



## Milwaukee Jewish Day School

Milwaukee, Wisconsin

Head of School

July 2025

Milwaukee Jewish Day School ([MJDS](#)), founded in 1981, is a pluralistic Jewish day school which currently serves 139 students Early Childhood, age 3, through Grade 8. Set in a beautiful residential Milwaukee neighborhood on a campus with other Jewish organizations, MJDS is a school where academic excellence and Jewish values are intertwined. The school's commitment to empathy, wonder, and *tikkun olam* (responsibility for making the world a better place) forms the heart of the MJDS community and educational program. With innovative teaching, small class sizes, and faculty's commitment to know each child throughout the school, MJDS supports students' academic, personal, and spiritual growth. MJDS seeks an energetic, highly relational educational leader to serve as head of school beginning July 1, 2025.

### MISSION and VALUES

*Where academic excellence and Jewish values prepare children for a lifetime of success, leadership, and engagement with the world.*

At the heart of the MJDS experience are three **core values** that serve as guiding principles:

- **Empathy:** Students aim to understand and be sensitive to the feelings, thoughts, and experiences of others
- **Wonder:** Students are encouraged to experience curiosity and appreciation of the world around them
- **Tikkun Olam:** Students are taught that their responsibility, as Jews and as people, is to make the world a better place

MJDS is committed to being an authentic pluralistic community. Guided by the wisdom of Pirkei Avot 4 —"*Who is wise? One who learns from all*"—MJDS embraces the diversity within Judaism. By exploring the diversity of Jewish tradition, understanding, and expression, MJDS believes that individuals better understand their own Judaism. At MJDS, students and families are offered the experiences and tools to engage with the world, while creating meaningful Jewish time together.

The school strives to nurture students into mensches, compassionate, responsible individuals. MJDS guides students in exploring their Jewish identities and connecting to the world around them, equipping them with the tools and values to thrive as thoughtful, engaged citizens and

leaders. The MJDS rally cry *Moving from me to we* reflects its commitment to community and collective responsibility.

## **PROGRAM**

MJDS is a three-division school with one classroom per grade level. The Early Childhood program serves 39 students ages 3-5. The Lower School, currently enrolling 55 students, encompasses Grades 1-4, and Grades 5-8, 45 students currently, make up the Upper School.

### **Repairing Together**

In 2016, MJDS launched the *Repairing Together* program, connecting students from different cultural backgrounds in K-8 schools in the Milwaukee area through thematic social and environmental action programming to share and celebrate the cultural, racial, and social diversity in the community. The program is, in part, supported by the Native American Forest County Potawatomi Foundation. MJDS partners with local schools, connecting students through age-appropriate programming and activities. Early Childhood students spend time together in musical programs, cultural celebrations, and story times. First through Third Grade students share field trips to community-based partners. Fourth and Fifth Grade students explore ideas about social justice and repairing the world with guest speakers and an active arts unit. In upper school, students embark on a three-year project to rewrite their own stories and histories and then take action together.

### **Academic Program**

MJDS's multidisciplinary, progressive curriculum blends academic excellence with Jewish values, fostering critical thinking, problem-solving, and leadership. It reflects the beliefs in the importance of students owning their learning, collaboration, and personal growth. Small class sizes allow teachers to differentiate instruction to meet each student's academic level, utilizing standards-based grading, project-based learning, and "I can" or "not yet" statements to encourage self-reflection and a growth mindset. Hebrew language instruction begins in K3. Students actively participate in their education, and innovative programs in MJDS's Daniel M. Soref Innovation Hub and Explore the Core (ETC) classes underscore this commitment to hands-on, engaged learning. Students lead the teacher-parent/guardian conferences beginning in First Grade. Candidates are encouraged to explore the school's website for more robust descriptions of each division's program.

### **Early Childhood**

The MJDS Early Childhood division currently serves young learners in its three classes, 3K, JK, and SK. The program provides a comprehensive and enriching experience that nurtures curiosity, exploration, and a love of learning. With a low student-to-teacher ratio, young learners receive personalized attention in a supportive environment emphasizing academic, social, and emotional growth. At the core of the curriculum are the Jewish values of kindness and wonder, which guide the integration of Hebrew, Jewish studies, art, music, and physical education.

## **Lower School**

The MJDS Lower School program provides a dynamic and personalized learning experience where students are encouraged to take ownership of their learning, with the goal of cultivating a lifelong love of inquiry and growth. Students are given opportunities to explore their passions through interdisciplinary projects and reflective practices. Portfolios track academic, social, and emotional development, fostering self-reflection through blogs, journals, and peer feedback. With a strong focus on Hebrew, Jewish studies, and STEAM integration in the arts, students have opportunities to engage meaningfully in their cultural and academic journeys.

