

FOR BOARD MEMBERS & LAY LEADERS:

Supporting Mission Alignment for Inclusive Learning

> What To Know

As a board member or lay leader, you play a critical role in setting the vision, priorities, and resource allocation for your school. While you may not be involved in daily instructional decisions, the policies and investments you support determine whether all students – including those with dyslexia and language-based learning disabilities (LBLD) – have equitable access to Hebrew learning.

Here are the core realities board members should understand:

- Hebrew literacy is central to Jewish identity formation. It is foundational for prayer, text study, and connection to Israel. When students struggle to access Hebrew, they are cut off from key components of Jewish life.
- Hebrew learning is fundamentally different from English learning. Hebrew's abjadid writing system, reliance on morphology, and limited oral exposure outside school require specialized approaches supported by research.
- Many students with LBLD are underserved in Hebrew. While schools often provide intervention services in English, Hebrew instruction rarely receives the same structural support.
- Early challenges in Hebrew widen over time. Research shows that students identified as high-risk readers fall further behind each year if not supported early and effectively.
- Teacher preparation varies widely. Many Hebrew teachers are not trained in structured literacy or in the science of reading as applied to Hebrew, a critical gap that affects learning outcomes.

> Why This Matters

1. **Mission Alignment.** Jewish day schools exist to foster strong Jewish identity, literacy, and connection. If students cannot access Hebrew learning due to learning differences, the school is not fully living its mission.

2. **Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging.** Families expect that students with LBLD will be supported across all aspects of the curriculum, not just in general studies. When Hebrew lags behind in inclusive practice:

- Students feel frustrated or excluded.
- Families lose trust and may seek other school options.
- The school sends an implicit message about who "belongs."

Supporting all learners in Hebrew is a matter of educational justice and Jewish values.

3. **Strategic Differentiation.** Schools that invest in high-quality Hebrew instruction and inclusive practices distinguish themselves. Families increasingly look for schools that understand learning differences and provide integrated support across all subjects.

4. **Financial Stewardship.** Proactive investment in literacy training, interventions, and strong faculty development reduces long-term costs by:

- Lowering retention risk.
- Reducing outplacement or costly one-on-one services.
- Increasing donor confidence through evidence of program quality.

5. **Community Confidence and Fundraising.** Funders and donors respond positively when schools demonstrate expertise, innovation, and a commitment to meeting the needs of all learners.

> 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. Make Hebrew literacy a strategic priority

- Ensure Hebrew learning – including reading – is included in strategic plans, annual goals, and head-of-school evaluations.
- Advocate for parity between English and Hebrew literacy support.

2. Invest in professional development

- Allocate funds for training in structured literacy and science of reading applied to Hebrew.
- Support ongoing coaching models, not one-time workshops.
- Encourage cross-department collaboration by funding joint PD for general and Judaic studies teams.

3. Strengthen staffing models

- Support hiring or training a Hebrew Reading Specialist or Community Hebrew Reading Professional.
- Ensure time is built into schedules for intervention, coaching, and collaboration.

4. Champion data-informed decision making

- Encourage the use of universal screening and fluency assessments in Hebrew.
- Ask school leadership for regular updates on Hebrew literacy metrics.
- Ensure interventions are tied to measurable outcomes.

5. Promote family partnership and communication

- Support the development of parent education programs about Hebrew learning and LBLD.
- Encourage clear, timely communication from the school about student progress and support.

6. Ensure fiscal alignment with mission

- Allocate funds to underwrite PD, coaching, assessments, and staffing that support Hebrew literacy.
- Consider multi-year funding strategies to build sustainable programs.

7. Be ambassadors for this work

- Communicate to the broader community why Hebrew literacy – and inclusive access to it – is a core part of the school's vision.
- Engage donors and partners who care deeply about Jewish education, inclusion, and academic excellence.

> Bottom Line

Your leadership matters. By championing inclusive, research-based Hebrew instruction, you strengthen not only the academic program but also the Jewish identity, confidence, and belonging of every child in your school.

For more information or to learn how other schools are strengthening Hebrew literacy, contact *Dr. Sarah Rubinson Levy*, Director of Pritzat Derech: Hebrew for All at: hebrewforall@hebrewatthecenter.org