



**Sinai Akiba Academy**  
Los Angeles, CA 90024  
**Head of School**  
*for July 2020*

**The School**

Sinai Akiba Academy ([www.sinaiakiba.org](http://www.sinaiakiba.org)) serves 575 students Preschool through Grade 8. Located in West Los Angeles, Sinai Akiba recently celebrated its 50<sup>th</sup> year anniversary. Established in 1968 as Akiba Academy through significant support from the Los Angeles Jewish community, the school was the first non-Orthodox Jewish Day School on the West Coast. During the 1974-75 school year, the school achieved accreditation through the California Association of Independent Schools (CAIS) and graduated its first class. In the mid-1980s, the school merged with Sinai Temple and became Sinai Akiba Academy. After bringing the Temple's Early Childhood Center under the umbrella of Sinai Akiba Academy in 2016, today's school educates students beginning with 2-year-olds through Grade 8 and offers programming for parents and younger children through its Parenting Center.

Students, parents, and faculty all point to the community as the school's most significant strength. The school enrolls students from 33 zip codes and families hail from 21 countries, resulting in a dynamically diverse community that is united in nurturing Jewish values and intellectual curiosity. The school has always highly valued academic excellence, achieved through strong general and Judaic studies. The school's close association with the Temple enriches the school community in numerous ways. David Wolpe is the Max Webb Senior Rabbi of Sinai Temple. Rabbi Wolpe has been named *The Most Influential Rabbi in America* by *Newsweek*, and one of *The 50 Most Influential Jews in the World* by *The Jerusalem Post*. The Rabbis and Cantor teach in each division and support families in numerous ways. The Head of School and administrators can regularly tap the expertise and support of the Temple clergy.

In recent years, under the leadership of Head of School Dr. Sarah Shulkind, the academic program has been invigorated through a commitment to today's best teaching practices, including a strong J-STEAM program (which incorporates Judaica) and additional hands-on learning experiences. With a Judaic Studies curriculum that nurtures and encourages critical thinking skills and graduates students proficient in Hebrew, parents recognize their children are receiving a top-notch academic education in a community infused with Jewish values.

After a seven-year tenure at Sinai Akiba as Head of School, Dr. Shulkind will be Head of School at Milken Community Schools. Sinai Akiba Academy is fortunate in having Betty Winn, an experienced day school leader with close ties to the school as Interim Head for the 2019-2020 school year. The school is looking for a dynamic educational leader who will be actively

involved in the school and Temple communities and who will embrace the school's mission and core values to serve as its next Head of School, beginning July 2020.

### **Mission**

Sinai Akiba Academy engages students in the joy and discipline of learning. We nurture a community of ethical, critical thinkers who, shaped by our evolving Jewish tradition, walk through the world with confidence and humility.

### **Core Values**

Sinai Akiba's core values serve as a pact with the sacred community it fosters; one which continues to energize the present, explore the past, and embrace the future. These five values are:

- Academic Excellence/Talmud Torah
- Kindness & Empathy/Derech Eretz
- Ethical Responsibility/Tzedek Tzedek Tirdof
- Soulful Intention/Avodat Halev
- Love of Israel/Ahavat Yisrael

### **Program, Faculty, and Divisions**

From Early Childhood through Grade 8, Sinai Akiba seeks to foster independence, curiosity, and joy in learning in its students, encouraging children to grow into the best version of themselves—reached through a balance of a commitment to *Talmud torah*, academic excellence, and equal attention to children's social and emotional development. Graduates' strong academic preparation and leadership skills are noted and valued by the high schools they attend.

Sinai Akiba's learning environment encourages children to gain a sense of meaning and belonging. Academics and values infuse the rigorous, interdisciplinary curriculum, which includes meaningful travel and dual language instruction. From early childhood through 8th Grade, students learn in both English and Hebrew every day, reaping the proven cognitive and social benefits of learning in more than one language. In addition, students build their critical thinking skills by engaging authentically with Jewish texts and traditions on a daily basis.

The school's diverse, warm, and welcoming Jewish community inspires its members to learn, grow, celebrate, pray together and support one another. A visit to the school will underscore this is truly a joyful environment, children clearly like coming to school, and there is a notable warm rapport between students and the faculty.

There are just over 90 faculty members who serve the school's 575+ students. The school has a strong commitment to professional development, with 2% of operating expenses allocated towards this each year, something faculty universally appreciate. Sinai Akiba is proud to have six learning specialists who provide support so that all students' emotional, behavioral, social, intellectual, and health needs are met.

