

## **Pursuing Excellence in Jewish Early Childhood Education: A Case Study of JECEI's Transformative Change Model**

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### **Abstract**

This paper is a case study of how a transformative change effort affects quality in Jewish early childhood education and how that pursuit of quality results in the engagement of families in Jewish living and learning long term. Parents make choices about early childhood education based on their perceptions of a school's quality. Research points to the importance of the quality of the early childhood experience for children and families. JECEI (Jewish Early Childhood Education Initiative) was founded to work with schools or centers to become quality Jewish early childhood education schools so that they would attract more Jewish families to Jewish ECE schools thereby increasing their engagement in Jewish living and learning long term. To achieve these outcomes, JECEI developed a transformative change model affecting the behaviors of families, educators, and professional and lay leaders in the Jewish ECE schools and host institutions (synagogue, Jewish community center, or day school). This paper presents key findings, themes, and outcomes with a look toward what are the implications of this transformative change model for others in Jewish early childhood education both in North America and Israel.

### **Introduction**

Jewish Early Childhood Education (ECE) has the potential for being a gateway to strengthening and engaging families in Jewish living and learning throughout their lifetime (Vogelstein, 2008). Research over the last two decades corroborates that Jewish ECE is a crucial period for instilling Jewish identity in children, reaching and involving parents, and leading families to seek

additional Jewish education and involvement in synagogue and community life (Vogelstein, 2008). “The novelty of parenting creates a fresh learning dynamic...they [parents] are ‘moldable,’ highly inquisitive, and constantly seeking information” (Rosen, 2006, p. 34). Rosen points out that parenthood precipitates major changes in every kind of family and social relationship; with one’s spouse or partner, within the extended family, with friends, in terms of work, and affiliation with organizations or institutions. Parenthood raises questions about the upbringing of a child bringing to the forefront issues of identity, expectations, and hopes for the parents themselves and collectively as a family unit, as well as for the child as an individual. All of this contributes to the years when families have young children are an opportunity for connecting families to the Jewish community and influencing the path that they take in their personal and home life as well.

While Jewish ECE holds the potential for engaging families, only 14% of Jewish families had their children enrolled in a Jewish ECE center program in 2000 (Vogelstein, 2006). If the Jewish component is not the attractor for most families, then what can be done to attract families to Jewish ECE program? An important step to answering that question is gaining insight into what influences the choice of an early childhood program.

Beck (2002) and JECEI (2008) conducted research to explore why families choose a Jewish school. Both found that parents are not choosing Jewish schools programs primarily because of the Jewish component. In an analysis of JECEI data, Ben-Avie, et al found that parents make choices about early childhood education based on their perceptions of a school’s quality (Ben-

Avie, et al, 2011). That quality had to do with the operation of the school including the teachers and educational experience.

The parents' interest in quality that Ben-Avie identified matches what researchers generally have found about the importance of the impact of quality in early childhood programs on children. Quality makes a difference in the program's impact on the child: "high quality early childhood programming results in better school readiness both academically and socially" (Public Policy Forum, Research Brief, Volume 97, Number 1, January 2009). Comer and Ben-Avie (2010) cite Shonkoff and Phillips (2000) who state: "The positive relation between childcare quality and virtually every facet of children's development that has been studied is one of the most consistent findings in developmental science," (Comer and Ben-Avie, 2010, p. 2). Vogelstein cites research from Bowman, et al, 2001, that shows that the quality of the teachers and their educational approach matter: "children learn more in a well planned preschool where curricular goals are specified and followed" (Vogelstein, 2002, p. ii). The Rand Corporation in a report concludes that child development benefits are tied to a program's quality (Comer and Ben-Avie, 2010).

JECEI as an organization began with the premise that the quality of Jewish ECE programs matters. The perceptions of those leaders who founded JECEI were that quality was not a central concern of Jewish ECE schools. Although many schools were warm and welcoming places, they were not necessarily high quality programs in their operation or effective in deepening children's much less families' connections to and engagement with Jewish living and learning. Some

Jewish ECE schools, 12%, did not even have Jewish or Judaism mentioned in their mission statement (Vogelstein, 2002). One indicator of the lack of connecting families to Jewish living and learning long terms is what Beck found in her interviews with parents where only 37% of the parents reported that the Jewish ECE schools “provided them with specific information about post-preschool Jewish education options” (Beck, 2006, p. 1). Clearly the schools were missing an opportunity to nurture the Jewish journey of a captive audience. Vogelstein laments that there is no study that shows the effectiveness of Jewish ECE schools in terms of their learning outcomes. No national accreditation system existed that stipulates standards or guidelines for a quality Jewish ECE school; five or six central agencies for Jewish education did have local accreditation processes for their schools. In 2007, CAJE convened some Jewish ECE professionals who drafted a document on key elements for creating a Jewish ECE program that focused on fostering excellence (Ben-Avie, et al, 2011). At least some Jewish ECE professionals were concerned about excellence even if they lacked resources to make this happen on a widespread basis.

