



## WHAT IS JECEI? A UNIQUE OPPORTUNITY FOR JEWISH ENGAGEMENT

In 2004 a group of leading philanthropists joined forces to launch JECEI, the Jewish Early Childhood Education Initiative. Their vision: to increase the number of families sending their children to high quality Jewish early childhood centers and to inspire them to become involved in Jewish life both during and long after the school experience has ended.

JECEI's founders and practitioners understand that educational excellence is the deciding variable for parents in determining where to send their children to school. They also know that new parents are in transition, examining their relationships to culture and community, and open to new pathways. As such, parents of young Jewish children represent a largely untapped, unmatched asset. Too often, families with young Jewish children miss the opportunity to participate in a Jewish early childhood program. Even when they do enroll, the program often fails to engage them in a significant way.

JECEI was formed to change that dynamic. Working with Jewish centers to create an educational and social environment that is welcoming to all Jewish families, including unaffiliated and interfaith families, JECEI transforms existing early childhood centers into high quality educational centers with active family participation. The centers infuse activities with Jewish ideas, reaching children at an age when they are most receptive to learning. By leveraging excellent secular and Jewish education for children with intelligent, carefully-designed outreach to parents, JECEI inspires families to integrate Jewish ideals into their daily lives, and is a gateway to lifelong Jewish engagement.

**"For me,** the fact that my son is growing up in a bi-cultural family makes it even more important to ensure that he is connected to Jewish values and Jewish living, especially since I converted. It gives me a chance to learn and practice with him."



## HOW DOES JECEI WORK? A WHOLE SYSTEM APPROACH TO CHANGE

JECEI is not your typical program; rather, it is a new approach to whole school change. We have developed an innovative, data-driven system for transforming early childhood centers into sustainable **centers of excellence that deepen the involvement of families** in Jewish living and learning

- JECEI's team of expert advisors works with early childhood centers in communities around the country to infuse daily life with Jewish values and ideals.
- JECEI builds communities dedicated to integrated Jewish living and learning by concentrating our efforts: we establish at least three JECEI centers in each community, nurture inter-school collaboration, and draw on the support of local professionals, executive directors and lay leaders.





**"As a person** who has had the opportunity to visit pre-schools over the world, I can say that the pre-schools in Reggio Emilia are the most impressive I have seen."

Howard Gardner, John H. and Elisabeth A. Hobbs  
Professor of Cognition and Education at the Harvard  
Graduate School of Education

- JECEI facilitates personal as well as digital connections to link parents to one another and to their center as partners in learning.
- JECEI's involvement with centers is an intensive, four-year process that engages parents and professionals from the centers; sponsoring organizations, which include JCCs, synagogues and day schools covering all ideologies; and, communal stakeholders.
- JECEI believes that data are key drivers of real change. Practitioners routinely collect both qualitative and quantitative information to assess the overall effectiveness and impact of JECEI in the centers and communities. That knowledge is paired with research in the field to keep our approach cutting-edge and to maintain excellence.
- JECEI culminates with a rigorous and uniform accreditation process. Through this, JECEI is creating a branded network of nationally-renowned demonstration centers that will serve as models of excellence for early childhood education programs in every state.

## WHAT MAKES JECEI UNIQUE? REGGIO EMILIA INSPIRATION/JEWISH VALUES

The JECEI approach to educational excellence and Jewish engagement draws its power from the unique blend of two inspiring directions:

- A world-renowned early childhood model (the schools of Reggio Emilia, Italy)
- Jewish ideas and values

JECEI adapted the Reggio Emilia philosophy because of the Reggio Emilia schools' reputation for educational excellence, their philosophic consistency with Jewish values, and their ability to stimulate children's learning and creativity. The Reggio Emilia approach acknowledges both the importance of a beautiful, inviting school environment and of listening intently to young children's thoughts. Teacher development, extraordinary parent involvement, and commitment to documentation as the way to "show" children's learning paths are hallmarks of Reggio Emilia's many innovations.



**"My father,** who is a physician and also is skilled in wood-working, helped build the sukkah at my son's school. He has never sat in a sukkah in his life. It was a gift to have a project where he could be helpful as well as spend an afternoon involved with his grandchildren in a Jewish experience. He stayed for the Jewish learning, led by a parent and he's much more interested now in Sukkot."



## WHAT IS JECEI'S IMPACT?

### A MEASURABLE DIFFERENCE IN JEWISH ENGAGEMENT

While JECEI is just beginning to take root around the country, a growing body of evidence indicates we are leading an increasing number of families to long-term Jewish learning and living.

A study by Yale University researchers analyzed data from parents in JECEI and non-JECEI schools and found that, across the board, JECEI parents:

- increased their celebration of Shabbat.
- increased their celebration of Jewish holidays.
- increased their contributions to Jewish organizations.

What's more, JECEI parents overall express a greater interest in sending their children to intensive Jewish educational programs in the future — such as Jewish camps, Israel experiences, and day schools. Finally, JECEI-accredited centers have proven that they can sustain the approach beyond the direct four-year engagement with JECEI staff and consultants.

## WHERE ARE WE GOING?

### JECEI IS ON TRACK TO TAKE OFF

The best measure of JECEI's success is the rapidly rising demand for our services. What started as a small pilot program has in short order become a full-fledged national effort, with partners in every region of the country and a growing list of locales expressing interest in joining our ranks.

We expect that the roster of centers will grow even longer as our accreditation program takes hold. A rigorous examination process, and the seal of excellence that it culminates in, provides a powerful incentive for Jewish early childhood centers to embrace the JECEI brand.

JECEI supporters could not be more excited about our potential for growth and the unique opportunities JECEI creates to strengthen Jewish connections. By providing a high-quality educational experience for families with young children, we can attract these families at exactly the time in their lives when they are shaping their identities and are most open to creating new pathways.



JEWISH EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION INITIATIVE

# JECEI



**"I attend** the Tuesday Text Study session because the idea of being able to build on themes that are brought up in the classroom appeals to me. This is my son's first time away from me...I wanted to maintain a connection and know what he is learning about."

If you are interested in getting involved with JECEI and helping us achieve our goals for the Jewish community, there are a number of ways to do so. First and foremost, to keep pace with the demand for our services, we must continue to expand our funding base. We would welcome your financial support. If there are JECEI centers in your community, tell your friends and neighbors with young children about them. And if we have not reached your city or town yet, encourage your local Jewish early childhood center to look into our program.

For more information about ways you can help JECEI grow, please contact Pat Bidol Padva, Ph.D., Executive Director, at:

**Jewish Early Childhood Education Initiative**

**6 East 39th Street, 10th Fl.**

**New York, NY 10016**

**pat@jecei.org**

**Phone: 212-792-6278**

**Fax: 212-279-1155**

**www.jecei.org**

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