



Head of School

Austin Jewish Academy

Austin, TX

Introduction

Austin Jewish Academy (AJA) is an independent, co-educational Jewish day school in Austin, Texas, serving students in grades K–8 and their families. AJA is the only Jewish day school in Austin with a pluralistic approach, embracing the rich diversity of the city's growing Jewish population. It is a community-oriented school that offers families from a wide range of religious practices, cultural backgrounds, and global locations—including Israel, Russia, Puerto Rico, South Africa, Canada, Croatia, Serbia, Mexico, Ukraine, New Zealand, Argentina, and more—a welcoming and inclusive environment. AJA grounds its strong academics in Jewish values, fostering critical thinking, creativity, and collaboration through its distinctive focus on project-based learning. Graduates leave AJA with confidence, a strong sense of identity, and the practical skills necessary to thrive in high school and beyond.

AJA families experience a warm, welcoming, and nurturing environment where safety, openness, and genuine connection are central. There's a strong sense of community throughout the school, which shares a 40-acre campus with numerous other Jewish institutions and synagogues. Teachers and families support one another, and students are happy, recognized, and encouraged to be themselves. Parents describe AJA as a place where their children are cared for as whole individuals, not just academically, but socially, emotionally, and spiritually, and report that AJA graduates go on to thrive at top high schools and colleges.

AJA is seeking a Head of School who will build on the school's strong foundation and lead it into its next chapter of growth. The AJA community looks forward to welcoming a new leader in the summer of 2026 who brings vision, warmth, and inspirational leadership, and embodies and upholds the Jewish values at the heart of the school.

Austin Jewish Academy at a Glance

Mission

To create a better world by raising students to their full academic, social, physical, and spiritual potential, guided by timeless Jewish values and traditions.

Vision

Inspire a community of students to transform the world.

Values

- INTEGRITY – יושרה
Practicing honesty, respect, kindness, and compassion.
- TRADITION – מסורת

Learning through timeless Jewish values and Torah, infusing students' lives with meaning and purpose.

- **EMPOWERMENT** – העצמה

Providing students with the tools to reach their full potential.

- **COMMUNITY** – קהילה

Collectively raising our children within a safe and nurturing environment.

- **EXCELLENCE** – מצוינות

Challenging students across all disciplines with the highest standards and an integrated curriculum to create life-long learners.

- **TIKKUN OLAM** – תיקון עולם

Creating a model community and improving the welfare of society at large.

The exceptional community of families and teachers at AJA **help shape** students into today's accomplished, innovative thinkers and tomorrow's compassionate problem-solvers and leaders.

Facts and Figures

Founded: 1997

Enrollment: 97

- Lower School (K-5): 84
- Middle School (6-8): 13

Student-Faculty Ratio: 5:1

Staff: 23 (many with advanced degrees)

Average Tenure of Faculty: 7 years

Operating Budget: \$2.3 million

Indebtedness: 0

Tuition: ≈\$21K

Average Class Size: 11

Accreditation: COGNIA, with membership to PRIZMAH and NAIS (National Association of Independent Schools)

On the Web: Austin Jewish Academy (<https://austinjewishacademy.org/>)



Educational Philosophy

Children deserve a relevant, rigorous, and joyful academic and co-curricular program. With that in mind, three points of focus guide Austin Jewish Academy's (AJA's) educational approach:

- **PROJECT-BASED LEARNING:** Students at AJA take ownership of their learning within frameworks and guidance provided by the exceptional faculty. The Project Based Learning curriculum teaches students to share in the work of Tikkun Olam – repairing the world.
- **SOCIAL EMOTIONAL LEARNING AND A WARM AND WELCOMING COMMUNITY:** The AJA school culture empowers students to navigate the world in a healthy way and enables sound decision-making. Students develop strong relationships with their classmates, across grade levels, and with faculty. Graduates move on to high school with character, confidence, and the ability to self-advocate.
- **JEWISH STUDIES:** AJA is dedicated to inspiring in students an enduring commitment to spiritual growth and a meaningful connection to Israel and Jewish life now and for the future. The Hebrew language is taught and incorporated throughout the day, with a strong language program that supports fluency and cultural connection. The curriculum also includes the teaching of Zionism as a core element of Jewish identity and peoplehood. AJA acknowledges and honors the diverse spectrum of Jewish life across the U.S., Israel, and the world, instead of teaching one “right or wrong way” to practice Judaism.

Academics & Programming

Austin Jewish Academy helps shape students into curious, life-long learners with the skills to engage and interact with the world around them. Supported by small class sizes and a nurturing environment, students feel the dedication of faculty and staff, who greet each student by name and tailor lessons to their academic needs and interests.