There is a strong administrative leadership team, which includes two division heads, one who oversees the Early Childhood and Lower School divisions and a Middle School division head. The Director of Judaic Studies and the school Rabbi oversee instruction of Judaic Studies across all divisions. Other senior administrators include Directors of Admissions, Communications, Development, and Finance.

Families can begin to connect with the school community through the **Parenting Center**, which offers programming for parents and children, infants through age 2. There are classes for parent and child such as Parent-and-Me Yoga and Shoo Bop Shabbat, educational programs for parents, and a Keshet transition class for early toddlers, preparing children for the Early Childhood Center preschool classes.

The **Early Childhood** constructivist program serves 190 children ages 2 through 5 years. The Early Childhood program is focused on the growth of the whole child, joyful learning, with a rooting in Jewish history, values, and practices. The division's large, colorful, light-filled classrooms open into vibrant outdoor space that encourages creative, active play, enabling children to explore materials and develop their questioning, curious minds. Spirited prayer and dancing, mini-minyans, weekly Shabbat and immersive Israel studies encourage these young students to celebrate their Jewish identity.

The **Lower School**, which serves 250 students, is a place where students in Kindergarten through Fifth Grade engage deeply in learning and develop meaningful relationships with fellow students and teachers; it is a place of exploration, asking big questions and finding solutions. Students are empowered to become proficient critical readers, skilled writers who can write across a variety of genres, and mathematicians who can master concepts that allow them to understand and solve a range of mathematical problems. Teachers are highly trained in differentiated instruction. They use formative assessment in all academic areas to understand each child's strengths and weaknesses. With in-class differentiated learning that focuses on each child's strengths, small group and one-on-one learning support and an advanced learners program, teachers and specialists differentiate instruction to address the needs of all students. Responsive Classroom is widely used throughout the Lower School.

The **Middle School** program recognizes and encourages students growing independence academically and socially. The rigorous, engaging curriculum gives students a solid foundation of skills and content in all academic areas while fostering the use of critical and higher order thinking skills necessary to face the demands of an ever-changing world. The 125 students in Grades 6 through 8 are taught by subject specialists. Students are expected to self-advocate, managing conversations with their teachers about assignments and extra help, learning how to navigate challenges in a supportive environment. During the second trimester, students lead their own conference with their advisor and parents in attendance to discuss their academic and personal growth and to set future goals.

Middle School students start the day in homeroom for 10 minutes where greetings are shared, attendance is taken and announcements are made. The advisory program is dedicated to the

social emotional health of students. Each student is part of an advisory group of 10 -12 students that is led by an advisor who acts as his/her parent at school. Advisory groups meet twice a week for a 35-minute period where they participate in activities that strengthen the classroom and school community. Middle School teachers have all been trained in Developmental Designs.

In 7th Grade, students meet with Holocaust survivors and write poems and stories reflecting the survivors' stories. Additionally, they participate in an exchange program with a local Muslim school, fostering profound mutual discoveries. The 8th Grade capstone trip to Israel enables students to experience Sinai Akiba's core value, *ahavat yisrael*, love of Israel, as they engage with Israel's land, people, language, and history, building community and gaining independence at the same time.

Middle School offers students opportunities to participate in clubs, orchestra (which begins in Lower School), athletics (open to 5<sup>th</sup> graders as well) and student government.

In 2015 the school installed an Innovation Lab, a space for creativity and experimentation, enabling the school to better support its **J-STEAM** programming. J-STEAM education is the study of Judaica, Science, Technology, Engineering, Art, and Mathematics. The program encompasses both project-based learning and design thinking to provide students with opportunities to explore, collaborate, and create. Students are encouraged to identify and solve problems through brainstorming, experimenting, and working towards mastery in an environment where it is safe to take risks. Additionally, students learn technical and scientific principles such as coding and circuitry, all while developing real-world skills that they will use throughout their education.

### **Governance and Accreditation**

While the Sinai Temple Board of Directors has ultimate oversight for school operations and fiscal management, there is an active, highly functioning School Board that works closely with the Head of School; it meets monthly and works from a committee structure. The School Board numbers 23 individuals and is composed of parents, grandparents, Sinai Temple members, and community representatives.

Sinai Akiba is accredited by CAIS (California Association of Independent Schools), WASC (Western Association of Schools and Colleges) and BJE (Builders of Jewish Education).

### **Budget and Philanthropy**

The school's approximate \$11M yearly budget is developed yearly by the administration working closely with the Budget Committee of the Board. This team seeks to fund the school's strategic initiatives while ensuring financial stability and long-term sustainability of the school.

Sinai Akiba has a strong fundraising team that runs an annual giving campaign as well as cultivating donors to the school's endowment. The school fundraising averages \$2M yearly, which includes the annual fund, gala, major gifts initiatives and gifts to the endowment.

