

Agenda: Jewish Education

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Congregational and Communal Jewish Education

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STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

Agenda: Jewish Education is a catalyst for informed dialogue around policy issues related to Jewish education. **Agenda: Jewish Education** seeks to actively engage lay and professional decision makers from across the spectrum of Jewish education institutions, organizations and federations by means of published articles, forums and online discussions.

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This issue of **Agenda: Jewish Education** takes a new look at a venerable feature of the North American Jewish community. Many educational leaders involved in congregational and communal Jewish education are spearheading or participating in initiatives designed to increase the quality and impact of these programs. There is no doubt that they face significant challenges. The prerequisites for deep change include patience, tolerance for complexity, and significant funding. The new models involve shifting paradigms, changing structures, setting high standards, forging new connections, and trusting new partners. Yet these pages are hope-filled and energizing. Educators and lay leaders are digging deeper.

The articles that follow contribute to the growing knowledge base of models and key factors that create sustainable and meaningful change in communal and congregational part-time Jewish education. In order to assist in making these pieces maximally useful to you, the issue has been designed so that each article or set of articles is preceded by a brief introduction and summary, and is followed by a series of questions to guide thoughtful discussion. We hope that you will choose to utilize these articles in your programs, meetings, policy deliberations, and informal discussions.

An area of our website has been designed to extend the reach and impact of the authors' contributions beyond these pages. A lively online discussion of Dr. Ada Beth Cutler's article on standards has already begun. We urge you to visit our website, www.jesna.org, and click on **Discussions** to join in the give-and-take.

We are eager to hear from you. Write to us at info@jesna.org to respond to any of the articles online, or to share your experience using this issue in your local community or national organization. How have you shared the content? Did you use the articles in any programs or meetings? What was the outcome of your discussions?

May 5763 be a year filled with peace and blessing, *shalom u'vracha*.

SHANI BECHHOFER, JESNA
EXECUTIVE EDITOR

INTRODUCTION BY THE EDITOR

Barry Shrage leads this issue with his reflective analysis of the change process in Boston. Shrage argues for a robust working relationship, indeed a partnership, between synagogues and federations in order to create a viable context for powerful congregational and communal education. Mining the case of Boston for guiding principles and generalizable learnings, Shrage identifies the key factors and components of system-wide change and puts forth a cogent and compelling vision of the sacred communities of the future. This important article will stimulate the thinking of communal leaders focused on the broader perspective on community-wide change.

Sacred Communities at the Heart of Jewish Life: 20 Years of Federation/Synagogue Collaboration and Change in Boston

Dedicated to the memory of two holy souls: Dr. Lewis Millender and Alan J. Tichnor who first bridged the gap between federation and congregations in Boston.

BARRY SHRAGE

Jacob left Beer-sheba, and set out for Haran. He came upon a certain place and stopped there for the night, for the sun had set. Taking one of the stones of that place, he put it under his head and lay down in that place. He had a dream; a stairway was set on the ground and its top reached to the sky, and angels of God were going up and down on it. And the Lord was standing beside him and He said, “I am the Lord, the God of your father Abraham and the God of Isaac: the ground on which you are lying I will assign to you and to your offspring. Your descendants shall be as the dust of the earth; you shall spread out to the west and to the east, to the north and to the south. All the families of the earth shall bless themselves by you and your descendants. Remember, I am with you: I will protect you wherever you go and will bring you back to this land. I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you.

Jacob awoke from his sleep and said, “Surely the Lord is present in this place, and I did not know it!” Shaken, he said, “How awesome is this place! This is none other than the abode of God, and the gateway to heaven.”

Genesis 28: 10-17

A VISION OF JEWISH COMMUNITY AND MEANING

Where is the house of God? Where is the gateway to heaven? What is the blessing and what has become of the promise?

We are all Jacob. All of us are on a journey. All are seeking a stairway, a path to community and meaning, to true spirituality and to purposeful lives.

The Jewish institutions that help to find answers to these questions will define Jewish life in the 21st century. Those that don't simply won't survive.

The synagogue is the most critical institution in Jewish life. Its success depends on its ability to transform Jewish life and to move Judaism from the periphery of our lives to the core of our existence. For this to happen, the focus of synagogue life must move from empty prayer to meaningful learning, from sadness to joy, from *Yom Kippur* to *Simchat Torah*, from “membership” to real community, and from passive affiliation to a passion for social justice and meaning.

