

## **ASSUMPTIONS REGARDING THE JECEI ACCREDITATION PROCESS**

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All accreditation processes have underlying assumptions about 1) what they are looking for or validating and 2) how that validation occurs. This document attempts to make explicit the understandings and assumptions related to these two questions and JECEI's accreditation process.

### **The "What" of the Accreditation Process**

For JECEI, the "what" revolves around the JECEI Standards of Excellence that are expressed both as indicators and evidence. The expectation is that every JECEI accredited school will have sufficient evidence of the indicators thereby reflecting that the JECEI Reggio inspired approach to Jewish living and learning has taken hold and that the school can continue along this path on its own. The schools are showing that they have implemented this approach and are likely to be able to sustain it. Moreover, they show their commitment to continuing the approach. While there is something shared by all JECEI accredited schools, the expectation is that the schools will retain their individual character and mission; in other words, they will not all look the same even though they share these Standards of Excellence.

### **The How of the Validation Process**

The overarching metaphor about how the JECEI validation process works is that it is like a dissertation defense. Much like a student coming up to defend his/her research on a topic, all along, the four year consultative process is preparing the school to embody the JECEI Standards of Excellence in the classroom and at the school level. The accreditation process is about making visible the culture that has emerged and the work that the school has already done. To that end, portfolios of all classrooms and on the school level are produced similar to the task of the student sharing his/her thoughts in a written dissertation. The challenge is in preparing effective documentation that matches the needs of the accreditation process. Each school works with a JECEI staff member or consultant to prepare its documentation. The school is only put up for external review by the validators when the JECEI staff person considers them ready for that review.

The validation approach is additive meaning that data can be found from different sources: portfolios, observation during the classroom or school visit, and interviews. Validators are not looking to “find errors” or “trip up” anyone. Rather, the validators are looking for sufficient evidence that the indicators are met. The goal is sustainability or the “tipping point” and not perfection. Some “old” ways of doing things may be present, but if a classroom has met the required number of pieces of evidence for an indicator, the JECEI approach is overriding and the “old” ways are likely to be diminished.

For the validators, the main data source for determining whether or not a classroom has met the JECEI Standards of Excellence is the classroom and school portfolios. Once sufficient evidence is found and the requirements met, no more “searching” is needed; the validator can move on to the next classroom or school portfolio. This analysis of each portfolio helps the validators identify in advance any classrooms or school indicators that need additional data to meet the required criteria. This helps the validators know where or on what they may need to spend more time on the school visit.

The school visit adds to the picture of the JECEI process in the school. It provides the validators with the opportunity to affirm that overall what they saw in the portfolios matches what they see in the classrooms and school itself, to seek more data for an unmet indicator, and to learn more about how the stakeholders experience the Reggio inspired approach to Jewish living and learning for families in their school and host institution. The validators need to keep in mind that JECEI accredits schools and not host institutions; the JECEI approach does address the connection between the school and host institution but its mission was not to change the culture of the host institution entirely. Any problems that emerge through observation or interviews should become part of the report narrative and as appropriate, are possible suggestions for the five year plan.

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