



פְּרִיצַת דֶּרֶךְ Pritzat Derech: Hebrew For All

For Parents



Pritzat Derech: Hebrew for All

Pritzat Derech (Hebrew for “breaking through”): Hebrew for All is a North American initiative dedicated to removing barriers to Hebrew literacy for students with dyslexia and other language-based learning disabilities in Jewish day school settings.

Launched in memory of Pamela Kanfer, z”l, and with initial funding from Lippman Kanfer Family Foundation, the effort is led by Hebrew at the Center in partnership with Gateways: Access to Jewish Education, Scott Goldberg Consulting, Prizmah, and The Shefa Center. With members of each organization serving as the initiative Planning Team, this group assembled a wide range of academics, practitioners, field leaders, and stakeholders to help the field to better serve these students as they launched their Hebrew journeys.

Prior to moving into field testing in pilot communities, the initiative completed an extensive discovery phase, sponsored short-term research including a comprehensive literature review, and identified interventions that can help schools, educators, and communities understand and support these learners effectively. Through ongoing research, professional learning, and resource creation, Pritzat Derech aims to foster environments where all students can thrive in their Hebrew learning.

In Mishnah Avot 2:16, Rabbi Tarfon taught “It is not your duty to finish the work, but neither are you at liberty to neglect it.” True transformative change for the students this initiative aims to serve will require school-wide shifts in instructional methods, curricular choices, staffing and policies, and other systematic approaches that maximize learning for all students. It is the goal of this initiative to begin to help the field consider these deeper questions and approaches. In the interim, this introductory guide is designed to begin that conversation, enabling more stakeholders access to the knowledge and key principles that can start making a difference in the lives of so many. We must do what we can to begin to remove obstacles to learning Hebrew so that this sacred and modern language becomes a part of their rightful inheritance.

Key Goals of the Initiative Include:

- Raising awareness and understanding of dyslexia, language-based learning disabilities, and related challenges.
- Providing schools with tools, systems, and strategies to support these diverse learners in learning Hebrew.
- Addressing the unique complexities of teaching Hebrew as a second or non-native language.
- Building a collaborative network of educators, researchers, and community leaders who have the most up-to-date knowledge and expertise to support this specific population.

Key Deliverables of the Initiative Include:

- Curation of relevant research and knowledge to inform practice in classrooms and schools.
- Training programs and publications for teachers, school specialists and leaders, and community stakeholders to translate the knowledge into useable practice.
- Field pilots that embed a new position of Professional Hebrew Reading Specialist with this knowledge, practice, and training into schools and community.
- Developing a framework to bring this intervention to field-wide scale.



This introductory guide is the first publication being distributed to the field to begin to raise awareness; to build a common language across the field with which to discuss the challenges students, teachers, schools and families face; and to begin to inform practice. Over the next few pages, you will find the following:

1. Glossary of Terms

The glossary of terms provides non-specialists with the key vocabulary necessary to inform discussions about learning, language instruction, and the different dimensions of the challenges students can face when learning to read Hebrew, including those that are different than their reading of English, the first language of most Jewish day school students in North America.

2. Summary of Descriptive Learnings

While the research sponsored by this initiative continues to advance and more is expected to be learned as the project's pilots unfold, this section shares some important first learnings that have emerged from bringing together a group of critical academics, educators, practitioners, and other stakeholders to identify key knowledge, knowledge gaps, and new information emerging from current research.

3. Key FAQs

As this initiative has been introduced to teachers and school administrators, concerned parents, community leaders, and others, a number of common questions have been surfaced that can be answered in a well-researched and thoughtful manner, empowering more policies and practices across the field that are informed by the leading ideas and data-informed research.

4. Stakeholder Supplements

While much of this document is designed to create shared language for all stakeholders, we recognize the need to provide more tailored details and guidance to specific audiences within a school community. These include information for Hebrew teachers, Hebrew leaders (such as department chairs), reading specialists, general school administrators, and parents who help guide the direction and priorities of each school.

Over the course of this initiative, additional publications will be distributed such as a more prescriptive field guide, academic research, OpEds and other writings that help shift the narrative to help make the day school space more inclusive and reflective of Jewish commitments to inclusion and effective Jewish education for all.

FOR PARENTS:

Supporting Your Child's Hebrew Journey

> What To Know

If your child is struggling with Hebrew reading, you are not alone! Many students—especially those with dyslexia or other language-based learning disabilities (LBD)—find Hebrew particularly challenging. Even children who do well in English may experience difficulty in Hebrew.