The school currently has an endowment of \$22 million and has a long-term goal of bringing that amount to \$50 million in order to support the increased need for financial assistance. Currently 34% of students receive some type of financial assistance. Sinai Akiba received two multi-million dollar gifts to the endowment, one \$2M and one \$5M during the 2018-19 school year.

### **Opportunities**

The successful next Head of School for Sinai Akiba needs to be a strong, innovative Jewish educator and a strong relational leader and community builder who will successfully lead and partner with others as the school navigates the opportunities and challenges before it.

- The school has made many curricular advances in recent years, and there is a strong culture of faculty growth and professionalism. The Early Childhood Center faculty is eager for further opportunities to fully implement the Constructivist and play-based curriculum, and faculty in the ECC and LS division would welcome more opportunities to plan with colleagues to further insure scope and sequence between grade levels and divisions. Faculty in all divisions would appreciate further opportunities to build faculty community across divisions.
- Sinai Akiba, like many Jewish and independent schools, has been challenged by declining enrollment and an increased need for financial assistance. Sinai Akiba's next Head of School will need to ensure that the school is well known across the city for all of its strengths and serve as a knowledgeable, inspiring support in the school's outreach to families.
- The next Head of School will need to provide strong financial stewardship to the organization. He or she needs to be an individual who is enthusiastic about building relationships with individuals who possess the capacity to invest in the school in order to continue growing the school's endowment. While the school currently has a balanced budget the long-term trends pose a challenge. The new Head of School will need to work with senior administrators and the Board to balance the school's strategic needs for maintaining a strong program with other demands on the budget. Additionally, a new Head of School will need to have the enthusiasm and vision to collaborate with others in the Los Angeles Jewish educational community in planning ahead on numerous fronts for on-going financial sustainability.
- Sinai Akiba's diversity is a highly valued aspect of this community. The next Head of School needs to be a leader who authentically appreciates a multi-cultural community and has experience bridging, celebrating, and supporting cultural differences and navigating the challenging conversations and issues that can arise in a richly diverse community.
- Sinai Akiba is a subdivision of Sinai Temple, one of the largest conservative synagogues in the country. The school and Temple facilities are physically connected and the two

entities are integrally connected through governance, fiscal oversight, programs, and a shared mission. There are numerous pluses to the relationship, enabling the school to tap the energies and resources of the Temple's rabbis and for the Temple's leadership to extend the school community into the broader Jewish community in Los Angeles and nationally. There have been historic and recent challenges to this relationship, which have prompted productive conversations with active steps taken to facilitate the communication between Sinai Akiba Academy and Temple. The Head of School will have opportunities to forge strong relationships with Temple leaders, partner and coordinate with the Temple, and advocate for the needs of the school.

It is important to note that Sinai Akiba is truly a school of many strengths and passionate stakeholders. An energetic, optimistic and innovative educational leader will find many willing and able individuals to partner with as the school navigates the challenges and opportunities ahead.

### **Leadership Needs**

In addition to the leadership needs and qualities noted above, Sinai Akiba Academy's next Head of School will be an experienced Jewish educational leader who truly embraces the school's mission, core values, and its community. The successful candidate will be an individual who will engage actively in the life of the school and the Temple, and who is:

- A warm, kind, empathetic, accessible, and relational leader who joyfully connects with children of all ages—as well as their faculty and their parents
- Inspirational, intelligent, strategic, and visionary with the ability to build teams and engender support toward successful outcomes
- Possesses strong diplomatic and communication skills with the abilities to connect with people of diverse backgrounds, listen thoughtfully, and present in small and larger groups with intelligence and ease
- A successful track record that demonstrates adeptness with financial, personnel, and strategic management of a complex organization
- A passionate, proactive, flexible, and appropriately decisive leader who has a successful track record leading others in the achievement of goals
- An experienced and successful fundraiser and ambassador, enthusiastic about serving in that capacity for Sinai Akiba
- Appreciative of and experienced leading a diverse community, and
- An authentic Jewish role model for Sinai Akiba's core values: Academic Excellence/Talmud Torah, Kindness & Empathy/Derech Eretz, Ethical Responsibility/Tzedek Tzedek Tirdof, Soulful Intention/Avodat Halev, Love of Israel/Ahavat Yisrael.

### **For Consideration**

Please forward electronically a resume, letter of interest, personal statement/statement of educational philosophy and a statement reflecting on your personal connection to Judaism to:

Jane Armstrong and/or Bill Lyons  
Independent Thinking

it@independent-thinking.com  
617.332.3131

All inquiries will be treated confidentially.

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