JECEI designed a transformative change process for Jewish ECE schools as a way to attract more Jewish families to quality Jewish ECE and deepen the engagement of those families in Jewish living and learning. The purpose of this process was simultaneously to improve the specific Jewish ECE schools JECEI worked with and raise expectations within schools across the North America. This paper presents key findings, themes, and outcomes from the research and evaluation of JECEI’s work with a look toward understanding the implications of this transformative change process for others involved in Jewish ECE and/or change efforts in both

North America and Israel. A fuller explanation of JECEI as an organization begins the next section, followed by an analysis of the outcomes achieved, key factors that affect the transformative change process, and exploration of the implications of these findings for other Jewish education change efforts and Jewish ECE schools overall.

### **What is JECEI?**

In 2004 a group of leading philanthropists in North America joined forces to launch JECEI.

Their vision is summed up in the two long-term outcomes of the JECEI Logic Model:

- 1) Sustain and expand the number of high quality JECEI schools in which families choose to enroll in order to increase the number of Jewish children enrolled in high quality Jewish ECE schools
- 2) Move families with young Jewish children toward enriched Jewish life and ongoing Jewish learning

JECEI's work focuses on three areas: 1) quality early childhood education, 2) engaging families in Jewish living and learning, and 3) shared leadership among professional and lay leaders including parents in the school and its host institution (synagogue, day school, or Jewish community center).

JECEI uses a whole school change process that involves transforming early childhood schools into sustainable centers of excellence to deepen the involvement of families in Jewish living and learning. The first group of JECEI schools were scattered throughout North America. JECEI shifted to a community based model in hopes of raising the quality of all the Jewish ECE schools in that geographic area. In a community, JECEI works with a minimum of three schools on a

transformative change process and works with all the schools in other ways such as providing professional development to directors and 2<sup>nd</sup> tier leaders and teachers or consulting for transitional or single programmatic changes in other schools. JECEI's transformative change work with the schools and community is a four-year process that includes:

- Introducing or deepening the Reggio Emilia inspired, Constructivist educational approach with Jewish living and learning.
- Identifying principles and evidence of quality and sharing examples of these principles from other JECEI schools that help guide a school's journey.
- Exploring ways of integrating Jewish practices, ideas, and values into daily life; in school, at home, and in the community.
- Providing teachers and administrators of Jewish schools with ongoing support, professional development, on-site visits, workshops, and retreats locally and/or nationally.
- Involving parents, teachers, directors and 2<sup>nd</sup> tier ECE professionals, and lay and professional leaders of the host institution in joint decision making.
- Fostering strong bonds within the parent body by facilitating social and educational events planned by and for parents.
- Enhancing communication and social networking among parents and teachers within and across communities through *JECEI Connect*, an internet portal.
- Setting the bar high, requiring that communities make a long-term commitment leading to JECEI accreditation as schools of excellence.
- Participating in ongoing evaluation and research on the school, community, and JECEI organizational level that feeds back data to the schools.

