

Workmen's Circle I.L. Peretz Jewish School of Long Island Adopts "Not Your Parents' Hebrew School" Curriculum

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Families looking for a supplemental Jewish cultural education and social justice activism will have an exciting new opportunity this back-to-school season, as the Workmen's Circle I.L. Peretz Jewish School of Long Island prepares to re-open its doors on Sunday, September 11th.

For over 60 years, the I.L. Peretz Jewish School has drawn families that are looking for an alternative to the traditional, synagogue-based experience. The school is one of eight in the growing national school network organized under the umbrella of the Workmen's Circle, the 100+ year old non-profit headquartered in NYC. Serving over 300 students, the Workmen's Circle is carving out a niche in progressive Jewish education, taking a "Not Your Parents' Hebrew School" approach.

Each of the Workmen's Circle Schools, from Long Island to Boston, are designed to meet the needs of local communities, while maintaining a larger focus on building cultural Jewish identities—which is exactly what most Jewish Americans are seeking, according the Pew Research Center.

The Center's landmark 2013 study found that 60% of Jewish Americans believe that being Jewish is mainly a matter of culture or ancestry, underscoring the demand for the Workmen's Circle model. "Many of our schools were founded by parents who wanted their children's Jewish learning to be centered around our rich heritage of joyful celebrations alongside focused social and economic justice activism. They are looking for an authentic experience very different from their own Hebrew School memories." Ann Toback, the Workmen's Circle's Executive Director, commented.

"They want their children to see Judaism as relevant to their lives, to embrace it and implement its values—which is what we're doing at our schools."

Those values include joyful holiday celebrations, yiddishkayt, and social and economic justice, drawing from the Workmen's Circle's historic roots in the labor movement. In a typical Workmen's Circle School year, students are not only in the classroom, they're also onstage playing klezmer music, in Eisenhower Park advocating for human rights, and participating in a wide variety of community service and social action projects that help people and change lives in our own community and around the world.

That blend of activities sparked the interest of school parents Raina and Todd Liebowitz who shared, "Our first year at school, we had no idea what to expect, but we felt right at home in no time. I love that our kids are exposed not only to Hebrew but to Yiddish as well—and I know my grandparents would have loved it too. Our boys aren't memorizing alphabets or history books. Rather, they're learning what it means to be Jewish through food, music, culture, and volunteering. This is more than an education: it's the Jewish community we've been looking for."

The Workmen's Circle I.L. Peretz Jewish School of Long Island will hold its Open House on Wednesday, September 7th, from 6pm-8pm, and Saturday, September 10th from 10am-12pm at 574 East Meadow Ave, East Meadow, NY 11554. At this free event, families can meet teachers and other families while enjoying a challah making and learning activity. For more information, please contact Staci Davis: sdcsw@aol.com, 516.794.0506. The I.L. Peretz Jewish School meets Sundays from 9:30am-11:00am starting September 11th.

At the Workmen's Circle, Jewish identity is not defined by or confined by religious beliefs. For us, identity and belonging are found in our heritage, values, ideals, language, cultural traditions and celebrations. We have been cultivating a proudly progressive, diverse, and inclusive community rooted in Jewish culture and social action for more than a century.

Since our founding, the needs and priorities of our community have evolved and today's Workmen's Circle is responding in new and exciting ways. We seed and support vibrant Jewish learning communities, create opportunities to connect to Jewish culture, celebrate our rich heritage, and take action for social and economic justice. Together, as we always have, we are working to build a shenere un besere velt far ale – a better and more beautiful world for all. Learn more at www.circle.org.

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