During 30 years of work for the Jewish community and fifteen as President of the Combined Jewish Philanthropies of Greater Boston, I've come to believe that the future of the Jewish community in America lies

in the development of a common vision; one filled with meaning and beauty and a unifying strategy that links federations and synagogues in order to transform the spiritual life of our people and create real communities of *Torah, Tzedek* and *Chesed* – learning, social justice and caring. To do this, federations must transform themselves from fundraising institutions focused primarily on overseas needs to dynamic networks rooted in real face-to-face communities, linking donors and ideas, including new constituencies, particularly synagogues, and driven by a compelling vision of our Jewish future. Similarly, congregations are transforming themselves from “houses of worship” that provide barely adequate Jewish education for children into real face-to-face communities whose primary goal is the intellectual and spiritual transformation of each family that passes through the congregational “gateway.” This new mission requires a larger and better-trained staff, energized volunteers, far more financial resources, and new partnerships between agencies, congregations and congregational movements, including far greater federation support.

But first we must acknowledge that we have both serious challenges and unlimited opportunities. The good news is that most Jews do pass through the congregational gateway. The bad news is that most emerge spiritually untouched. The good news is that most American Jews still send their children to congregational schools. The bad news is that despite the best efforts of talented educators, far too many still dislike the experience and most – especially those whose education ends at age 13 – emerge having learned far too little to affect their lives or their identity.

The bad news is that classroom education for children cannot work if parents and the larger culture they represent have little respect or love for our texts and our literature. Worse, most of our congregants come to our synagogues without any substantial knowledge of our rich 3500-year-old civilization, having never experienced the joy of Jewish learning – and worse yet, most leave our synagogues pretty much the same way.

The good news is that we can change it all. We can make things much better. It is a lie to say that we just don’t have the answers. We have many answers. Intensive Jewish summer camping works and youth groups work, and movement trips to Israel work and family education works

and serious adult learning works and classroom learning can work if it is part of a total integrated congregational education system – a true community of learners.

All that is required is the vision to recognize the need for radical change and the money, resources and persistence to implement change and to follow our dream.

Over the last 30 years, we’ve seen a number of important trends emerge and find great champions in Jewish life – day schools, or social justice, or camping, or free travel to Israel have all been offered as the answers to our existential Jewish challenge. But day schools alone are not the answer and camps alone are not the answer and Birthright alone is not the answer. These are all excellent and effective programs, but they are not Judaism. Judaism is a life based in community and filled with reverence and beauty and spirituality and justice and meaning and a connection to Israel and to an eternal people. This vision of a sacred community must be at the heart of congregational life. Adult learning and social justice programs and Jewish camps and trips to Israel and family education will all need to become a standard part of each family’s spiritual journey through our Jewish community if congregations are to achieve their potential. But these programs can only truly succeed if they are rooted in a broader vision that includes and transcends them all.

AFTER SEPTEMBER 11: THE SEARCH FOR COMMUNITY AND MEANING

The aftermath of September 11 reinforced what we already knew. A synagogue is much more than a platform for education. It can be the stuff of community itself – the basic building block of Jewish life. During the weeks following September 11, Americans turned to their synagogues and churches in greater numbers than ever before. They came looking for renaissance and meaning. They came to find answers to pressing questions. They came because they wanted to be able to tell their children that life could still have meaning and purpose after the disaster. They came to find solace and hope because many were concerned that they could no longer assure their children a better life after the economic collapse of the summer and fall of 2001 and the sense of insecurity that pervaded our world after the destruction of the World Trade Center. Many found what they were looking for, but far too many found only crowds and words, without caring

and without meaning and without spirituality, revealing both the weakness and the potential of congregational life in America.

Early in December, the Biennial Convention of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations was held in Boston. It was the greatest biennial that was ever held by the UAHC and one of the very greatest Jewish meetings in recent history. It was filled with joy, emotion, caring and faith and it took place just three months after the catastrophe of September 11. It was a marker that our Jewish renaissance is happening and that it has already begun to fill our Jewish world with confidence, emotion and purpose. It was one of many signs that revealed a brighter future for the American Jewish community and for world Jewry. And it placed the congregation at the heart of that transformation.

