



פְּרִיצַת דֶּרֶךְ Pritzat Derech: Hebrew For All

For School Leaders



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 SCHOOL LEADERS:

Supporting Hebrew Learning for All Students

> What To Know

Hebrew instruction in Jewish day schools presents unique challenges, particularly for students with dyslexia and other language-based learning disabilities (LBD). While schools increasingly adopt structured literacy approaches in English, Hebrew often lags behind in adopting evidence-based, inclusive practices.

Key Insights From Recent Research and Field Practice:

- **Hebrew's structure poses specific challenges:** It uses an abjad script (mostly consonants), relies heavily on morphology (roots and patterns), and has two primary forms (pointed and unpointed text). These characteristics require explicit instruction for all learners—and even more so for those with learning differences.
- **Fluency matters more than accuracy:** In transparent orthographies like Hebrew with vowels (nikud), students may read accurately but slowly. Slow, effortful reading limits comprehension and reduces motivation.
- **Learning gaps widen over time:** Data shows that students identified as “high risk” read fewer words per minute and progress more slowly than their peers over time unless provided with targeted intervention.

Despite this, Hebrew teachers often lack access to the same tools, training, and interventions that support English language learners. This gap leaves students with LBD at a disadvantage, compromising both their learning and their connection to Jewish identity.

> Why This Matters

You set the tone and priorities for your school. Instructional decisions, professional development, hiring, and resource allocation all flow from leadership. Addressing Hebrew instruction for students with LBD isn't just about academic achievement; it's about access, equity, and fulfilling your school's mission.

Here's Why This Should Be On Your Radar:

- **Equity and inclusion:** Hebrew is core to Jewish identity, and access to that learning must be equitable. Failing to support struggling readers in Hebrew excludes them from full participation in Jewish life and learning.
- **Parent satisfaction and retention:** Parents of students with LBD are savvy and vocal. When they see their children excluded from success in Hebrew (or when support exists only in general studies), they notice. Conversely, when schools demonstrate real understanding and inclusive practice, parents become strong advocates.
- **Instructional consistency:** Structured literacy is not only for English. Applying the Science of Reading to Hebrew creates alignment across departments and supports all learners more effectively.
- **Staff empowerment and retention:** Hebrew teachers who feel equipped to support diverse learners are more confident and less likely to burn out. Without proper training and support, they may feel ineffective or overwhelmed.
- **School reputation and differentiation:** Schools that effectively support all learners in both general and Judaic studies stand out. As learning differences are increasingly recognized and diagnosed, families are actively looking for inclusive environments.

> What You Can Do

As a school leader, you have the authority and responsibility to drive change. Here are concrete steps you can take:

1. Screen Early and Monitor Progress

- Implement universal screening—such as MaDYK—for Hebrew reading by kindergarten or first grade.
- Use tools that assess decoding, fluency, and comprehension, tailored to Hebrew.
- Embed data review cycles into staff meetings and teacher planning.

2. Build Teacher Capacity

- Offer PD in structured literacy with a specific focus on Hebrew.
- Include topics like phonological awareness, decoding, morphology, and fluency.
- Provide ongoing coaching, not just one-off workshops.
- Ensure your instructional leaders and department chairs understand literacy science and can support implementation.

3. Develop Tiered Supports For Hebrew

- Integrate Hebrew into your MTSS (Multi-Tiered System of Supports) framework.
- Allocate time in the schedule for small-group or 1:1 Hebrew intervention.
- Coordinate between general and Judaic studies teams to align support plans.

4. Hire and Empower Specialized Roles

- Consider cultivating a Hebrew Reading Specialist or supporting a Community Hebrew Reading Professional.
- Give this person time to coach teachers, support students, and monitor data.
- Prioritize bilingual or dual-trained specialists who understand both language instruction and learning differences.
- Advocate for and create endowed professional learning and/or raise funds specifically earmarked for development in this area.

5. Support Families

- Clarify your school's goals and approach to Hebrew learning and intervention.
- Offer parent education events around Hebrew literacy and LBLD.
- Share tools families can use at home, like read-aloud recordings or vocabulary prompts.

6. Foster a Culture of Inclusion and Collaboration

- Model a strengths-based, collaborative approach to struggling learners.
- Ensure that Hebrew teachers are invited into broader conversations about student learning and support.
- Recognize and elevate the importance of Hebrew literacy alongside English.

> Bottom Line

Inclusion in Hebrew is possible—and essential. The tools, knowledge, and frameworks are being developed. Your leadership can ensure that all students, regardless of learning profile, can access Hebrew and feel a deep sense of belonging in Jewish life and learning.

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/pritzat-derech

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



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