



News & Announcements

JEWISH COMMUNITY HIGH SCHOOL OF THE BAY

Dear JCHS Students and Families,

The Journeys Decision

As you know, we have been closely monitoring the impact of the COVID-19 virus. After thoughtful consideration and consultation with colleagues whose schools also were scheduled for international and domestic travel, **JCHS has decided canceling this year's journeys is the best way to protect student health and safety. Regrettably, it will not be possible to reschedule the journeys this Spring.**

Please keep reading for more information about this decision and to learn about our plans for continuing meaningful learning if health authorities close JCHS as has occurred in some countries or communities in the U.S.

We do not make this decision lightly and know it is disappointing for students (and their trip leaders and chaperones). It also disrupts planning for families. We also regret this cancellation because the journeys powerfully express our educational values and deepen our educational program.

Paramount for JCHS are ongoing risks to the health and safety of students and professional community members. **JCHS viewed the current situation as too volatile and unpredictable with too many unknowns. This includes a meaningful risk that clusters of JCHS students and educators far from home might need to be medically assessed (then treated) because they present symptoms or quarantined because they had contact with someone else testing positive for COVID-19. We would have no viable way to staff or responsibly manage that scenario for an extended number of days/weeks.**

Just this week, for example, several Bay Area schools and schools in other states have been closed temporarily with some of their students quarantined due to COVID-19. California declared a state of emergency. Schools in Los Angeles are bracing for closures. Many other high schools and middle schools have canceled domestic and international travel.

Schools have been closed and teens quarantined around the world. This includes Israel, where more than 60,000 people have been quarantined to stem the spread of COVID-19. Another example of the risk of quarantine comes from Israel where nearly 80 Israeli soccer spectators are quarantined this week because they sat in a stadium near an Israeli teen who later was confirmed with COVID-19.

Journey Fallout

With no journeys punctuating the academic calendar this Spring, there will be some changes to the school calendar.

- **JCHS classes WILL take place on Monday - Thursday, March 16-19 with a regular daily schedule.**
- **JCHS classes will NOT take place on Friday, March 20**, which is not a change to the calendar. In recognition of the turmoil in our communities, we encourage every student to devote part of March 20 to serving others affected by COVID-19. The Student Life Team will offer suggestions next week for ways to help those in need.

- With several classroom days restored to the calendar, **JCHS classes will NOT take place on Monday - Tuesday, April 6-7 (the two days right before Pesach break)**

Continuity of Learning

Of course, we hope the current outbreak will not warrant a school closure. But if that becomes necessary, **we immediately will communicate that decision to families via the Swift K-12 emergency system by email and text message.** We want to give you as much advance notice as possible; but we know that might mean only a few hours if ordered by public health officials.

If there is a closure, JCHS plans to continue class instruction using a distance learning model. Our educators have been training on how to make screencasts and hold individual student/teacher video conference meetings. This will keep the learning moving forward even if we cannot all be together on campus. If school is closed, we expect students to daily check their email and the JCHS web portal to keep current on assignments in each of their classes.

Journey Replacement

While we cannot replace the journeys this Spring, for this year's seniors we are exploring an overnight experience between Shavuot and Graduation. For this year's juniors, we are exploring taking them to Israel in March 2021.

Journey Fees

It is too soon to know which, if any, of this year's journey costs will be recovered, lost, or possibly rolled over to next year. When we know more, JCHS will let families know about a partial refund of journey fees.

Gratitude

Thank you for partnering with us toward ensuring all students learn and grow in a healthy and safe environment. Our community thrives on that partnership.

I hope you can imagine how difficult and challenging this decision was to make. I want to commend and thank on your behalf our talented Student Life team (Roni Ben-David, Maria Lipkina, and Evan Wolkenstein, led by Rabbi Aron Wolgel) along with Rabbi Dean Kertesz and Michelle Matz, as Deans of Students, along with Michael Brody as Assistant Head of School for the tremendous work they put into planning and organizing the journeys and also helping think through the most complicated aspects of this decision. I'd also like to thank our Student Support and Educational Leadership teams for their insights and advice. I'm struck by the wisdom, thoughtfulness, and great care for students, families, and colleagues, that all our professionals bring to their work every day.

More Questions

We understand that this announcement about the journeys and planning for contingencies if the campus is closed is a big deal and will raise more questions. Please know that we are working to answer those questions and give you as much clarity as we can as the situation evolves.

Students will be meeting by grade tomorrow (Thursday) to discuss the loss of this year's journeys. I anticipate there likely will be a mix of emotions for each of them (and us).

Please let us know if we can help you (or your student) navigate those feelings. Julie Beck as School Counselor, Rabbi Dean Kertesz and Michelle Matz as Deans of Students, and I are available to you at school or by phone and email.

Closing Thoughts

While COVID-19 has been devastating for many and burdensome for others, I am reminded that these types of plagues have challenged human communities for centuries. Reish Lekish (3rd century, Galilee) is recorded in the Talmud saying,

“Master of all realms, redeem and save, rescue and deliver [us] from all types of afflictions that suddenly erupt and come to the world. May You, anticipating

our need, bring a halt to [any] plague.” (Ketubot 8b.)

May that happen soon.

L'Shalom - Toward Wholeness,
Rabbi Howard Jacoby Ruben

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