Here's Why:

- Hebrew is a **second (or third) language** for most children and often isn't spoken at home.
- Its writing system is different; Hebrew is **consonant-based** (called abjad), and many texts **omit vowels** as students get older.
- Your child may **read accurately** but still **struggle with fluency** (reading quickly and smoothly), which makes it hard to understand what they read.
- Many schools are just beginning to adapt reading support to Hebrew in the same way they have for English.

You might hear terms like “structured literacy,” “phonological awareness,” or “decoding”—these refer to how children learn to connect letters with sounds, sound out words, and build comprehension. These processes work differently in Hebrew than in English, and children need instruction that addresses those differences.

> Why This Matters

- **Hebrew is a core part of Jewish life and learning:** From prayer to Torah to Israeli and Jewish culture, Hebrew helps connect your child to Jewish identity, tradition, and community. When children struggle with Hebrew, they may feel left out or disconnected.
- **Early challenges can grow over time:** Research shows that children who struggle with Hebrew fluency in early grades fall further behind as they get older unless they receive targeted support. These struggles can affect confidence and motivation—not just in Hebrew, but in school overall.
- **Parents are powerful partners:** You don't need to speak Hebrew to help your child. By understanding how Hebrew learning works and advocating for your child's needs, you can play a key role in supporting their success.

> Common Questions

Is learning two languages too hard for my child? It depends. Learning both English and Hebrew can be a benefit, and students with LBD often need instruction that is carefully paced and explicitly taught. Starting with **aural Hebrew (hearing and speaking)** and moving gradually into reading is often most effective.

Why does my child do fine in English but struggle in Hebrew? Hebrew and English use different writing systems and phonological structures. A student may do well in English but still find Hebrew decoding or fluency very difficult. That doesn't mean they're not trying or capable; it means the instruction needs to be different.

What if I don't know Hebrew myself? You can still support your child! Listen to recordings together, help with vocabulary flashcards, ask the school for practice tools, and, most importantly, encourage your child and celebrate effort.

> What You Can Do

1. Ask Questions About Hebrew Instruction

- What are the school's goals for Hebrew?
- How does the school teach Hebrew reading?
- What happens when a child struggles in Hebrew?
- Are teachers trained in the Science of Reading or structured literacy for Hebrew?
- Are there specialists who support reading in Hebrew, not just in English?

2. Understand What Your Child Is Experiencing

- If your child reads slowly, struggles to remember vowel sounds, or avoids reading aloud, they may need extra support.
- Your child might read Hebrew words correctly but still not understand them because reading is slow or vocabulary is limited.
- These are common signs of language-based learning challenges, and early intervention can help.

3. Partner With Your Child's Teachers

- Request updates on your child's Hebrew progress.
- Ask whether assessments are used to track growth (such as words correct per minute).
- Share what you're seeing at home including frustration, avoidance, or questions about Hebrew.
- Encourage the school to coordinate supports between English and Hebrew instruction.

4. Support Hebrew Learning At Home

- **Listen to Hebrew together:** songs, stories, or recordings of classroom texts.
- **Practice key vocabulary:** Ask teachers what words are being learned in class and use them in conversation.
- **Celebrate small wins:** Encourage effort and progress, not just perfection.
- **Normalize the challenge:** Let your child know that reading Hebrew is hard, and that it's okay to need help.

5. Advocate For Inclusion and Access

- Ensure your child receives appropriate support in both English and Hebrew.
- If your child has an IEP or learning plan, ask that Hebrew instruction be addressed specifically.
- Encourage your school to invest in teacher training and reading resources for Hebrew, just as they do in general studies.

> Bottom Line

Every child deserves to feel successful in Hebrew. You can help your child build confidence, competence, and connection. And you can help your school grow in how it supports diverse learners in Jewish education.

For additional tools, training opportunities, or to join a network of schools addressing these challenges, contact *Dr. Sarah Robinson Levy*, Director of Pritzat Derech: Hebrew for All at:

hebrewforall@hebrewatthecenter.org

For more information:

Visit hebrewatthecenter.org/prizat-derech

or contact **Dr. Sarah Rubinson Levy**,
Director of Pritzat Derech: Hebrew for All,
at hebrewforall@hebrewatthecenter.org.



עברית במרכז
HEBREW AT THE CENTER

