



Sinai Akiba Academy

Head of School

Los Angeles, California

## Introduction

Established in 1968, Sinai Akiba Academy (SAA) was the first non-Orthodox Jewish day school on the West Coast, representing the Conservative stream of Jewish religious life. Initially renting its facilities from Sinai Temple, the school and temple merged in 1986. Today, the two institutions occupy a full city block at the intersection of Wilshire Boulevard and Beverly Glen. A series of building and renovation programs over the past three decades have enhanced school facilities, including a state-of-the-art innovation lab, new classrooms, and a Parenting Center. Two gymnasiums and a rooftop playground provide ample, well-designed space for the physical education program and playtime.

SAA's endowment, currently valued at nearly \$30 million, places it among the top ranks of Jewish day schools nationally. It is one of the highest endowed K-8 Jewish day schools in the country, reflecting the loyalty to and esteem in which families have held the school for decades. SAA's prominence is enhanced by its affiliation with the 1,500-member Sinai Temple, one of the country's leading Conservative synagogues.

For a Jewish day school on the west side of Los Angeles, the student population is surprisingly diverse. While all of the students are Jewish, a broad diversity of cultural, economic, and religious practices is reflected within the school community. Many students trace their traditions and connections to Europe, Iran, Mexico, Argentina, South Africa, Russia, Israel and beyond. Religious observance also ranges widely, from Modern Orthodox to minimally observant. The school's generous financial aid program ensures that the student body is also economically diverse. All SAA families must become members of Sinai Temple.

## Mission and Core Values

*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.*

*Our core values serve as a pact with the sacred community we foster; one which continues to energize the present, explore the past, and embrace the future:*







## Sinai Akiba Academy at a Glance

2021-22 School-wide Enrollment (Toddler-Grade 8): 613

Early Childhood: 243

Lower School: 262

Middle School: 108

Employees: 140, including 78 full-time faculty

Endowment (6/22): \$27.3 million

Operating Budget: \$16 million

K-8 Tuition: \$32,995 to \$37,175

Financial Aid: \$2.4 million to 35% of the student body

Accreditation: Western Association of Schools and Colleges, California Association of Independent Schools, BJE: Builders of Jewish Education

Affiliations: National Association of Independent Schools, Prizmah: Center for Jewish Day Schools, Jewish Federation of Greater Los Angeles

On the Web: SAA ([sinaiakiba.org](http://sinaiakiba.org)), Sinai Temple ([sinaitemple.org](http://sinaitemple.org))



## Governance and Administration

SAA is the largest department of Sinai Temple. The school and temple have formed an increasingly strong and healthy relationship in recent years, with SAA's Head of School considered a member of the temple's senior staff. The school's operations are similar to that of an independent school. It administers its own budget and is governed by a 19-member board composed of a diverse cross-section of the community, including parents, alumni, grandparents, Sinai Temple members, and other stakeholders. The board meets monthly, with sub-committees responsible for strategic planning, tuition assistance policies, development, recruitment, endowment, and other areas of importance.

The Head of School reports to the Board Chair, leading the school with the support of the Associate Head of School and Director of School Finance and Operations. Other administrators reporting directly to the Head of School include the Early Childhood Center/Parent Center Director, Lower School Director, Middle School Director, Judaic Studies Director, and Advancement Director.



Sinai Temple will also be transitioning to new leadership in 2023 with the departure of Max Webb Senior Rabbi David Wolpe. His successors will be Rabbis Erez Sherman and Nicole Guzik, dynamic and forward-thinking been a valued part of have worked at the temple for many years.

## The Educational Program

SAA's expansive curriculum provides students with a solid foundation of skills and content in all academic areas while fostering the use of critical thinking and reasoning, integrated information literacy, collaboration, self-direction, and invention in a rigorous, relevant, and engaging environment. Through immersive dual language instruction in Hebrew and English, students from kindergarten through 8<sup>th</sup> grade reap the proven cognitive and social benefits of learning in more than one language, engaging authentically with Jewish texts and traditions each day. Music and visual arts contribute to the creation of a joyful atmosphere.

Committed to excellence and innovation, SAA invests almost double the national school average in professional development to ensure that its teachers are always growing. Each year, faculty attend and lead sessions at prestigious national conferences and workshops.



The school's programs are organized into four divisions:

- The Elaine & Gerald Wolpe Parenting Center provides parent-child and grandparent-child classes for infants through 2-year-olds as well as community-building opportunities and classes to support parents in raising children of all ages.
- The Douglas Family Early Childhood Center offers a research-based, developmentally responsive, and child-centered program within a joyous Jewish environment to children from 16 months to 5 years old.
- The Lower School serves students in kindergarten through grade 5 with a program featuring an emphasis on critical thinking, differentiated instruction, and experiential learning.
- The Middle School, for students in grades 6 to 8, provides a rigorous, relevant, and engaging curriculum that prepares students to excel in Los Angeles' competitive secular and Jewish high schools. (Over the past five years, 90 percent of graduating 8<sup>th</sup>-graders were accepted to the high school of their choice.) In addition to providing a solid academic foundation, the program emphasizes leadership development as well as public speaking and presentation, preparing students to become B'nai Mitzvah. The SAA Student experience culminates in a life-changing trip to Israel.