CONGREGATION AND COMMUNITY

Face-to-Face Community: The Context of Successful Jewish Education

For Jewish life to flourish, for Jewish education to succeed, we must create a unified vision of Jewish life and Jewish schooling must be part of a larger context of Jewish existence, including community and family, caring and commitment, justice and purpose. Cut off from a living Jewish community, Jewish education for children becomes meaningless talk with little connection to values, culture or purpose. To be clear: congregational, after school education will fail for most children if it is not part of a transformed, vital congregational experience.

The idea of community is thus at the heart of the Jewish enterprise and the continuing need for community is one of the clearest messages to emerge from the terrible trauma of September 11th. A clear definition of community must therefore be the starting point for a renaissance of Jewish life for both federations and congregations. According to Robert Bellah in *Habits of the Heart*:

“...a community is a group of people who are socially interdependent, who participate together in discussion and decision making, and who share certain practices that both define the community and are nurtured by it. Such a community is not quickly formed. It almost always has a history and so it is also a community of memory.”

“...While the idea of community, if limited to neighbors and friends, is an inadequate basis for meeting our current needs, we want to affirm community as a cultural theme that calls us to wider and wider circles of loyalty, ultimately embracing that universal community of all beings...”

Professor Arnold Eisen translates this idea of community into Jewish terms in his 1995 essay, “Reimagining Jewish Community in America” and suggests three starting points or primary building blocks for the definition and construction of Jewish community:

- It must be local, face-to-face, as near as the *re’u* or neighbor whom Leviticus XIX commands us to treat in a manner befitting love.
- It must also be *le’olam*: unbounded by time or space, grounded in the unique Jewish situation that is writ large in the world today as much as ever, and dedicated to a *tikkun* that is commensurably all-embracing.
- Finally, on each of those levels, the “words” we speak as Jews must conform to the grammar of Jewish life, underlying and flowing from the conversation begun at Sinai. That is to say, it must be founded on the *Torah* based on narrative or resulting in just action. It must include both study and deed – study as deed, deed as study; both of them arising out of community, constituting community and reinforcing community. We will be a community defined by our conversation and our activities.

Core Values and a Common Agenda

Strong communities are built on common values and a common history that together become the memory of the community. Without a powerful, meaningful and inspiring vision of Jewish life, our institutions and communities cannot compete successfully for the hearts and minds of those who can now choose to affiliate with hundreds of exciting and engaging alternatives available in the larger community. We must know what we stand for if we are to offer powerful options.

As diverse as our community is, a set of core beliefs and an action agenda is emerging, around which the vast majority of Jews can agree. There is a growing consensus on the importance of developing a renaissance of Jewish community around the basic values and principles of

Torah – serious Jewish learning; *Chesed* – kindness, and caring for Jews here, in Israel and throughout the Diaspora, and *Tzedek – Tikkun Olam* – social justice and the possibility of a rebuilt world for our Jewish people and for all humankind.

The Community Matrix

The Jewish conceptions of learning, caring and justice can only be fully realized in the context of strong, interdependent “face-to-face” communities. Learning, justice and caring are the point of Jewish life. They are the seeds of Jewish community. At the same time, Jewish communities are the ground within which these seeds must grow. Too often in the past, strategies for Jewish education or continuity have ignored the need for community, while strategies for community-building have failed to understand that communities require culture, meaning and purpose to flourish. The need for a strategy that supports both must be at the core of the work of our new federation-synagogue relationship.

Federations have a central role to play in community building, but cannot reach out to every member of the Jewish community and cannot become a “face-to-face” community for any but a minority of committed volunteers. For the rest, the task of binding Jews to each other with caring, concern and love, and to systems of Jewish belief, Jewish learning, Jewish values and Jewish social action, belongs to “gateway” institutions, primarily congregations and Jewish Community Centers. The role of federation must therefore be to strengthen and support congregations; to link them to the resources and staffing they require; to encourage, develop, and fund powerful programs that can truly transform them into communities of *Torah*, *Tzedek* and *Chesed*.