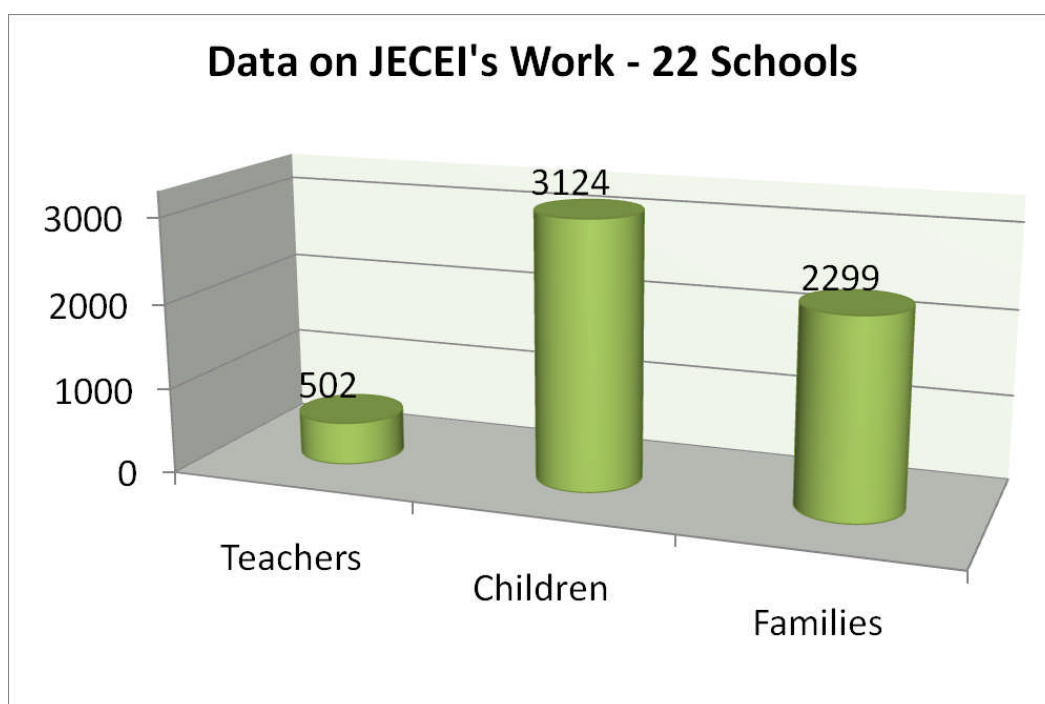
Thus far, all six JECEI schools that were part of the transformative change process described above and that sought accreditation were confirmed by experts in Jewish ECE and general ECE as having fulfilled the quality indicators JECEI articulated.

### JECEI Research and Evaluation

JECEI is an outcome and data driven organization. Ongoing research and evaluation are conducted both internally and externally to inform the consultative work with schools and communities and demonstrate JECEI's attainment of its outcomes to local and national funders.

Internally, data are collected through surveys, interviews, school visit reports, and other means. JECEI has developed tools for collecting data at different stages of the transformative change process around its outcomes. JECEI's consultants complete reports that are organized around the JECEI principles of quality that reflect what a school looks like that is implementing the JECEI approach and shares them with the schools as part of the ongoing and immediate feedback loop of data in the transformative change process. The same set of questions that help a school reflect on its progress toward implementing the JECEI principles of quality are the same set of questions that help JECEI schools seeking accreditation plan for their future. JECEI collects baseline and outcome data on the schools including parent and educator surveys at different points in the transformative change process. The portfolios that schools create on both the school and classroom levels as part of accreditation are data and often inspiring examples for others on what is possible as well as what they have accomplished.

The data collected by JECEI staff alone are extensive having reached a large number of schools, teachers, children, and families as of 2009/2010.



Data collected on Jewish ECE schools and educators in Pittsburgh contributed to that community beginning to work with JECEI in 2011. Those data increase the number of schools for which JECEI has data to 33, the number of educators to 736, and the number of children in those schools to 4172.

JECEI has utilized outside researchers and evaluators to conduct studies and analyze some of the data collected by JECEI staff. The work of these external experts has yielded significant findings about JECEI's outcomes and how JECEI operates. These studies include:

- Analysis of parent and educator data from JECEI schools as compared to Project Kavod schools, an advocacy effort for Jewish ECE by Dr. Michael Ben-Avie of the Yale Child Study Center
- The “Critical Friends Report” on the JECEI transformative change process prepared by three early childhood experts (Dr. Michael Levine, Ann Lewin-Benham, and Dr. Jonathan Silins) in 2008 based on site visits, interviews, and focus groups
- Case study by Drs. James Comer and Michael Ben-Avie of the Yale Child Study Center that focuses on JECEI early childhood schools as an example of quality ECE that is characterized by healthy relationships, the capacity to successfully promote children's learning and development, and the ability to engage families in the work of school improvement
- External Evaluation funded by the Jim Joseph Foundation 2009 and 2010 on the JECEI transformative change process that included site visits, interviews, and surveys
- Reports of the outside experts who reviewed the six JECEI accredited schools

Combining these studies by outside experts with the research and evaluation that JECEI staff has conducted, both the data and their analysis have significantly added to what is known about Jewish ECE in North America.

### **Key Findings about the What of JECEI: Outcomes**



JECEI's Logic Model, its theory of change, identifies what JECEI has set out to accomplish, what the desired impact or long term outcomes are. Outcomes are important as they identify how the participants are changing. The research on JECEI has produced outcomes that relate to issues of quality in early childhood education, engaging families in Jewish living and learning including choosing a Jewish ECE option, and fostering shared leadership. Three key findings about outcomes are presented here that align with each of the three JECEI areas from its Logic Model: Excellence in Early Childhood Education, Shared Leadership, and Engaging Families in Jewish Living and Learning.