## **Upper School**

The MJDS Upper School program combines academic rigor, student choice, and real-world engagement. Through ETC (Exploring the Core) and Omanut (Music and Arts) enrichment classes, students explore diverse interests like guitar, robotics, abstract painting, and Hebrew radio broadcasting, encouraging their creativity. With small class sizes and expert teachers, students are supported in both academic and personal growth, developing leadership skills and a strong sense of Jewish values. The program emphasizes experiential learning, preparing students to embrace challenges and make interdisciplinary connections. Eighth graders take a two-week trip to Israel that strengthens their connection to Jewish culture and heritage.

MJDS graduates are well-prepared for secondary school success. Most students attend local public high schools and thrive academically and as leaders. MJDS's strong and small community enables its students to gain the self-confidence and personal advocacy skills to navigate well in a bigger school setting.

## **JEWISH LIFE**

MJDS is a vibrant pluralistic Jewish community dedicated to nurturing and celebrating the unique Jewish identities of its students. The Jewish culture is reflected throughout the school building with Jewish art adorning the walls and signs in both Hebrew and English through the hallways. Under the guidance of the Director of Jewish Life and Learning the curriculum is grounded in essential *shorashim* (roots) that include Hebrew language study, Jewish text, theology, and Israel. Faculty partner with families to empower students to develop Jewish *shorashim*, nourish their *neshamot* (souls), and grow into lifelong Jewish learners.

[Shabbat Sing](#), a well-appreciated tradition at MJDS, invites guardians and special friends to join on Friday mornings for singing and dancing, fostering a sense of community and joy.

## **CAMPUS, CLIMATE & CULTURE**

MJDS is an authentically warm and welcoming community where students, families, and staff feel a deep sense of belonging. Staff members take pride in knowing each child and family, fostering personal connections that create a close-knit community. Families appreciate the personal connections and high-quality education MJDS provides, viewing it as an integral part of their family's Jewish community. The faculty share a genuine passion for student-centered teaching, fostering an environment where students are eager to engage in their learning in and out of the classroom. The school's leadership prioritizes positive faculty/staff morale,

consistently seeking ways to support the well-being and professional growth of the entire staff. MJDS's positive professional culture is apparent and a great strength.

MJDS is located within Whitefish Bay's neighborhood, along the beautiful shores of Lake Michigan on Milwaukee's north shore. The school occupies space on a campus owned by the Milwaukee Jewish Federation (MJF). The campus is also home to the Harry & Rose Samson Family Jewish Community Center, which additionally offers an early childhood program, the Bader Hillel Academy, an Orthodox Jewish K5-8 school, and Jewish Beginnings, another early childhood program. This shared campus provides students access to amenities, including a gym, library, playground, and cafeteria. The administrative teams of MJDS and the neighboring schools coordinate schedules and maintain a cooperative relationship.

### **FACULTY & STAFF**

MJDS employs 38 full time and 16 part time faculty and staff. Additionally, the school has utilized consultants and outside professionals to enhance initiatives and programs, including music, after-school activities, and professional development.

In addition to the head of school, the leadership team this year includes a dean of students; director of admissions; outreach & alumni relations; marketing & communications director; business administrator; operations manager; director of philanthropy; director of Jewish life & learning; and school counselor. MJDS has two Learning Partners, faculty members who teach part-time and serve to support teaching and learning throughout the divisions.

### **ENROLLMENT**

MJDS's current enrollment of 139 students is a decline from last year's enrollment of 161. This lower enrollment can be attributed to a large Eighth Grade graduating class in 2024, less robust interest in the school's 3K program, and some attrition in the early Upper School grades. It is worth noting that in 2017, enrollment was at 125 students and grew during the pandemic to 180 students, as unlike area public schools MJDS remained open. Strengthening enrollment will be a top priority for MJDS's next head of school.

There are, of course, numerous factors which impact enrollment. MJDS draws from communities that have strong public schools, and some Jewish families find it financially challenging to be members of a temple, send children to summer camp, and afford day school tuition. To address this and ensure accessibility, the school implemented the Affordable Customized Tuition Program in 2018-2019. This initiative allows MJDS to make quality Jewish education accessible to all Jewish families, regardless of their financial situation. Funding for this initiative comes from generous donor contributions, grants from the Helen Daniels Bader Jewish Education Fund, support from the Milwaukee Jewish Federation, the MJDS fundraising activities and events, and unrestricted endowment income. MJDS needs to continue to ensure that area Jewish families are aware of the great strengths of the school's community and the high value of an MJDS education.