Jewish Community in a Mobile World

But how can we maintain “real” Jewish communities in the face of the breathtaking mobility of the 21st century? Paradoxically, I believe that this challenge actually represents our greatest opportunity. How many of us have experienced the beauty and the sense of relief we feel when we find Jewish life in a foreign country we’re visiting? Suddenly we are “at home.” In a time of mobility, community becomes that much more important, that much more desperately sought after by human beings who are, after all, biologically designed for communal existence. And so the existence of strong, caring synagogues that will wel-

come and care about us wherever we move becomes that much more important and that much more attractive for Jewish life in the 21st century.

THE BOSTON MODEL

Over the last 15 years CJP, the Boston Jewish Federation, and our congregational community have conducted a continuing experiment in congregational change and federation-synagogue relations. From the Supplementary Jewish Education Task Force to the Synagogue Program Fund to the Commission on Jewish Continuity to JRNI, the Jewish Resource Network Initiative, Boston has been the acknowledged leader in creating partnerships between federation agencies (especially the Hebrew College and the Bureau of Jewish Education) and congregations, funding innovation, and finally institutionalizing innovation through community wide programmatic change. Throughout a decade and a half of effort we have learned that change is difficult but it is possible. Moreover, change can be made to pervade an entire community rather than just a single institution, creating a critical mass of change that generates its own momentum and that is far more difficult to reverse.

Boston’s success is based on a very different model of communal change and federation-synagogue relations than most communities have created. It is rooted in a new vision of congregational life and of the congregation as part of a broader communal network. We started with a new conception, based in part on work done at the Jewish Community Federation of Cleveland in the mid-eighties, and we learned from our “work in progress” every step of the way. We were committed to learning; we were working with an incredible group of talented professionals and committed volunteers at CJP and at our congregations; we had the full support of our congregational movements; and most importantly, and I think differently from most communities, we were in it for the long haul.

This was not going to be a short-lived experiment in federation-synagogue relations. We were not funding short term “innovative projects” or trying to make our congregations love us. We didn’t even try to raise more money for the federation from congregants. We were highly motivated by the urgent need for successful new models in Jewish education and we were optimistic about the potential of our community, our congregations, and the continuity of

our Jewish future. Our work was at the very heart of our conception of community. Our presence, our commitment and our funding were not going away. We were blessed with great continuity of staff and volunteer leadership over fifteen years and we built our shared vision into a Strategic Plan that kept us “on task” even as we changed tactics and added to our agenda over time. In reviewing our work – our successes and challenges – nine important principles emerge. Some we understood at the beginning, some developed over time, and most continue to differentiate our approach from other communities:

THE PROCESS OF CHANGE

Creation of a True Partnership with Congregations and Congregational Movements

The work of educational change in Boston began in 1988 with a relatively new planning concept modeled on work that developed in Cleveland in the mid-1980s. At the core of the new concept was the realization that 70% to 80% of Boston’s children were educated in a congregational context; that most families gave their primary Jewish loyalty to their congregations and rabbis; and that congregations controlled vast educational resources, including camps, youth work and Israel experiences that were only waiting to be unlocked and coordinated.

Any serious effort to engage the Boston Federation in the work of educational change and Jewish continuity would therefore require a serious working collaboration with congregations. The Commission on Jewish Continuity was therefore constituted as an equal partnership between the federation and its agencies and Boston’s congregations, congregational movements, and the Synagogue Council. After an initial period of trust building, the Commission partnership yielded real collaboration and a common vision of change. At the heart of our common vision and the trust that made it all possible was the principle of mutuality. CJP did not come to “save the synagogues from themselves” and the congregational leadership did not come to criticize the federation. We came together to create a revolution in Jewish life that would change us all and lead to a Jewish renaissance that would assure a wonderful Jewish community for all our children and grandchildren.

Beyond its unique collaboration between the federation and the synagogues, the Commission led to an extraordi-

nary level of cooperation among the movements: Orthodox, Conservative, Reform and Reconstructionist working together for the common good.