#### #1 Quality in Early Childhood Education: Affects Jewish Engagement

The significance of quality has to do with how to attract families to make Jewish early childhood education choices. JECEI surveyed parents in its schools at different points in the transformative change process. These results were compared to a group of parents whose Jewish ECE schools were involved in Project Kavod, an effort in a Florida community to improve salaries and benefits for teachers.

The results of surveys of JECEI parents show that they view the purpose of a Jewish ECE school primarily in **general educational rather than Jewish educational** goals or outcomes. When asked to select the three primary characteristics that they would like their child to acquire, parents enrolled in JECEI schools and Project Kavod schools, selected from a list of 15 characteristics of which 8 were Jewish characteristics and 6 were general characteristics, the top

two selections were: strong social skills and competence in abilities with any Jewish item far behind as evidenced by the selection of a sense of Jewish values, the most popular Jewish option.

Data from JECEI Outcome and Baseline Surveys of Parents (JECEI 2008)

Schools	Strong social skills	Competence in abilities	Sense of Jewish Values
Original JECEI Schools	65%	59%	30%
Wave 2 of JECEI Schools	80%	69%	22%
Wave 3 JECEI Transformational Schools	76%	61%	17%
Wave 3 JECEI Transitional Schools	75%	64%	19%
Project Kavod Comparison Group	75%	64%	19%

Why did these parents select a Jewish ECE school? On a 5-point scale, the two most important factors were the quality of the staff and educators (4.88) followed closely by the quality of the child development program (4.77) (Ben-Avie, et al, 2011). Clearly, the quality of the school in general, “non-Jewish terms,” affected parents’ choice of these Jewish ECE schools. Shevitz and Bailis observe that a robust program in terms of its Jewish content when combined with quality education overall is viewed as having an added advantage by inmarried (two Jews) and intermarried families:

The enhanced Judaic content and activities that JECEI brings to centers does not deter non-Jewish families from enrolling their children. The centers’ general excellence and the value added of being grounded in Jewish values are attractive to many of the non-Jewish families, as well as the Jewish families” (p. 5).

Part of the JECEI transformative change process is to work with the schools on strengthening their general or overall quality in early childhood education. JECEI devised principles of quality that are used to guide the transformative change process and ultimately JECEI's accreditation procedure. Five of the thirteen principles of quality focus on quality in early childhood education, the contribution of Reggio inspired, constructivist ideas and practices to the JECEI change process. The comparison of baseline or initial data of the schools to where they emerge when accredited suggests that the growth in terms of general factors related to quality early childhood education is considerable, thereby making the schools even more attractive to parents who are seeking quality in early childhood education.

The parent survey data of the original JECEI schools that completed the transformation process was compared to the same number and similar kind of schools in Project Kavod that did not go through a transformative change process led to a surprising finding that connected quality of early childhood education to parent engagement in Jewish living and learning. Analysis of the data showed that parents' perceptions of a school's quality predicted, was linked, to increased participation in Jewish living and learning and the impact of those experiences on the families' Jewish behaviors and attitudes (Goodman et al 2009, Ben-Avie et al, 2011). Increasing parent engagement in Jewish living and learning is a far more complex process than simply intensifying the Judaic content of the educational program. To be successful in reaching families to make Jewish school choices and then for that choice of a school to make a difference in terms of their engagement in Jewish living and learning involves addressing and raising the overall quality of the school.

## #2 Engaging Families in Jewish Living and Learning: In-married and Interfaith Families

If Jewish ECE schools are a gateway to Jewish life, then they must be effective in reaching and increasing the Jewish engagement of both intermarried and in-married (two Jews) families.

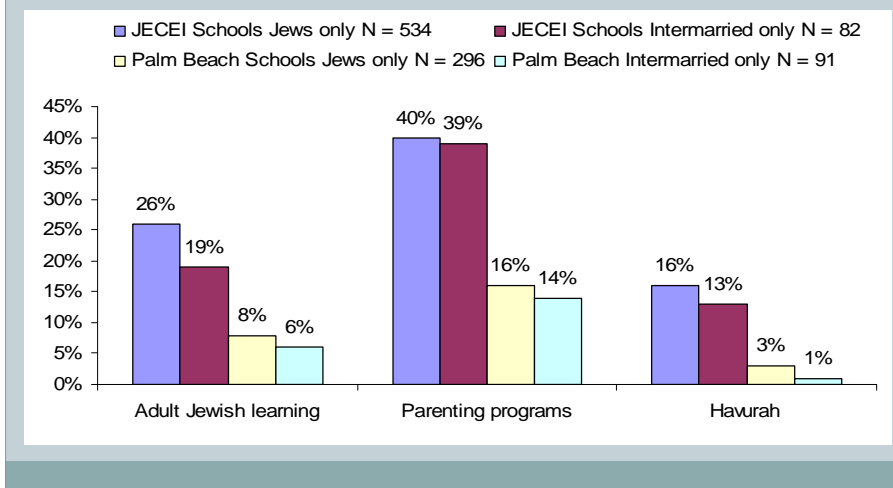
JECEI schools like many schools throughout the country have both kinds of families. In fact with the high intermarriage rates that characterize the US population over the past decades, in 1990 the statistic was 52% of recent marriages, the ability to attract and engage intermarried families is critical. Studies conducted by outside evaluators as well as those conducted by JECEI staff demonstrate that JECEI schools are changing the lives of both intermarried and inmarried families.