## **ADVANCEMENT**

MJDS has made strides in its advancement efforts in recent years. In 2023, the school exceeded its annual fund goal of \$320,000, raising \$361,000. A biennial gala provides another vital source of unrestricted funds and serves as a wonderful celebration of the school's community. MJDS benefits from restricted funding sources, including designated donations, grants, special use funds, and endowments, ensuring a diverse and resilient financial foundation to support its mission. As noted above, the Helen Daniels Bader Jewish Education Fund provides generous support, and the school receives a substantial yearly allocation from the Milwaukee Jewish Federation. MJDS boasts an endowment of \$6.5 million.

## **GOVERNANCE, BUDGET & ASSOCIATIONS**

The governance structure at MJDS is designed to ensure effective leadership and strategic oversight. The Board of Directors is currently comprised of 20 members, which includes seven current parents, parents of alumni, community members and alumni. The bylaws, last updated in May 2024, note that the Board can have a minimum of 18 and a maximum of 28 members.

MJDS's governance includes several standing committees, including the Executive Committee, Budget and Finance Committee, Development Committee, Board Governance Committee, Chai Committee, and Head of School Evaluation Committee. The Head of School Evaluation Committee collaborates with the head of school to establish goals, evaluate performance, and provide advisory support. The Board prioritizes recruiting members who are passionate about the school's mission and well-suited to achieve its strategic goals. The Board has partnered well with the head of school, understanding appropriate governance and leadership roles.

MJDS is a member of the Milwaukee Jewish Federation and the Prizmah Center for Jewish Day Schools and is accredited by the Independent Schools Association of the Central States (ISACS). Its last ISACS reaccreditation took place in March 2023 and confirmed MJDS's myriad of strengths.

## **OPPORTUNITIES**

MJDS is a school of many strengths. In particular, a very positive school culture and community is a wonderful hallmark. In recent years, the school's leadership has actively focused on encouraging collegiality and professionalism, recognizing the importance of not taking this for granted. MJDS has an engaging, innovative, effective curriculum, and its core values are well-rooted. The Board of Directors understands its role and partners effectively with the head of school. Thus, these key elements of a healthy school are well-established and will be appreciated by MJDS's next head of school. MJDS's most significant challenges are ones that numerous independent schools across the country are facing—diminished enrollment and financial sustainability.

MJDS's Board has recently launched a Sustainability Task Force that began its work in October 2024. The school has engaged Stonecipher Consulting to lead it through this project. The mission of the task force is to ensure the sustained excellence, growth, and operational and financial viability of MJDS by collaboratively identifying and recommending strategies to

support the long-term success of the school. Over the past decade, MJDS has engaged thoughtfully with the realities of tuition, recognizing the financial choices and challenges families can face. The school has two programs that offer tuition assistance: ACT, Affordable Customized Tuition, (described earlier), is a newer program that sets tuition based on each family's unique financial circumstances. The SAJE program, Supporting the Advancement of Jewish Education, offers Jewish professionals in the Milwaukee community reduced tuition for their children. With numerous Jewish organizations throughout the city, ensuring a vibrant pluralist day school to support the attracting and hiring of Jewish professionals is a synergistic necessity. While a number of families have taken advantage of this, it is at some considerable expense to the school; the program has not yet been endowed or funded, so some MJDS stakeholders have expressed concerns about the financial sustainability of this program. Currently tuition income supports 33% of income, and the school's leadership recognizes this is not a sustainable long-term model. It is important to add, there is an organized effort underway to grow the school's endowment from its current \$6.5M to \$18M, so the school's leadership is proactively addressing sustainability. The outcomes of the work of this Task Force will offer the next head of school and the rest of the school's leadership a road map of strategies. This work, coupled with the ISACS reaccreditation, will provide valuable insights for a new leader.