A Conscious Movement from Experimentation to Institutionalized Change

From the start we were clear about the need to create a new integrated model of formal and informal education along with an emphasis on education for children, families and adults. We believed that the time of experimentation and program development had ended and that the time had come to institutionalize models that we already knew had a high probability of success. Israel travel did not require further testing. Funding and incentives were required to make Israel travel a standard part of every youngster’s Jewish education. Family education did not require new innovative models. It required full time staffing in every congregation to make it part of each family’s synagogue experience. High impact youth work had been proven as essential for a quality teen educational environment since at least the mid-70’s. What was required was a federation and synagogue commitment to hire full time youth workers along with federation funding to incentivize congregations and make adequate staffing a norm rather than an exception. We decided not to fund feel good short-term programs but rather to invest in long-term institution-wide change.

Investment of Top Synagogue and Federation Leadership

The highest level of federation and synagogue leadership were personally involved in the process, including the Executive Director (President) of CJP and the Vice President for Planning, along with the Director of the Commission and the directors of the regional congregational movements. They all worked at Commission meetings and behind the scenes to address difficult issues and challenges as they arose, and to achieve the consensus that ultimately prevailed. The Commission process also had the input and involvement of the rabbinical and volunteer leadership of key congregations. Both local and national support from the congregational movements was essential to the development of a successful process. In particular the engagement of movement leadership opened doors to congregations that would otherwise have been closed and provided the coordination, communication and support that assured a smooth and productive process.

Involvement of Multiple Layers of Congregational Leadership

The engagement of congregational leaders went beyond rabbis and congregation presidents to include educational directors, youth workers and family educators. The professional and volunteer leadership of the federation made sure to create channels of communication and regular meetings with these professionals, as well as with other congregational leaders.

Persistence, Focus, Feedback and Research

As noted above, CJP and the Commission were in it for the long haul. None of our projects started successful. All were initially flawed. All required consistent momentum, feedback, research and support from the top over many years before they began to achieve measurable success. All continued to evolve over time. Significant funds were invested in research and evaluation, which created a feedback loop that led to ongoing improvement in each project.

Vision and Change

If you don't know where you're going any road will get you there. The Commission on Jewish Continuity began with a number of hypotheses based on years of observation and research. We began with a vision and a clear sense of direction. We believed that family education could be transformational and that Israel travel, intensive Jewish summer camping, and youth work were powerful tools for building Jewish identity. We believed that the impact of these programs would expand geometrically, if they were implemented together in the same congregation and if they could be rooted in the congregational culture as part of a total Jewish educational experience. We started with real and reasonable ideas. We did not simply ask congregations what they needed or offer start up grants for innovation. We made big, across the board bets on big ideas with a high probability of success in many congregations at the same time.

In the area of family education, for example, we began with small-scale experiments but moved quickly to funding half the cost of full-time trained family educators in congregations across the community. In other words, we never tried to find the perfect family education program through innovative program grants. Instead, we tried to institutionalize the idea of family education and provided training and opportunities for sharing and consultation to encourage the evolution of better models over time. We

also created a learning network for new professionals and plenty of opportunity for them to learn together. We overseeded the field to assure the emergence of some excellent models that could be replicated and expanded through contact with other congregations. The goal was not the perfect family education program. It was the development of an excellent community-wide process that would make family education a standard, institutionalized part of most schools, most congregations and most families' Jewish educational experience.

But we also stayed open to change, adding outreach to interfaith families, Building Caring Communities, the JRNI project, our social justice initiative and universal adult Jewish literacy as we went along. Needless to say, our initial plans for our projects changed frequently over time so that our family and youth educator initiatives look quite different today from our starting point hypotheses.

"Tipping Points" and Assuring a Critical Mass for Change

One of the weaknesses of many existing synagogue change efforts is that they attempt to create individual change projects in individual congregations often in different cities. In these instances, congregations frequently compete with other congregations for funding, with only the winner allowed to try the innovation. Our approach was to announce up front our intention to implement new projects across the board in as many congregations as wanted to participate with a funding model that required at least 50/50 congregational participation. Moreover, structured opportunities for sharing and ongoing consultation through the Hebrew College and the Bureau of Jewish Education were provided to share ideas and success stories and improve the model over time. We now have more than 22 full-time family educators and nearly as many full-time youth workers. Some are better used than others and not all are what I would view as completely or even mostly successful, but they are all evolving over time, and enough variations and successes exist to assure real progress throughout the community. Moreover, if a particular congregation drops out or loses a key rabbi, staff person or major volunteer, the model continues to exist in the community for potential re-adoption later on. The existence of many replicable models provides a much greater evolutionary chance for success and improvement over time.