The study of parents in JECEI schools that completed the transformative change process showed that both JECEI inmarried and intermarried families were more likely to participate in Jewish living and learning activities than those parents in a comparison group of similar schools involved in Project Kavod. Both the intermarried and inmarried families of the JECEI schools demonstrated higher levels of participation in adult and parent learning than either the inmarried or intermarried in the comparison group of schools.

In-Married and Intermarried Families  
Participation in Parenting and Adult Jewish Learning  
JECEI 2008b

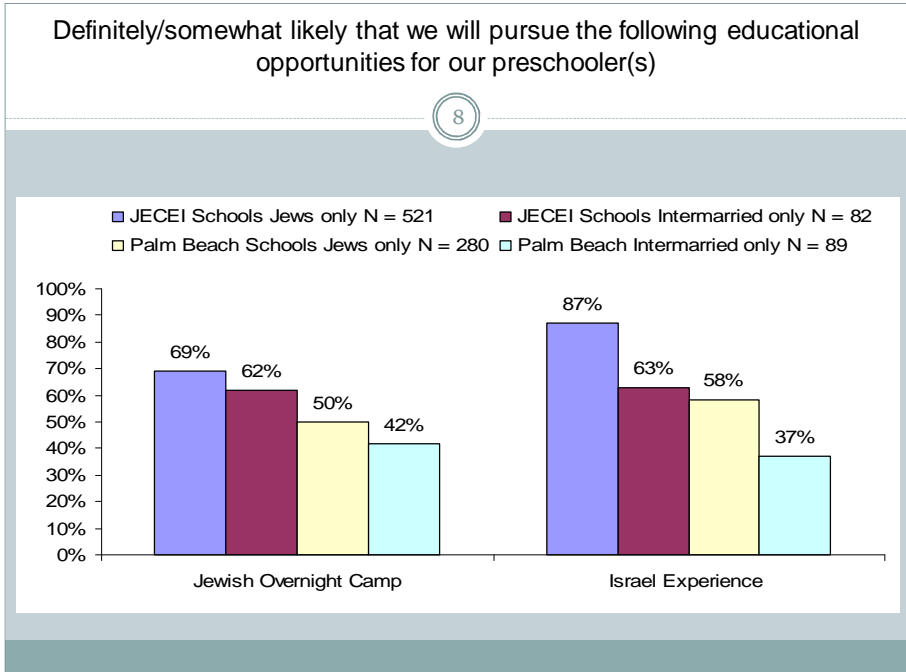
During this school year parents participated in the following school programs:

6



Furthermore, the JECEI parents compared to Project Kavod parents showed greater interest in furthering their children's Jewish education through enrollment in intensive experiences: a day school, Israel experience, and/or Jewish camp (JECEI 2008). Again, the same pattern that JECEI parents whether inmarried or intermarried had higher expectations for their furthering their children's Jewish education in intensive experiences than either inmarried or intermarried families in the comparison group.

In-Married and Intermarried Future Jewish Education  
JECEI 2008b



The 2010 Shevitz and Bailis independent study of the JECEI schools also found for both intermarried and inmarried families “considerable evidence that the current and intended future Jewish lives of the families with children enrolled in JECEI centers are being positively influenced in terms of their Jewish behaviors, attitudes and commitment” (p. 4). When they separated out the families that were not previously Jewishly engaged from those who came to a preschool experience already engaged, they found increases in a variety of Jewish practices and educational activities such as discussing Jewish values, ideas, beliefs and traditions with their children, attending Jewish events, and carrying out Jewish rituals and practices.