AJA takes an active, personalized approach in helping each child thrive, meeting students where they are and guiding them toward their full potential, whether by crafting college-level math lessons or enabling ambitious artistic endeavors.

A signature feature of the AJA academic experience is Portfolio Day, where students present their work to peers, families, and the broader community. In these presentations, students showcase their knowledge and accomplishments and demonstrate that they can apply their learning to real-world challenges and contribute to a better world.

Learning by doing is also bolstered by AJA’s access to excellent facilities including the state-of-the-art gymnasiums and pool, a theater, well-equipped art and music rooms, and a

makerspace. A Science and Innovation Center enhances hands-on learning with a state-of-the-art lab, greenhouse, vegetable garden, and even a chicken coop—sparking curiosity and a love of discovery.



The new Head of School will lead a learning community grounded in the belief that students learn best through active engagement. AJA embraces a developmental approach that considers each child's interests and abilities as the foundation for building their skills. It values the innate drive of students to educate themselves, cultivating self-motivated learners by fostering their self-direction, responsibility, and independence. Its curriculum is integrated

and meaningful, weaving together general and Judaic studies to deepen understanding and strengthen Jewish identity. Learning is seen as a partnership that extends beyond the classroom into the home and community, with families playing an essential role in the educational journey. The school encourages respect and tolerance, and its support for language acquisition enhances community as well as cognitive and linguistic growth. Teachers serve as facilitators, creating opportunities for effective problem-solving and critical thinking that prepare students to meet challenges with confidence and purpose.

The curriculum at AJA is academically strong, values-driven, and developmentally responsive. General and Judaic studies are integrated in meaningful ways, with an emphasis on critical thinking, creativity, and real-world application. Hebrew and Jewish Studies are central to the school's mission and taken seriously by students and faculty alike, regardless of background or level of observance. A robust Hebrew language program fosters fluency and connection to Israel, and Zionism is thoughtfully woven into classroom learning and school culture. Project-based and experiential learning are core to the academic experience, and students are supported as individuals, challenged, encouraged, and celebrated for who they are and how they learn. The result is a well-rounded, high-quality education that prepares students to thrive both as scholars and as engaged members of the Jewish and global communities.

From the moment students arrive, AJA immerses them in Jewish learning and a love of Israel. Kindergarteners are introduced to Jewish holidays, Torah, and the Hebrew language; as students advance, their studies broaden to include essential prayers, traditions, and core Jewish values. Hebrew instruction begins in earnest in first grade, and by second grade, students are leading Tefillah and exploring topics such as Shabbat and life on a kibbutz. In the upper grades, students engage with more advanced Jewish texts and history, including the Torah, Mishna, and significant global topics like the Holocaust. Throughout the AJA

educational journey, Jewish values, Hebrew, and Israel are thoughtfully woven into the fabric of daily learning, deepening students' understanding of Jewish heritage and strengthening their connection to it.

AJA students shine beyond the classroom. They earn district and tournament titles in JV sports, top PSIA placements in math and writing, and science fair honors at the state and national levels. The school offers rich extracurricular activities, including chess club, art club, and high-quality theater productions that showcase student creativity and talent. At AJA, sports and extracurricular endeavors interact synergistically with students' self-directed academic pursuits, as the faculty guide students to learn about their passions and become passionate about their learning.

Jewish Life & Community

A hallmark of the AJA student and family experience is its strong sense of community, centered on Jewish values, traditions, and celebrations. Students share that “we function as a big family.” The atmosphere is down to earth, welcoming, and unpretentious.



T'filah and *KabShab* gatherings at AJA foster a strong sense of community and spiritual connection. Different classes take turns leading portions of the services, creating a shared sense of responsibility and pride. Younger students often sit in the laps of older students, reinforcing the school's culture of warmth, mentorship, and belonging. Holiday lunches are another cherished tradition, bringing all grades together to eat, celebrate, and build lasting memories. Parents frequently share that “AJA makes being Jewish a joyful experience” and “I see my kids delight in Judaism,” reflecting the school's success in nurturing a meaningful and joyful Jewish identity.

Additionally, as part of the Jewish Studies program at AJA, each elementary school grade celebrates a special milestone event marking completion of a unit of study during the school year. Kindergarteners are given their first siddur in a special ceremony, and by the time they are in fifth grade, the children have learned trope and read from the Torah on a different day surrounded by family and the larger student body. These special events, celebrating student accomplishments, create wonderful, shared memories for families and students alike.