Even more importantly the existence of many variants in many congregations provides the potential for creating a real community wide “tipping point” of attitude change. This is beginning to happen in Boston as the widespread engagement of multiple leadership elites (and ordinary congregants) in the *Me’ah* Program has made Jewish literacy a mark of real status in our Jewish community, with adult Jewish learning at the edge of becoming a communal norm.

Funding, Staffing and Turn-Key Initiatives

If the mission of our congregational movements today is the spiritual, intellectual and ethical transformation of most congregants and the creation of real Jewish community, most congregations are neither funded nor staffed to provide any hope of success. Moreover, most rabbis and leaders were raised in old paradigm congregations, making it difficult for them to even envision the structure, funding or staffing necessary to succeed.

Often in synagogue change processes, consultants help congregational leadership envision new goals like adult education or family education or informal education for children. But then at the moment of implementation, they leave them powerless to implement high quality, sustainable programs due to lack of funding or staffing or the availability of easily implementable models. It does little good to turn a congregation on to serious Jewish adult education and then leave them with the same program and teachers that have always been available but have had limited impact.

CJP and the Commission on Jewish Continuity therefore offered serious incentives for congregations to hire new full-time staff for specific tasks (youth work and family education) and incentives for Israel experiences. The Commission also developed full-blown turn-key programs like *Me’ah* (a two-year Wexner Heritage type adult learning experience) which were designed to be integrated into any congregation desiring to participate.

Ongoing Consultation and Support

The Commission on Jewish Continuity with our partners at the Bureau of Jewish Education and the Hebrew College and the Synagogue Council provide support, feedback, coordination, consultation and help to assure success over time.

THE CONTENT OF CHANGE

Universal Adult Jewish Literacy

A community that has no cultural, intellectual or spiritual memory has no future. The creation of “communities of learning” will require a change in our communal culture. In America, we have built great and sophisticated public and private school systems to transmit secular learning and the values of western culture to each generation. We have done so because our parents believed in America and in western civilization. Only if we truly believe in the importance of our communal memory, our Jewish culture, our *Torah* and its ability to give our lives beauty and meaning, can we truly create communities of Jewish learning.

Expanding Jewish adult education is key to the overall goal of building broad communal support for Jewish education. Only a community filled with adults who love Jewish learning and find meaning for their own lives in Jewish knowledge will create universal Jewish literacy for their children and grandchildren. Only a community that sees the literary beauty of the Bible as clearly as it sees the beauty in Shakespeare will raise a generation of Jews who are Jewishly literate as well as masters of Western Civilization and culture. In Boston, the federation will pay half the cost of a full-time family educator for any interested congregation (we are already in more than 30 congregations!) as well as half the cost of *Me’ah*, our gold standard adult learning experience which currently reaches 700 adults a year in 20 congregations.

Strengthening serious intensive and comprehensive Jewish learning for adults (rather than the episodic and uncoordinated efforts that usually pass for adult education), particularly at congregations, must become a far higher priority if we are to assure the success of our Jewish renaissance. The Wexner Heritage Program, *Me’ah* and the Melton Adult Mini School all provide useful models for serious comprehensive adult learning of the kind that must become normative for American Jews.

Me’ah (A Hundred Hours of Jewish Learning), developed by our Hebrew College and its leader David Gordis, is modeled loosely on the Wexner Heritage Program (Bible, rabbinics, Jewish history and Jewish philosophy – two years, 25 weeks per year, two and one-half hours in the classroom and two hours of homework per week!). Our

goal was simply to make every Jew in every congregation in Boston a literate Jew – universal Jewish literacy. It started with 40 participants and grew to 700 participants per year within four years. The demand has been enormous, a symbol of the Jewish community’s hunger for serious Jewish learning and meaning. It has spread from congregation to congregation across Greater Boston. More importantly, the reality structure of Boston Jewry has begun to change with far more Jews believing in the power of Jewish learning to bring meaning and intellectual satisfaction to their lives.