**Exhibit 3:  
Reported Increases in Jewish Behaviors by Previously Not Jewishly Engaged\*  
(Jewish and Interfaith Families Only)**

**Bailis and Shevitz 2010, p. 19**

	% FAMILIES REPORTING SOME INCREASE	% FAMILIES REPORTING A LOT OF INCREASE
Celebrating Jewish holidays	97%	56%
Discussing Jewish values, ideas, beliefs, and traditions with their children	92%	41%
Attending Jewish events at places like the JECEI center, synagogue, or JCC	90%	39%
Doing Jewish things with other families	81%	30%
Carrying out ceremonies as a family such as lighting candles on Friday night	80%	38%

Shevitz and Bailis found changes for inmarried and intermarried families in attitudes and commitments among those not previously engaged.

**Exhibit 5:  
Increases in Non-Engaged\* (Jewish and Interfaith) Families' Attitudes about Jewish Life  
Bailis and Shevitz 2010, p. 20**

	% Report Increase
Becoming more involved in the Jewish community as a result of enrollment of children at JECEI centers	<b>+70%</b>
Feeling good about being Jewish	<b>+68%</b>
Providing a rhythm to family's day, week, year through Jewish practices such as Shabbat and holidays	<b>+67%</b>
Feeling joy in being Jewish	<b>+64%</b>
Feeling a strong sense of meaning in our lives	<b>+63%</b>
Feeling more comfortable participating in Jewish practice	<b>+63%</b>
Feeling part of the chain of the Jewish people from the distant past and into the future	<b>+61%</b>
My family will join a temple, JCC, or other Jewish group	<b>+53%</b>
Likelihood of child/ren attending Jewish camp in the future	<b>+43%</b>
Likelihood of children attending Hebrew/congregational school	<b>+39%</b>
Likelihood of children attending Jewish day school in future	<b>+26%</b>

These increases were nearly the same for intermarried families as inmarried: "Interfaith families are increasing their current and intended future Jewish activities and involvements almost as much as the [inmarried] families (Bailis and Shevitz 2010, p. 7). This level of success in

engaging intermarried families as well as inmarried families who were less engaged are important findings to those concerned about outreach. Shevitz and Bailis found that these families are seeking a safe place where they are accepted and supported as they explore Jewish life:

In the focus groups we frequently heard that the interfaith families want to have more practical knowledge about Judaism, more contact with other Jewish families who will accept them, more guidance in terms of bringing Jewish customs into their homes and more support for what they are trying to do (p. 23).

These are important insights about what intermarried families are seeking that a Jewish ECE or any Jewish program can address.

The data from the Shevitz and Bailis study point to an important emerging theme around interacting more with other Jewish families. In the United States, repeatedly the best predictor of involvement in and connections to Jewish life long term is the number of Jewish friends a person has. Shevitz and Bailis asked about this aspect of socializing with other Jewish families in a couple of ways. “Doing Jewish things with other families” increased some of 81% of the families and 30% for others not previously engaged. “Increased likelihood of socializing with other Jews” among those not previously Jewishly engaged increased among 67% of the Jewish families who were not previously engaged and 73% of the intermarried families. While these behaviors are not necessarily the same factor as “the number of Jewish friends,” they do show that the Jewish ECE experience as in the case with JECEI can increase the ways in which Jewish families are connecting through socializing and sharing Jewish living and learning experiences.



### **#3 Shared Leadership: Increases Engagement in Jewish Living and Learning**

Shared Leadership refers to having professionals, parents, and lay leaders working together, sharing their perspectives and making decisions about the school's direction. The JECEI model in Waves 2 and 3 involved the creation of leadership teams consisting of the range of stakeholders such as director, teacher(s), parents, board member from the host institution (synagogue, Jewish Community Center, or day school) and executive director or rabbi. The leadership team was involved in supporting the JECEI process including and to do so they studied Jewish values, often what were called the "JECEI Lenses." The leadership team customarily led the vision setting or mission statement formation, designing and implementing a plan and programs for engaging families in Jewish living and learning, and the development of the 5-year plan for the JECEI accreditation. Inspired by its study of Jewish values, one school's leadership team created a special way of welcoming its teachers and children at the beginning of the year. The idea of having parents and children, particularly fathers, build a sukkah at the school rather than the congregation's maintenance staff to foster a sense of community and start the new year came from a parent member of the leadership team (see diagram 1 below). That school's leadership team devised a celebration with rituals and blessings in a deep and richly Jewish way for the children and families who were transitioning from preschool to kindergarten.

Diagram 1  
Sharing JECEI's Journey  
Report Submitted to JECEI Board of Directors, August 2010



### Example of Shared Leadership

I brought up [building a sukkah from scratch] during the JECEI meeting and the teachers thought what a fantastic way to start the year....What a great way to connect to our children and families through a community wide experience.