Throughout the grades, signature features of the SAA program include the following:

- **Judaic Studies:** To inspire children to be engaged in exploring their roots and shaping their Jewish identity, students delve into their personal family history and values as well as daily t'fillot, holiday rituals, modern Hebrew language, Jewish history, critical analysis of Torah and rabbinic texts, and active engagement with Jewish thought and the land of Israel. Starting in Lower School, students are immersed in Jewish values, heritage, texts, and language. Students learn to lead prayers, read from the Torah, perform Jewish rituals and mitzvot, connect to Israel in a multitude of ways, and take pride in being Jewish. Ongoing projects with local, national, and international organizations and communities help SAA students repair the world (aid in the act of *tikkun olam*).
- **J-STEAM (Judaica, Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, and Math):** SAA partners with local, national, and international businesses and universities — with a special focus on American Jewish innovators and agencies in Israel — to bring the most current J-STEAM practices to even the school's youngest learners. From age two through graduation, students engage in hands-on, interdisciplinary investigations that place their discoveries in the larger context of history, values, and culture. The

Innovation Lab is a hub of design thinking, experimentation, and creativity. The coding and robotics program immerses students in a tech-driven environment, building their creative confidence and shaping their awareness that they can be problem solvers and programmers, inventors, and engineers.

- **Outreach:** Throughout their time at SAA, students are encouraged to engage with the world beyond the school. In Los Angeles, they meet internationally renowned artists, scientists, and politicians at museums and institutions. They travel to local Jewish Sleepaway Camps, Sacramento, and Washington, D.C., deepening their definitions of self, community, and nation. 7<sup>th</sup> graders participate in an exchange program with a local Muslim school, fostering profound mutual discoveries. The capstone experience for 8<sup>th</sup> graders is the two-week journey to Israel. There, students explore SAA's core value of *ahavat yisrael*, love of Israel, by engaging with Israel's land, people, language, and history.
- **Student Services:** SAA is committed to meeting the needs of all its students. The seven-member student services department offers gifted education and learning and social-emotional support to help ensure that all students thrive in the challenging program. Learning specialists provide individual, small-group, and in-classroom support in both general and Judaic studies. Counselors and the school nurse address students' emotional, behavioral, social, and health needs. The program has become a model for other private and Jewish day schools.
- **After-School Offerings:** For more than 40 years, SAA's renowned after-school orchestra has offered everyone from absolute beginners to advanced musicians the opportunity to perform within the school and in the community. The after-school program also includes special-interest classes for all ages, childcare through grade 5, and interscholastic athletics in grades 5 through 8.

## Opportunities and Challenges for the Next Head of School

The next Head of Sinai Akiba Academy will lead one of the nation's premier Jewish day schools. With outstanding resources including its exceptional faculty and staff, its longstanding reputation for excellence in both secular and Judaic studies, its healthy endowment, and its affiliation with Sinai Temple, SAA offers an extraordinary career opportunity for an accomplished and astute educational leader.



As has been the case at most schools, the past few years have presented SAA with difficult challenges that have taxed the talented professionals, limited educational innovations, and frayed the bonds of the community. The pandemic first necessitated virtual learning, then triggered an evolving set of COVID-19 protocols regarding masking and vaccination, some of which alienated members of the community.

With COVID-19 challenges now receding, SAA is well positioned for another leap forward. The arrival of new leadership at both the school and the temple in 2023 will provide an exceptional opportunity to renew one of SAA's longstanding strengths: its diverse, warm, and welcoming Jewish community.

SAA is seeking a strong and entrepreneurially minded leader who will inspire confidence and embrace the school's diverse constituencies while offering a unifying vision to guide the next phase in the school's development. A thorough strategic planning process, postponed by the events of recent years, will be a high priority for the Board and the school's leadership team once the new Head arrives.

Enrollment for the 2022-23 school year is projected at around 460, a decline from prior years. The drop is attributable to factors including the dissatisfaction among some of the families with the school's COVID policies and/or perceived curricular approaches and a planned reduction in the size of the Toddler and 2-year-old classes due to space limitations.



The school's healthy endowment and generous donors have enabled SAA to weather short-term deficits while continuing to offer financial aid to more than one-third of the student body. Continued attention to fundraising will be essential to preserving SAA's commitment to offering an excellent education to an economically diverse student body. The next Head of School – who will have the support of a talented, highly professional advancement team – need not be a fundraising expert but must be willing and able to play a central role in this vital aspect of school leadership.

## Desired Leadership Qualities

- A strategic, visionary leader who is open to new ideas and approaches.
- A supportive, mentoring leader.
- A strategically oriented leader who can enthusiastically communicate a guiding vision.
- A clear-minded leader who can confidently stand by decisions that, while right for the school, might be unpopular with a vocal minority of parents
- A warm, visible, present leader who will help to build community.
- A skilled administrator who will bring clarity, consistency, and accountability to the management of people and programs.
- An educational leader who is committed to academic excellence and evidence-based curricular innovation.
- A passionate advocate for Jewish education and for the State of Israel.

## Skills and Qualifications

- An appreciation for and ability to lead a diverse Jewish community.
- Significant leadership and administrative experience, ideally in a Jewish setting.
- Excellent communication skills.
- The ability and willingness to participate actively in the school's advancement efforts.
- A commitment to reflecting SAA's core values in all aspects of leadership.



## Application Requirements and Search Process

Candidates should submit as soon as possible the following materials:

- A cover letter indicating why you are particularly interested in and qualified for the position.
- A current resume.
- A statement of educational philosophy.
- The names, email addresses, and telephone numbers of five references, with an explanation of the candidate's relationship to each. (We will obtain your permission before contacting any references.)
- A second writing sample of your choice (article, talk, newsletter, etc.) Application materials should be uploaded directly on the DRG website ([www.drgtalent.com](http://www.drgtalent.com)) by visiting the Sinai Akiba Academy listing.

This position description is based upon material provided by Sinai Akiba Academy, an equal opportunity employer.

To apply for this position, please click [HERE](#).

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DRG is conducting this search on behalf of Sinai Akiba Academy. To discuss the opportunity in more detail, contact the lead consultants:

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