A groundbreaking recent study on adult Jewish learning found that most Jews expressed a preference for very short-term learning experiences focused on popular topics like Jewish cooking and the Holocaust. That indeed is the limited scope of many congregational programs marked by very limited expectations of congregants. But market research is an inadequate guide to the real needs of our Jewish people. We can and must understand our congregants as a community that can be inspired by leadership and by an elevated vision of Jewish life. If we had depended on market research in 1995 in Boston, we would never have created *Me’ah* and that would have been a tragedy.

Small face-to-face communities, particularly synagogues, already educate most of our community’s children. But they can be much more. They can become, in Isa Aron’s words, “congregations of learners” and the central carrier of culture and learning for us and for our children.

By surrounding ourselves with learning, particularly sophisticated and comprehensive adult education, we can change the norms of Jewish life and the attitudes we transmit to our children. But the reverse is also true. The process of learning together itself creates community. For the Jewish people, learning can be an intimate act of self-discovery that strengthens the ties that bind us together. Our communities can create opportunities for learning just as learning itself creates community.

Integrating Formal and Informal Jewish Education: Creating a Total Educational Environment

Congregation-based afternoon school education is the most widespread form of Jewish education in America. The goal of educational and communal policy must be the transformation of congregational education through an overall strategy designed to make each congregation a

total educational environment – carefully orchestrating the work of highly trained professionals (rabbis, educators, family educators and youth workers) and programs (services, schools, youth movements, movement camps, targeted intensive adult education aimed at young families, and adult/family education programs). The distinction between formal and informal education must be erased and we must move to assure as much support and funding for high impact and high potential Jewish camps, Israel learning experiences, youth activity, and family and adult education as we currently provide for our highly problematic afternoon school efforts.

In essence, we are seeking to create a new synagogue structure that makes an intensive family integration/education experience, exciting services, excellent schools, intensive Jewish summer camping, powerful youth groups and Israel experiences for teens a standard, automatic, integrated part of our educational programs, just as the after school/Sunday school experience is a standard, well-funded [contended point – distracting], and required part of congregational life. The Commission on Jewish Continuity in Boston has worked to transform the relationship between federations and synagogues so that new incentives can be made available to congregations to create this integrated structure.

A Strategy for Youth Education

Teens are among the fastest growing cohorts of American Jews and they’re also the most vulnerable. Far too many teens drop out at age 13 and Jewish education will simply fail if we can’t retain and inspire our youth. Programs that place trained full-time youth workers in every synagogue will be critical to success, as will strategies that integrate youth groups, camping and Israel experiences. Simply put, the more youngsters that participate in intensive Jewish summer camping, the more teens that will participate in youth group experiences. The more youth group activity, the more teens go to Israel; and the more teens go to Israel, the stronger our youth groups, and so on.

And of course, all of this is well within our capacity to envision and to accomplish. In Boston, the Robert and Myra Kraft Passport to Israel Incentive Savings Program and some very dedicated congregations have vastly increased the pool of Israel bound teens. The Grinspoon Foundation’s camp incentive program has significantly increased camp participation in Western Massachusetts.

Most significantly CJP's Youth Educator Initiative has increased the number of full-time trained youth workers in congregations in Boston from two to 11 in only four years with four additional half-time workers also developed through the program. Our goal must be integrated camp, Israel, and youth group experiences for every teen.

Caring Communities

The creation of compassionate, face-to-face communities through which we care for each other – visiting the sick and lonely, comforting the bereaved, aiding those in need, welcoming new members – clearly represents a core agenda for congregational life. The Willow Creek Community Church outside Chicago is now among the most successful in the country, but at the start, it was failing. Research revealed its core failure as a community. Members felt uncared for and unwelcome. They felt that the Church was more interested in their money than in themselves as people.

Change will require a radical new focus on welcome and caring as core values of Jewish life. For this to happen, the typical *Chesed* committees of synagogue life will require far more work. The Willow Creek Community Church has 7,000 volunteers under the guidance of 100 professional staff to create a sense of real caring and community for its 30,000 members. It didn't happen by accident. In Boston, CJP's human service agencies have begun to bring their services into congregations and CJP's Commission on Jewish Continuity is developing plans to fund full-time volunteer coordinators for congregations to test the applicability of the Willow Creek model.