*a JECEI Leadership Team parent member*



For most of the schools, the leadership team was involving a fuller range of stakeholders in new ways particularly around joint decision making related to the school’s overall direction and taking responsibility for engaging parents and families in Jewish living and learning. While most of the schools had some form of parent involvement before usually in the form of a parent association that did events and fund raising, expanding the range of stakeholders to include lay and professional leaders from the host institution in matters related to the school’s overall direction and to create a comprehensive plan for engaging families in Jewish living and learning was not common place. All of this served to make the Jewish ECE program more visible and prominent in the host institution and increase the school’s intentionality in fostering the engagement of parents in Jewish living and learning.

Involving parents and lay leadership in the school had other unanticipated benefits. The data show that those who participated as lay leaders in the Leadership Team, their engagement in Jewish living and learning was likely to increase significantly. Shevitz and Bailis start off by sharing the finding that: “Playing a role on JECEI leadership teams may promote the likelihood of increased engagement with Jewish activities in the home and the community” (p. 7). They go on to show that for those parents for whom JECEI represented “a lot” more engagement in Jewish living and learning, that their changes were significantly higher than the parents and families who were not in leadership roles:

When we look only at parents who say that they are now doing things “a lot” more as a result of JECEI, we see a large difference between the leaders and the rest of the parents. More of the leaders have changed a lot. On seven of the eight measures, the range of the differences between the two groups was between 18% and 26%” (Bailis and Shevitz 2010, p. 25).

This finding is important as it suggests that by involving parents in shaping the direction of the school, this helps to create more Jewishly engaged leaders. In effect, the school creates its own core of Jewishly committed leaders who help raise expectations for other parents. It also means that the leaders don’t have to come in Jewishly committed; the process of serving on a leadership team like JECEI’s helps enrich and strengthen their priorities, values, and practices Jewishly..

### **Key Findings and Themes about the How of JECEI: Transformative Change**

The first set of key findings dealt with outcomes related to the JECEI Logic Model, the what JECEI is trying to accomplish. This set of key findings identifies factors that influence how JECEI achieves its Logic Model outcomes.

#### #4 JECEI’s Model of Effectiveness Increases over Time

JECEI’s model of transformative change takes time for schools to reach the “tipping point” where they can sustain the JECEI approach to Jewish ECE. It takes time to grasp what it is involved in the JECEI approach to Jewish ECE. Application lags behind knowledge or understanding of the JECEI approach as evidenced in the chart below.

**Exhibit 1:**  
**Teachers’ Understanding and Use of JECEI Components**  
(Proportion of teachers giving a rating of “4” or “5” on a scale of 1 to 5)  
Bailis and Shevitz 2010, p. 12

	ALL CENTERS	NEWER CENTERS	ADVANCED CENTERS	DIFFERENCE
Degree to which most teachers follow the JECEI approach	62%	42%	73%	+31%
Degree to which own teaching follows the JECEI approach	65%	54%	72%	+ 18%
Degree to which most teachers understand the JECEI approach	59%	43%	67%	+24%
Own understanding of JECEI approach	76%	62%	84%	+22%

“Time matters. The centers that have worked with JECEI the most time tend to show the most growth in terms of its teachers’ comfort with and the use of JECEI’s Jewish and constructivist approach (Bailis and Shevitz 2010, p. 5). This finding makes sense based on what is known about transformative change. Bidol Padvá (2008) in writing about transformative change initiatives shares a formula about the conditions that are necessary for a paradigm shift to occur that supports the creation of a new reality. The formula is:

$$D \times V \times F > R$$

$$(\text{Dissatisfaction} \times \text{Vision} \times \text{First Steps} > \text{Resistance})$$

Just overcoming the “normal” types of resistance that often arise takes time for a new approach to set in.

The intention of JECEI staff was to support the work of the schools in learning and integrating this approach that combined Reggio inspired, constructivist ideas and practices with Jewish living and learning, to the “tipping point” where the school could sustain the work on their own. The entire accreditation process is based on the premise that the schools are demonstrating what they already have done to prove that they not just can, but are capable of doing the work, and want to continue to implement the JECEI approach to Jewish ECE. Reaching this “tipping point” where the JECEI approach can be sustained takes times to achieve. JECEI began as a three year commitment and later was extended to a four year process. Shevitz and Bailis note that “There is a growing body of evidence that the effectiveness of the programming in JECEI centers increases over time” (p. 4). As schools become more proficient at implementing the JECEI approach to Jewish ECE, the model takes hold resulting in a greater impact on the participants.