Austin itself is one of the fastest-growing Jewish communities in the country. There's a strong culture of collaboration across Jewish institutions and organizations, and AJA has a particularly strong partnership with Shalom Austin, the city's integrated Federation and JCC. Through philanthropic investment, shared spaces, and professional cooperation, AJA has

greatly benefited from Shalom Austin’s commitment to the school’s success. Additionally, the city’s vibrant music and culinary scenes, along with strong academic institutions like the University of Texas, contribute to Austin’s dynamic energy and help shape Jewish life. Austin has emerged as a thriving tech hub, offering a lower cost of living compared to many other major tech centers and attracting a growing Israeli community.

Faculty and Administrators

The people who work at AJA embody the school’s mission and values, creating a community that is both academically robust and deeply rooted in joyful, lived Judaism. What sets AJA apart is not just its rigorous curriculum, but the genuine care and dedication the staff show toward each student. Many faculty members have been part of the school for years, and even newer educators speak of a strong sense of purpose and belonging. As one teacher expressed, “I feel supported and uplifted to be myself and a part of the positive and inclusive atmosphere.” This culture of care is felt by families and students alike—parents consistently remark on the love and commitment teachers bring to their work, and students appreciate the creative, engaging ways their teachers help them learn. One student put it simply: “Teachers build connection with you; they make space to get to know you to help you grow.”

The team is lean, and everyone rolls up their sleeves to do all that needs to be done. In the immediate future of AJA, the Head of School will be a leader who actively contributes to the day-to-day work while also providing oversight and guidance to others, blending execution with strategic leadership.

Campus

The Dell Jewish Community Campus is a vibrant and distinctive center of Jewish life in Austin. Spanning 40 acres, the campus is home to Austin Jewish Academy as well as Shalom Austin, which encompasses the Jewish Community Center (JCC), the Jewish Federation, Jewish Family Service, and the Jewish Foundation of Austin & Central Texas. It also hosts three synagogues—Reform, Conservative, and Modern Orthodox—creating a truly inclusive and diverse Jewish environment.



AJA students participate in the full spectrum of Jewish life on the larger Shalom Austin campus. The JCC features recently renovated, state-of-the-art facilities, including fitness and aquatic centers, sports courts, nature trails, and flexible event spaces. It offers robust programming for children, families, and adults, and it is home to a thriving early childhood center located right next to AJA, along with highly regarded after-school and summer camp offerings. AJA students benefit from regular access to the JCC

gym, pool, and athletic fields, enriching their school experience. The campus's extensive resources and amenities create a dynamic environment for families and enable the school to enhance and expand its educational offerings.

AJA also benefits from the security of the Shalom Austin campus, which prioritizes the safety and well-being of all who visit. It is a secure, gated campus with controlled access points, on-site security personnel, and a close partnership with local law enforcement. In addition, the organization follows robust emergency preparedness protocols and invests in ongoing safety training to ensure a safe environment for children, families, and community members.

Opportunities and Challenges for the Next Head of School

AJA presents an exciting opportunity for its next leader to make a meaningful and lasting impact. With a strong foundation already in place and a clear path for growth, the school is well-positioned for its next chapter. Located on a beautiful, well-resourced campus in one of the fastest growing and most dynamic cities in the country, AJA benefits from the steadfast support of Shalom Austin and the larger Jewish community. The potential to elevate the school's profile and enrich its offerings makes this a compelling moment for visionary leadership.

With a current enrollment of approximately 100 students, AJA has significant opportunities to grow enrollment across all grade levels, with a particular focus on expanding and stabilizing the middle school. Key strategies for growth include deepening the connection with the JCC's Early Childhood Program, exploring transportation options to better serve families throughout greater Austin, and actively engaging Austin's fast-growing Israeli community. These targeted efforts position the school to attract a broader and more diverse student body while strengthening its presence in the region.

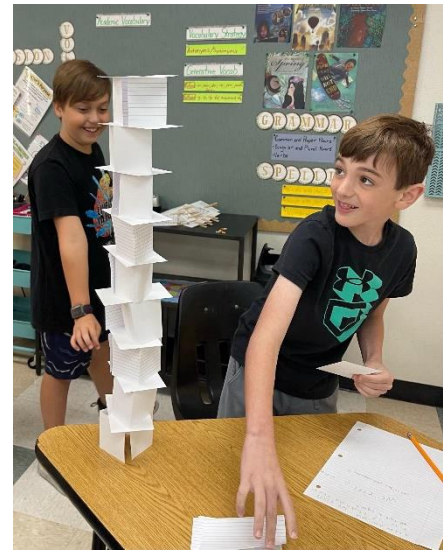
There is also significant potential to enhance fundraising efforts at AJA. The school is seeking a dynamic Head of School who can establish ambitious fundraising goals and implement bold, scalable strategies to drive sustainable growth and maximize impact.

