

#OnwardHebrew: In the words of education directors

BONUS: Complementary resources are offered in *green font* after select comments.

What can create hiccups with #OnwardHebrew or its elements?

- **Combining grade levels.**

- “We have a 4th/5th grade class. The fifth graders were scheduled to learn to decode, not the fourth graders. For us, it meant that the fourth graders learned to decode, too.”
- “We combine grades 3, 4 and 5, bringing 30 children together with one teacher and two teacher assistants. It’s a challenge to have Hebrew decoders (the 5th graders who are learning one-on-one at a different time) with those who are not (the 3rd graders). But it’s not impacting any of those who have learned to decode. So, if the class is working on the recitation of a prayer or blessing, the decoders use the corresponding jPrayer prayer page and the other children use the transliteration/Hebrew page from the *siddur*.” *[For a jPrayer example, see [“Teaching T’fillah” prayer resource sheets, pages 1-6.](#)]*

- **Moving to smaller classes or one-on-one learning.**



- “We found the finances to be a challenge.”
- “We’d love to shift to one-on-one learning but haven’t figured out how to find enough teachers/facilitators.”
- “We have enough trouble finding Hebrew teachers for one class per grade level. I’m not sure how we could hire enough teachers for smaller groupings.”

- **Once committed to #OnwardHebrew, figuring how what to do with children who have already started to decode in a younger grade.**

- “We decided to move our decoding to fifth grade, but the third and fourth graders had already been introduced to this skill. We talked to others who had made the move and decided to keep them moving forward with the old curriculum. For them, we are training their teachers to teach decoding sound-to-print, rather than their traditional way.” *[Click here for a video*

that offers four easy strategies for teaching decoding Sound-to-Print:
<https://youtu.be/u3zkwzd31Eo>

- “We decided to teach prayers and blessings in 3rd and 4th grade, along with Hebrew Through Movement and Jewish Life Vocabulary. However, we focus on spirituality and prayer-meanings, rather than decoding.”

- **Respecting the parameters dictated by other programmatic decisions.**



- “We are committed to Project Based Learning but because of the time needed and structure, cannot integrate Hebrew Through Movement. So we are “On-the-Way,” with all doing Jewish Life Vocabulary, *t’fillah*

and one-on-one decoding in a later grade.”

- “Our program is intergenerational, divided into trimesters. Some classes are for children, some for adults, and some classes that seamlessly integrate a large age span. On Sundays, we don’t have specific Hebrew classes, though everyone is involved in *t’fillah* and Jewish Life Vocabulary. Our K-2 children leave *t’fillah* after *Mi Chamocha* to enjoy HTM with one of our teachers. Every other year we offer a voluntary fifth and sixth class for children paired with a parent using ‘Let’s Learn Hebrew Side-by-Side.’ [<https://www.shalomlearning.org/curriculum/hebrew-programs/lets-learn-hebrew/>] Otherwise, children learn to decode about a year out from their B’Mitzvah with our tutor; they then move into the prayers and blessings. It’s all a bit complicated, but it works for us!”
- “We originally tried setting up decoding in a lab situation – children worked independently on “Let’s Learn Hebrew Side-by-Side” and then checked in with one of the facilitators in the room. It got complicated. Now we are struggling to find the right Hebrew books for decoding, taught in person (previously, all Hebrew was on Zoom).”

Ah, and what forces can derail #OnwardHebrew?

- **A merger** between an educational program that incorporates #OnwardHebrew with a program that is not interested.

- **Turnover** - a director who brought #OnwardHebrew leaves.
- **A new director is hired without experience in part-time Jewish education**, thus lacking some of the cultural understanding and possibilities.
- **Teachers who don't have the needed Hebrew background** to support HTM or JLV.
- **The difficulty in finding teachers, period!**
- **Finances** ... or the inability to creatively maneuver within the previous financial assumptions.
 - “Financial pressures and budget cuts during the first year of the pandemic forced the move from small-group Hebrew learning to very large groups of 15-20 children. I hope we can move back to smaller groupings in another year.”



- “We had financial pressures, but I sought out volunteers to work with kids on Hebrew decoding. We have a culture of volunteering and it wasn't really a problem. Yes, I had to fill in, personally working with two to three kids, but it helped me know what was going on from the inside.”
- “I'm working on getting volunteer leadership to teach in the program on a regular basis during the year. I realized that they'd have to see it as an unpaid job.”
- **Change is made without attention to the principles of a change process; it doesn't stick.**

- **Children’s progress is not communicated honestly to parents.** [One director noted that there was a perception by parents that children learning in pods or larger groups were doing well, but it caused grief when it was discovered that the children were struggling.]
- **A lack of storytelling,** i.e., consistent sharing stories of #OnwardHebrew and Hebrew learning successes.
- **Measures of success haven’t changed with the shift to #OnwardHebrew:**
 - “We still have a long list of prayers and blessings that senior clergy feel is important children need to be able to decode well. So if we move decoding to fifth grade but there’s a list of prayers that children need to have decoded correctly in fourth (like *V’ahavta*), they’ll never be able to accomplish the task.”
 - “The cantor complains that x child doesn’t know y prayer. It’s a problem.”
 - “And who checks the kids to the cantor’s standards? Can we trust a teen to appropriately pass children on their prayer lists?”

