

In/Visible Disabilities in Hebrew School

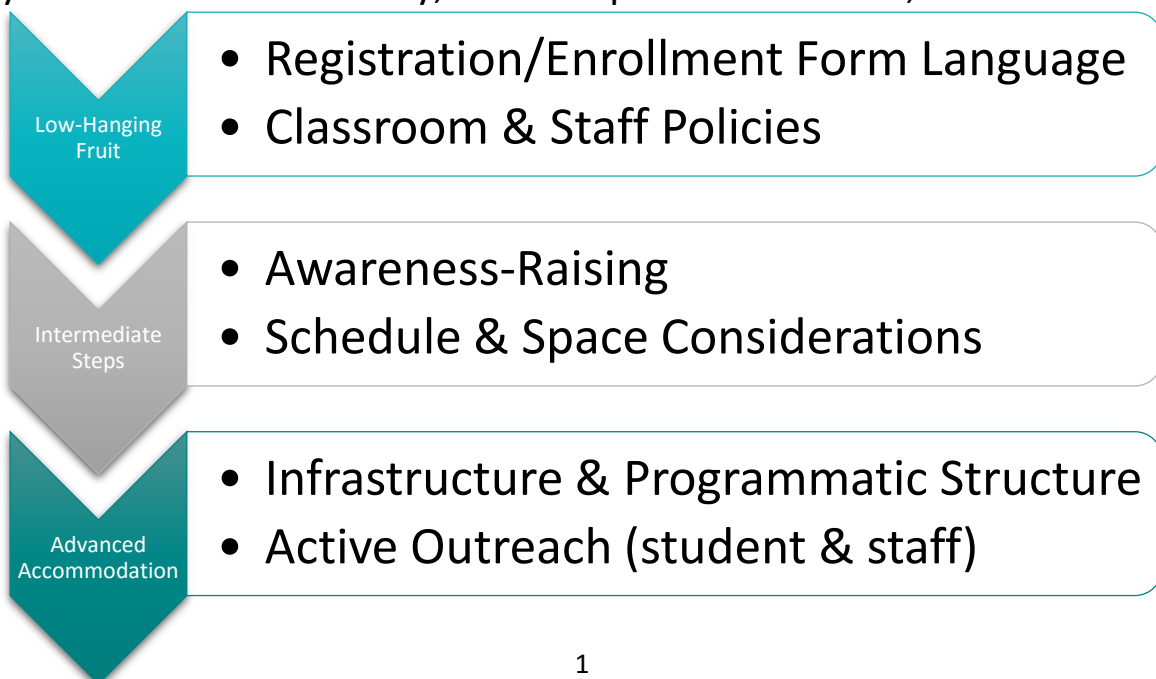
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"You shall not curse the deaf, nor place a stumbling-block before the blind..."
– Leviticus 19:14

Americans with Disabilities Act (last amended/updated 2010):

- (1) The term "disability" means, with respect to an individual
 - (A) a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities of such individual;
 - (B) a record of such an impairment; or
 - (C) being regarded as having such an impairment (as described in paragraph (3)).
- (2) Major Life Activities
 - (A) In general: For purposes of paragraph (1), major life activities include, but are not limited to, caring for oneself, performing manual tasks, seeing, hearing, eating, sleeping, walking, standing, lifting, bending, speaking, breathing, learning, reading, concentrating, thinking, communicating, and working.
 - (B) Major bodily functions: For purposes of paragraph (1), a major life activity also includes the operation of a major bodily function, including but not limited to, functions of the immune system, normal cell growth, digestive, bowel, bladder, neurological, brain, respiratory, circulatory, endocrine, and reproductive functions.
- (3) Regarded as having such an impairment
For purposes of paragraph (1)(C): (A) An individual meets the requirement of "being regarded as having such an impairment" if the individual establishes that he or she has been subjected to an action prohibited under this chapter because of an actual or perceived physical or mental impairment whether or not the impairment limits or is perceived to limit a major life activity.
- (9) Reasonable accommodation
The term "reasonable accommodation" may include
 - (A) making existing facilities used by employees readily accessible to and usable by individuals with disabilities; and
 - (B) job restructuring, part-time or modified work schedules, reassignment to a vacant position, acquisition or modification of equipment or devices, appropriate adjustment or modifications of examinations, training materials or policies, the provision of qualified readers or interpreters, and other similar accommodations for individuals with disabilities.

ADA requirements are the **bare legal minimum**: if you want people with disabilities (whether visible or invisible) to feel comfortable and welcome in your school's community, more steps must be taken, such as...



Note: This is not an exhaustive list of options, just a few suggestions to get you started!