In addition to the strategies that will result from the Task Force work, MJDS's next head of school will need to be an active external ambassador, ensuring that the school is well and accurately known throughout the Milwaukee Jewish community, generating additional interest in the school. The new head of school will need to be energized by the opportunities to build key partnerships throughout the community, particularly the Milwaukee Jewish community. The school's location alone requires good partnering, with shared school building space with Bader Hillel Academy and Jewish Beginnings, and the Federation serving as a landlord. Milwaukee is home to a midsize Jewish community, served by numerous synagogues, and while some have robust memberships, like other communities the number of unaffiliated families is growing. Some MJDS stakeholders have suggested that further strengthening MJDS's family programming, may offer some Jewish families an alternate option to connect with the Jewish community. As the new head builds relationships throughout the community, they may need to help the school community adjust to a shift in the focus of the head of school role as it has been perceived as an internally focused role. The Board recognizes that a head of school who will serve as a dynamic ambassador in the greater community will be important to realizing the goals of the Sustainability Task Force, including strengthening enrollment and growing endowment.

The new head of school will have the opportunity to reimagine the roles of the lead administrators and overall staffing to ensure clarity and efficiencies in support of students, families, and staff. Pandemic stresses, fluctuations in enrollment, and this leadership transition led to shifts in structure and responsibilities and changes in administrative roles over the last few years. There are questions whether the school is properly staffed for the current enrollment. Stakeholders and programs will be well-served as roles are examined, clarified, and then communicated.

MJDS's students and families note the quality of the faculty as one of the school's greatest strengths. Numerous faculty members have served for many years, with some nearing retirement age. Current faculty consistently note the positive environment, supportive families, and professional collegiality as reasons they love working at MJDS. At the same time, enhancing salaries and strengthening benefits would be welcomed, and will support retaining, and attracting as needed, a strong faculty. Hiring for open positions in recent years has proven in some cases, particularly Hebrew and Jewish studies, to be challenging. The new head of school will have the opportunity to champion the needs of faculty, support the positive collegial environment, ensuring that this great MJDS strength does not diminish.

Like in many Jewish Day Schools, MJDS's stakeholders experience the Jewish educational programming differently, with some families feeling there is not enough Jewish teaching integrated, and others concerned there is too much. There is a shared belief that the "J" in the school's name must remain central to the school's mission and success. A new head of school will need to be equipped for and adept at listening to and responding well to families' concerns, while working with the Director of Jewish Life and Learning to ensure that the school is meeting its mission and its commitment to pluralism.

Some MJDS stakeholders believe that allowing non-Jewish children to enroll might enable MJDS to address some of its enrollment challenges. Currently, the only non-Jewish children who can enroll are children of staff. A new head of school will need to be prepared to engage in this conversation, balancing differing opinions and enrollment challenges.

MJDS's next head of school will have engaged and willing partners in the work ahead to strengthen and secure the school's future.

### **LEADERSHIP NEEDS**

MJDS's next head of school will embrace the school's mission and exude its core values of empathy, wonder, and *tikkun olam*. They will be an experienced, collaborative leader and educator who has strong knowledge of and appreciation for Jewish values, embraces those values in their own life, and shares MJDS's commitment to pluralism. Additionally, the next head of school will:

- Be a highly relational individual who authentically enjoys interacting with individuals of the many ages represented within the school's community
- Possess a track record of conceiving of and implementing strategic initiatives with successful outcomes as well as the ability to partner with and lead Board members and other stakeholders in securing MJDS's future
- Demonstrate the personal skills and enthusiasm to serve as a compelling chief ambassador both within the school community and throughout the Milwaukee Jewish community
- Understand and be energized by fundraising and marketing, enjoying the opportunities to encourage others to invest in MJDS's students and its future

- Revel in the opportunity a small school enables to balance the internal and external pieces of a head of school's responsibilities, and possess a track record that underscores the ability to prioritize competing demands
- Be an effective, inspiring, and adept communicator in both small and large group settings, able to listen well and engage in challenging conversations with ease and empathy
- Appreciate MJDS's educational approaches to student-centered learning, academic rigor, and an innovative curriculum, and engage knowledgeably in discussions of pedagogy, both secular and Judaic, and
- Serve as a compelling role model, possess a sense of humor, and exude infectious joyfulness.

The MJDS community is tightly knit, bound by a shared mission and clear core values that permeate every aspect of the school. The deep pride and purpose that faculty, families, and students share create a vibrant and purposeful learning environment. With the support of a dedicated Board of Directors and administrative leadership team, MJDS fosters a culture that celebrates collaboration and works towards a singular goal: providing an education infused with Jewish tradition that equips students for the future. The opportunity to join this community and lead this vibrant school is a wonderful opportunity for an enthusiastic school leader.

### **For Consideration**

Please send electronically: Resume, Letter of Interest and Educational Philosophy or Personal Statement to:

Samantha Brennan, Senior Consultant or

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*All inquiries will be treated confidentially and review of candidate files will begin immediately.*