**Exemplar Congregation Quotes:**

"I am so proud to be part of a congregation that makes it a priority to meet the needs of all of its children."

"Working with the Religious School leadership and Inclusion Specialist makes it clear that working effectively with children with special needs is not only done, it's a priority."

"As an educator, I have a keen awareness of the importance, and difficulty, of working with students with special needs outside of a traditional school setting. Shaare Emeth has gone above and beyond to provide the training and resources necessary to welcome all learners to the program. As a result, it is a truly inclusive learning community in which all children benefit."

Andrew Loiterstein, Parent, Principal of Community Public School

“My husband Joe and I are so grateful to our Congregational Family at Shaare Emeth. Our children have been students of the Pre-school, Religious School and Summer Campers from the time they were old enough to attend. Our oldest son Jake is on the Autism Spectrum and has required various supports throughout his life. The Clergy and Staff at Shaare Emeth have offered support and assistance to our family and our son - his success at Shaare Emeth's Religious School has not only given us pride - it has given Jake a safe place to build his confidence and most importantly connect with his Jewish Identity in a meaningful way.

We are so excited to be planning Jake’s Bar Mitzvah in January 2018 - this will be a celebration for so many reasons!

Shaare Emeth deserves the honor of being named amongst the Exemplar Congregations through the Union for Reform Judaism.”

Lisa Litvag, Parent

When our son with diverse needs started his religious and Hebrew school journey, we could not picture a Bar Mitzvah at all. Our Religious School director said it was possible, but we had our doubts. After recently celebrating his Bar Mitzvah, we reflect back on the journey that enabled us to reach such a joyous meaningful day. We would not have reached that milestone so successfully if not for the support, time, passion and energy given to our son and our family. The Religious School, clergy and all staff and community were instrumental in making it a simcah that exceeded our expectations.

Beth Kodner, Parent

Our daughter Kaitlyn is 18 years old. She has an Autism Diagnosis. Kaitlyn’s Bat Mitzvah was probably one of her biggest accomplishments and proudest moments. We went into this process having no idea what to expect and we were blown out of the water. The Clergy the teachers and our Religious school director invested a lot of energy and individualized support to help Kaitlyn be successful. Kaitlyn has been absorbed into our religious school community since Kindergarten. Shaare Emeth is a second home to Kaitlyn. She has worked in the religious school for the past three years and is very proud of having a job. We are very grateful to have had such an amazing experience.

Julie Yawitz, Parent and Her husband is on the Board of Directors of Autism Speaks

“Through key planning and teaching strategies we've made a dramatic difference in reaching students with diverse abilities and skill bases. There's nothing more gratifying than helping special kids feel normal.”

Parent, Teacher, Public School Educator

Shaare Emeth Religious School has been incredible with accommodating our ADD child. The care, communication and support has been amazing. Our director always collaborates with us on how to best set our child up for success and she often has wonderful insight on how to best accommodate our child's needs. The staff always has our child's best interest at heart and is always extremely helpful, patient and supportive. We are very appreciative for their efforts and very grateful to be part of Shaare Emeth Religious School family.

Parent of 2 students in Religious School

 I have been a Hebrew teacher for five years, specializing in children with special needs for the last two. Why do I enjoy teaching Hebrew to students with special needs? While it can sometimes be a challenge to develop an individualized curriculum for a child with special needs, doing so enables the child to reach their full potential. In addition to the individualized curriculum, the teacher must present each lesson in a manner appropriate for the student. When I come up with a plan that works, the student thrives. For the child do be successful, learning Hebrew must be fun. As long as we accomplish what needs to be done, I believe the student should be able to do it in a way that suits them. I give lots of high fives, fist bumps and other forms of encouragement. Students also appreciate working one on one; it makes them feel special in a good way.

Among others, I have worked with one specific student for almost two years.

When we first started working together, the only prayers he was comfortable saying were the Sh’ma and the Shabbat blessings. Now he can read or chant all the prayers in a Shabbat service and he thoroughly enjoys doing it. I am proud of how far he’s come and can’t wait to see where he goes next!

Jerri Livingston, faculty in the Religious School