<p style="writing-mode: vertical-rl; transform: rotate(180deg);">Low-Hanging Fruit</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Registration/Enrollment Form Language</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Do ask parents to disclose any physical, learning, or psychosocial disabilities their child has – but don't be offended if they're not comfortable sharing at first. Parents will be more likely to disclose if the enrollment form language... <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Favors value-neutral terms over words that are inherently or colloquially loaded <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Disability, Obstacle, or Challenge > Problem or Issue Information or Diagnoses > Labels or Conditions Explains why/how the information will be used – don't assume parents will know! <ul style="list-style-type: none"> So our teachers can plan activities that are most likely to inspire your child To help us provide proper accommodation for our diverse student body Keep in mind that many disabled youth haven't yet had access to the resources for a proper or official diagnosis. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Some schools ask for two sets of information: "formal diagnoses" & "suspected obstacles to learning" Never make ANY promises or suggestions on your enrollment form you cannot keep! 	<p style="text-align: center;">Classroom & Staff Policies</p> <p>It can take a little as one staff meeting to review your...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Student attendance & tardiness policies <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Penalties & policies that preclude make-up work will affect disabled students' ability to learn and develop a sense of belonging in class, especially after long hospital stays. Bathroom break/hall pass policies <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Crohn's and other GI conditions can necessitate frequent bathroom visits and, often, embarrassment – don't make it harder on these kids than it already is! Sub plan/teacher absence policies <ul style="list-style-type: none"> It is fair & reasonable to ask disabled teachers for a backup lesson plan to be kept on file in the event of a last-minute absence, even if you don't require such of non-disabled teachers. Vaccination record policies <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Whatever your state's laws regarding vaccine-avoidant "personal belief" exemptions, you are legally permitted to protect your immune-compromised teachers and students by having a stricter "no vax/no class" policy than the state. If a student or teacher has a medical vaccine exemption, however, that must be honored: they are the exact folks that herd immunity is necessary to protect! <p>...for areas with room for improvement in providing a fair work and learning environment for all members of the community.</p>
<p style="writing-mode: vertical-rl; transform: rotate(180deg);">Intermediate Steps</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Awareness Raising</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Professional Development programs & speakers for teachers <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Don't hesitate to ask your own disabled staff to contribute: their experiences can be instrumental in creating a culture of all-ability acceptance! But also don't be surprised if disabled staff don't want to speak or lead a program: they may not feel comfortable being "out" as disabled to everyone yet. Just to emphasize: never "out" a disabled staff member or student to anyone else without their express permission. You can raise awareness of the challenges around disability accommodation without "outing" any individual who isn't ready. Speakers, programs, and field trips for students Poster/sign campaigns PBL: Have upper-grade students plan their own awareness campaign and carry it out – maybe they'll even find the need for a project to make the school's space more disability-friendly! 	<p style="text-align: center;">Schedule & Space Considerations</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Classrooms <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Chair/resting space for teachers in a space where they can continue teaching Desks/tables in a U shape: teacher can get to the most students with the least energy expenditure Space options for students who need a minor break from overstimulation not too far from supervision Office <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Set aside a safe recovery space from major overstimulation Keep carb-heavy snacks and drinks (with electrolytes, or Gatorade powder for making some) on hand for students or teachers whose blood sugar or blood pressure tend to crash Comfortable place to lie down in the event of medical flare-ups which can hit without warning Bathrooms <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Make sure an adult can get in to a locked bathroom or stall in the event of an emergency without breaking the lock/door (which could also injure the person stuck inside) Scheduling <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Recess/free time: at least 5 minutes per hour of classtime Make transition times explicit in any schedule issued to either teachers or students
<p style="writing-mode: vertical-rl; transform: rotate(180deg);">Advanced Accommodation</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Infrastructure & Programmatic Structure</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Food <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Can participants with GI/autoimmune conditions/allergies find out full ingredient information for every food item? Are there any options free of the Top-Eight allergens (milk, eggs, fish, shellfish, tree nuts, peanuts, wheat, soy)? If outside food is brought in, how will you communicate the need for clear ingredient labels without folks feeling pressured to give up all of Grandma's Secret Recipe? Would a participant in the program who can't eat any of the food still find it worthwhile? Space <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Is there clear signage so someone new to the building can find the nearest restroom or water fountain easily? Nearest First Aid kit? Nearest AED? Can people who can't take stairs transition between spaces with the whole class, or must they use an elevator while everyone else goes another way? (Especially for teachers on wheels, supervision during transitions can be tricky!) Programming <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Are there program options with lower stimulation (small groups, no sound system, etc.)? What programs could address the specific needs & interests of disabled community members? 	<p style="text-align: center;">Active Outreach</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> In/visible disabilities can result in highly favorable traits in a teacher: perseverance, understanding, patience, self-awareness, and introspection. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Note: Not always. Disabled people can have a wide variety of adjustment processes and reactions to their dis/ability. Disabled people don't exist to inspire non-disabled people and are allowed to be bitter/angry/etc. Disability doesn't inherently make a person a great/inspiring teacher, but it also doesn't have to prevent it. Looking to fill a new position? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Most disabled folks have a social or support network around them, either online or offline – and many are explicitly looking for part-time work that allows us time for all our weekday doctor appointments, making supplementary schools a particularly good fit for both the disabled staff member and the school administration. Ask one disabled acquaintance and they might be able to connect you to half a dozen more talented folks, some of whom may have otherwise given up on a job search! Same goes for families with disabled children: many parents probably belong to at least one Facebook group for support and information around their child's needs. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Create a school that's a welcome community for one disabled student and you'll have the infrastructure underway to support their friends who are looking for a new community!