The ideal candidate for this role will be a charismatic and engaging leader who actively connects with Shalom Austin and the broader Austin Jewish community, building strong relationships and partnerships that naturally draw people in. AJA families deeply value the school and seek a leader with a visible and compelling external presence to highlight the school's many successes. There are exciting opportunities to deepen existing collaborations with Shalom Austin leadership, clergy from Austin's synagogues, and key community supporters, further strengthening AJA's role within the vibrant local Jewish landscape.

Responsibilities

Reporting to and partnering with the school's Board of Directors, the Head of School will:

- Clarify and communicate AJA's mission and vision and lead the development and articulation of a strategic plan with clear, measurable goals and benchmarks over time.
- Foster strong relationships with the AJA community through visible and accessible leadership
- Cultivate and solicit support from individuals, foundations, and institutional partners; identify and pursue grant opportunities.
- Preserve the academic excellence of the school in an inclusive Jewish values-based environment.
- Establish sound financial practices and oversee the monitoring, management, and reporting of the school's fiscal health.
- Collaborate with the Shalom Austin leadership.
- Actively represent AJA in Austin's Jewish and educational communities to foster strong and supportive relationships between AJA and the greater Austin Jewish community
- Oversee enrollment management with a focus on attracting, engaging, and retaining mission-aligned families.



Qualifications

- Advanced degree and at least ten years of experience in a senior administrative position in an education setting preferred.
- Proven leadership in the nonprofit sector, ideally with experience guiding a small school—preferably a Jewish Day School—or organization through a period of significant growth.
- Strong business acumen to ensure the school's financial health through strategic budgeting, resource management, and sustainable growth initiatives.
- Demonstrated success in advancing institutional priorities through strategic fundraising and donor engagement.
- Charismatic relationship builder and ambassador who represents AJA in the broader community and drives Jewish community engagement.
- Admissions and enrollment management experience a plus to systematically increase enrollment while maintaining the school's character and academic standards.
- Skilled at leveraging the Board for strategic guidance and direction; brings strong board relationship management and activation abilities, with the discernment to push back when necessary.

- A compelling communicator who builds trust and brings a principled, confident voice to leadership conversations.
- Approachable leader who builds a positive team culture and supports staff development.
- Student-centered leader who empowers others, holds high standards, and navigates challenges with clarity and compassion.
- Values and understands the diversity of Jewish culture, with the ability to connect across the spectrum.

Personal Characteristics

- An excellent listener with an open-door approach
- Positive yet realistic
- Energized by challenges; a creative thinker and effective problem solver
- Skilled in working with families on sensitive issues and promoting proactive family responsibility
- Community-minded
- Strong advocate for Jewish day school education
- Calm, measured, relatable, responsive, and open
- Supportive and empathetic
- Open to change while respectful of tradition
- Committed to fostering Zionism and a love of Israel at AJA
- Dynamic and forward-thinking
- Diplomatic and non-judgmental; instills trust in stakeholders



Key Competencies

Stakeholder Focus	Strategic Mindset	Collaborates
Building strong stakeholder relationships and delivering targeted solutions.	Seeing ahead to future possibilities and translating them into breakthrough strategies.	Building partnerships and working collaboratively with others to meet shared objectives.
Instills Trust	Financial Acumen	Drives Vision & Purpose
Gaining the confidence and trust of others through honesty, integrity, and authenticity with diverse groups of people.	Interpreting and applying understanding of key financial indicators to make better decisions.	Painting a compelling picture of the vision and strategy that motivates others to action.

Benefits and Compensation

The salary range for this position aims to be competitive and commensurate with relevant experience, starting around \$200,000 per year. Austin Jewish Academy offers a comprehensive benefits package, including tuition assistance, medical, dental, and vision insurance and a matching 403(b) retirement plan.

Application Requirements and Search Process

DRG is conducting this search on behalf of Austin Jewish Academy. Interested candidates should submit, as soon as possible, materials including the following:

- A cover letter indicating why they are particularly interested in and qualified for the position
- A current resume
- A statement of leadership philosophy
- A second writing sample of your choice (newsletter, article, talk, parent email, etc.)
- A list of references (references will not be contacted until the finalist stage of the search and only with candidate permission)

Application materials should be uploaded directly on the DRG website (www.drgtalent.com) by visiting the Austin Jewish Academy listing.

Anticipated Search Calendar

Application Deadline: August 25, 2025

Semifinalist Interviews (on Zoom): September 2025

Finalist Visits: October 2025

Starting Date: July 1, 2026

This position description is based upon material provided by Austin Jewish Academy, an equal-opportunity employer.

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

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