#### **#5 Educators need support to implement the JECEI transformative change model**

In addition to time, educators need support to implement the JECEI change model. Shevitz and Bailis found that teachers have a greater understanding of the JECEI approach to Jewish ECE than what they actually applied to their classrooms: “higher proportions of teachers understand the Reggio-inspired way of teaching and JECEI’s Jewish lenses than consistently use them in the classroom” (p. 5). Use or application lags behind knowledge. In addition to sufficient time,

teachers need to be given coaching and support to learn about the new ideas, take risks, try out these ideas, reflect on them, adapt and refine them for their setting. Figuring out how to apply the ideas and practices to one's classroom, the specifics of a setting, requires both time and support.

In some cases, the JECEI approach ideas were clear, but teachers needed more professional development or learning opportunities to acquire the skills and knowledge needed to successfully implement the ideas. For example, "JECEI requires that teachers engage more readily with parents and other professionals at their sites in many ways. This is not easy for some teachers and they would benefit from training and support (Bailis and Shevitz 2010, p. 5). Even the best intentioned individuals benefit from coaching and support to try out new ideas in their setting.

#### **#6 Articulating outcomes and principles of quality augments the transformative change process**

Many change efforts including JECEI involve articulating a vision of what they are trying to accomplish. Few identify how one can reach that vision in a concrete way that can guide the transformative change process. JECEI staff worked with a wide range of JECEI stakeholders in devising and then reviewing first, the 13 principles of quality, and then involving these stakeholders in identifying, revising and refining the evidence that attempts to define in a concrete way what the 13 principles of quality look like in a vibrant classroom or school. Both the principles of quality and the supporting evidence were intended to help guide schools along the way as well as used as the indicators of excellent practice for purposes of accreditation (See below).

JECEI Accreditation Procedure: School Guide 2010  
Principles of Quality and Evidence

JECEI Principle of Quality: Small group project work and documentation are part of the curricular process of teachers engaging students in constructing the learning experience.

Evidence:

4.1 Engaging children in constructing the learning process

4.1.3 Teachers use provocations to encourage children's exploration

4.1.4 Teachers use their observation of and/or conversations with children to inform learning experiences

4.3 Documenting children's learning

4.3.1 Teachers regularly engage in the process of observation and documentation as a way of facilitating learning and growth

4.3.5 Teachers document children's exploration of Judaism and Jewish life.

4.3.9 Teachers use documentation as a vehicle for communicating with parents about their child's learning experience.

In fact, these principles and pieces of evidence succeed in fulfilling this goal: "JECEI has enabled centers to develop a vision of what high quality Jewish and Reggio-inspired early childhood education entails and helped them take the steps to turn this vision into a reality" (Bailis and Shevitz 2010, p. 5). The portfolios that schools created capturing the principles of quality and supporting evidence further assisted new schools in helping them imagine and develop strategies for achieving these principles. These portfolios further concretized what the JECEI approach to excellence looks like.

The JECEI Principles of Quality, how a school goes about achieving the JECEI Logic Model outcomes, are useful beyond helping schools concretize what the JECEI approach is. These

principles of quality and pieces of evidence help schools measure and recognize their success.

“Centers put what they have learned into a useable framework and recognize the many achievements they have made since the beginning” (Bailis and Shevitz 2010, p. 6).

JECEI 2009 – From report submitted by JECEI to the Helen Bader Foundation, Milwaukee, WI

*A parent said that, one week her daughter brought a creation that she did in class, but what made it for the parent, was the picture of her daughter working, that accompanied the work. She said: "I will keep the picture, as to see her working on it, was more meaningful for me more than just the end product".*



In one school, the director initiated a process with the class teacher to explore the essence of the holiday as a way of better meeting the children’s developmental needs. Out of this discussion, the teacher took the children outside and they brought back a branch to explore. The teacher was astonished to see how the children explored the branch. The teacher created a display for the parents that had a written description and pictures

that showed the children’s exploration.

### **Implications for Jewish Early Childhood Education and Change Initiatives**



## **Outcomes**

- 1) Excellence in Jewish Early Childhood Education matters: it is the path to increasing Jewish engagement.
- 2) Jewish early childhood education can be the gateway to Jewish engagement, both personally and communally, for intermarried and in-married families that funders seek.
- 3) Change initiatives can help Jewish early childhood schools go from good to great with important results and benefits for all.

## **Key Factors for Facilitating Transformative Change**

- 4) Professionals partnering with parents in decision making around Jewish living and learning makes a difference in the lives of the parents doing the planning, the other parents, the school, and host institution.
- 5) Vision combined with indicators or benchmarks is a powerful combination for raising quality, transforming an institution.
- 6) Creating sustainable educational change – the stickiness factor - a) takes time, b) focuses on the whole institution, and c) requires support for teachers who grasp new approaches to translate them into the classroom.

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