



פְּרִיצַת דֶּרֶךְ Pritzat Derech: Hebrew For All

For Reading Specialists & Interventionists



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 READING SPECIALISTS & INTERVENTIONISTS:

Optimizing Hebrew Support

> What To Know

As a reading specialist or interventionist, you are already familiar with supporting students with dyslexia and language-based learning disabilities (LBD) in English. But many students need the same level of support in Hebrew and often aren't getting it.

Hebrew Presents Different Challenges Than English:

- Its **abjad orthography** (consonant-based script) makes vowel decoding a unique challenge.
- Most Hebrew texts used in schools are **vowelized**, but students transition to **unpointed** text as they advance, requiring strong morphological and contextual knowledge.
- **Oral exposure** to Hebrew is minimal outside of school, unlike English.
- Students with LBD often display **accurate decoding in Hebrew** but struggle with **fluency and automaticity**, limiting their comprehension and motivation.
- In Hebrew, dyslexia is particularly characterized by difficulties with fluency, even if accuracy in decoding may be achieved due to Hebrew's relatively transparent orthography (with nikud). This impacts comprehension significantly.

Recent research shows that students identified as high-risk readers in Hebrew read about six WCPM (words correct per minute) by Grade 2, compared to 20 WCPM for their typically developing peers. These gaps widen over time unless identified and addressed early.

Students learning Hebrew as a second language may apply rules and norms from English, their first language, which can impact their Hebrew acquisition.

> Why This Matters

- **You are uniquely positioned to bridge the gap:** Students with LBD often receive support for English reading, but not for Hebrew. Your expertise in structured literacy, progress monitoring, and intervention design is directly applicable and needed in Hebrew settings.
- **Alignment matters:** Students learn best when strategies are aligned across languages. Many structured literacy principles apply across English and Hebrew but need to be adapted to Hebrew's structure.
- **Fluency is the major barrier:** Because Hebrew with vowels is relatively transparent (clear sound-symbol correspondence), accuracy alone isn't a reliable diagnostic marker. Fluency—speed, expression, and ease—becomes the best indicator of Hebrew reading difficulty.
- **Intervention in Hebrew is possible:** You don't need to be fluent in Hebrew to support students or coach teachers. You need knowledge of reading development, willingness to learn language-specific features, and collaboration with Hebrew educators.

> What You Can Do

1. Collaborate With Hebrew Teachers

- Share your expertise in phonological awareness, decoding, fluency, and comprehension.
- Observe Hebrew reading instruction and identify parallels to general reading support.
- Help teachers adapt structured literacy routines to Hebrew.
- Provide coaching or co-teaching support in small groups when possible.

2. Build and Align Screening and Progress Monitoring

- Use tools like MaDYK or adapted fluency assessments to collect WCPM data in Hebrew.
- Track progress over time to identify students who need more intensive support.
- Use parallel data in English and Hebrew to inform intervention design.

3. Develop and Implement MTSS For Hebrew

- Support your school in integrating Hebrew reading into MTSS frameworks.
- Help define tiers of support: universal instruction, small-group intervention, and intensive individual support.
- Work with leadership to schedule intervention time for Hebrew, especially in early grades.

4. Train and Empower Staff

- Offer PD for Hebrew teachers on the Science of Reading, dyslexia, and structured literacy.
- Help teachers understand that even vowelized Hebrew can be difficult without automaticity and vocabulary.
- Promote strategies like phoneme-grapheme mapping, morphology instruction, and repeated reading in Hebrew.

5. Customize Interventions For LBLD Students In Hebrew

- Teach morphological awareness alongside decoding.
- Reinforce word recognition strategies with flashcards, games, and targeted vocabulary practice.
- Use recorded texts or teacher-modeled read-alouds to build fluency.

6. Support Families

- Communicate clearly about how Hebrew reading development works.
- Provide tools families can use at home: recordings, flashcards, or vocabulary games.
- Help families advocate for appropriate supports in both English and Hebrew.

> Practical Strategies

- **Use decodable, vowelized texts** at students' instructional level.
- **Embed oral language** activities (i.e., echo reading, songs, sentence completion) to build vocabulary and fluency.
- **Monitor WCPM regularly** to measure fluency growth.
- **Teach morphology:** Explicitly connect root words to meaning and usage.
- **Support generalization:** Help students apply decoding and comprehension strategies across both languages.

> Bottom Line

You are a catalyst for inclusion. Your work supporting literacy doesn't stop with English. When you extend your expertise to Hebrew instruction—through collaboration, coaching, and cross-language strategy—you expand access, belonging, and success for all learners.

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

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For more information:

Visit hebrewatthecenter.org/pritzat-derech

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