children in RS on BOTH Saturday and Sunday).
- 3) This does not address scheduling conflicts for families with other activities but, in fact, potentially exacerbates those problems.

Benefits to this RS model:

- 1) Addresses challenge of having the 7th graders miss instructional time for 14 B'nai Mitzvah in 2007-2008 school year.

Costs related to this model:

- 1) Would include the current set of costs.
- 2) Would include additional costs of keeping building open and running an extra day (custodial and building costs).

RS on Weekdays Only (near- or long-term option – NOTE: this option was explored and discussed; however, the instructors in the group felt that it should not be considered in light of the significant instructional challenges that it presents)

What it looks like:

RS would take place two times per week from 4:30 to 6:15 and students would also have a Shabbat service attendance requirement (to be determined).

Challenges:

- 1) Based on learning studies and prior experience, educators feel that this is a BAD model for learning
 - a) Students have more difficulty absorbing information and learning material after they have already been in school all day.
 - b) Attention span is shorter the later you get in the day
 - c) Students have already been sitting all day
 - d) Students are simply too tired or worn-out to learn.
- 2) This interferes with students being able to complete homework for their regular school.
- 3) This interferes with scheduling of sports and other secular or after-school activities (potentially exacerbating scheduling conflicts).
- 4) This creates issues for working parents who would need to provide transportation for their children (and might, therefore, affect enrollment or membership).
- 5) Students would still have a Shabbat service attendance requirement and, therefore, families would have to come 3 times a week.
- 6) We may have trouble finding teachers willing to teach on 2 weekdays.

Benefits to this RS model:

- 1) Frees up weekends except for the Shabbat service attendance requirement.
- 2) Avoids issues related to space constraints on weekends due to B'nai Mitzvah.

Costs related to this model:

- 1) Would include the current set of costs.
- 2) Would include additional costs of keeping building open and running an extra day (custodial and building costs).

Offer RS on Both Saturday and Sunday (long-term option ONLY)

This option was not seriously considered because the increased costs and problems it creates do not outweigh the benefits at this time. We may want to re-visit this option once the RS population gets so big that there will be 2 classes of students for each grade level. Until then, there would be too many obstacles to implementing this model.

Appendix A

Projected Number of Classrooms Needed for Each Religious School Grade Level (accounts for anticipated growth)

Grade Level	2005-2006	2006-2007	2007-2008	2008-2009
Kindergarten	1	1	1	1
First Grade	1	1	1	1
Second Grade	1	1	1	1
Third Grade	2	1	1	1-2
Fourth Grade	1	2	1	1-2
Fifth Grade	2	1-2	2	1-2
Sixth Grade	1	2	1-2	2
Seventh Grade	1	1	2	2
Total classrooms	10	10-11	10-11	10-13