Communities of Justice

A Jewish community that focuses solely on its own needs ignores its most basic historical, Biblical and prophetic mandate. The pursuit of *Tikkun Olam*, social action – the repair of the world for our neighbors and for all humankind – is an essential element of Jewish community-building because it is at the core of the covenant between Abraham and God, and because working together in a great cause itself builds community. This value must guide us to actively involve our congregants in advocacy and service projects that engage them in repairing the world. But most congregational social justice efforts are understaffed and underfunded and limited. In Boston, the Jewish Community Relations Council has recruited 700 volunteers – most through congregationally based out-

reach efforts – to tutor inner city youngsters on a weekly basis and build bridges to inner city churches. Plans are already being developed to test full-time, federation funded, social justice coordinators to build this critical element of our congregational and communal vision.

Broadening the Base of Community: Outreach to Interfaith Households

Since 1997, CJP has partnered with congregations and congregational movements (especially the Northeast Region of the UAHC) in an extensive program of outreach to interfaith households. This partnership and significant federation funding has vastly increased the scope of congregational outreach efforts reaching more than 1,300 people and generating a great deal of serious interest in Judaism in households that have already opted to live Jewish lives as well as those who are exploring Jewish alternatives.

Federation Engagement and Synagogue Change

The total scope of CJP-synagogue engagement is exceptionally broad, encompassing 13 different programs in formal and informal Jewish education; 10 in social justice, and 21 aimed at creating and sustaining caring communities. The total CJP investment in these programs is over \$2 million, touching 70 synagogue and day school sites and tens of thousands of synagogue members. The sum total of programmatic investment is enormous but still requires structural change within congregations and federation to be fully effective. To achieve higher levels of impact, we've created two programs to examine the overall structure of congregational organizational life and facilitate thoughtful change. JRNI – the Jewish Resource Network Initiative aims at overall congregational change while also seeking to strengthen the congregation's ability to welcome, serve, care for and engage its members.

The Advancing Congregational Educational (ACE) Initiative offers intensive consultative services and extended grants that enable synagogues to experiment with comprehensive new models for congregational education. Beginning with the congregational school, ACE seeks to expand and deepen opportunities for lifelong Jewish learning by linking formal and informal, family and classroom education into a coherent whole which is guided by a team of professional Jewish educators and engaged lay leaders.

Finally and most importantly, CJP and our congregations are sponsoring the JRNI Leadership Development Institute.

JRNI's Leadership Development Institute (LDI) will seek to engage, inspire and support lay leadership throughout Greater Boston's Jewish community. Our goal is to raise the sights of current and next generation leadership to see beyond today's Jewish communal world and envision newly energized communities of Jewish life. The Leadership Development Institute and is designed to bring university level leadership training and business expertise to congregational leadership. Faculty from Harvard Business School, the Kennedy School at Harvard, and Brandeis University have already been involved in this process. Without the best and brightest volunteer leaders, trained and engaged, all other efforts at synagogue change must surely fail.

THE FEDERATION: A COMMUNITY OF COMMUNITIES

The Federation Network

Vibrant synagogue communities are enhanced by vibrant, creative, supportive federations. Synagogues and other gateway communities need federations to create a community of communities in order to broaden their vision, preventing them from becoming narrow and parochial. They need umbrella institutions that symbolize *K'lal Yisroel*, the community if Israel – enabling their members to feel and understand that they are part of a broader Jewish community linking Jews in every synagogue and organization to a more inclusive network that includes Jews in other organizations: unaffiliated Jews throughout the greater community; the entire American Jewish community; the world Jewish community and ultimately the community which Robert Bellah describes as the “community of all humankind.” The federation therefore becomes a network and the key connector between local grassroots organizations and the broader Jewish world without which Judaism loses much of its meaning and power.

To meet the needs of a larger and more inclusive Jewish community and to be a real presence, a real central address, a real community of communities, I would suggest that federations must begin to look more like networks than concentric circles or pyramids; that information and funds must flow through these networks, con-

necting donors and needs; recipients and givers; that knowledge, ideas and vision must replace emergencies, power, money and coercion as the primary forces that hold communities together. In the future the most powerful and influential federations will be those that favor autonomy and that give power away, rather than those that hold power in and dominate their systems.

Connecting Jews: The Tipping Point and The Power to Make Change

The Jewish community is far more tightly connected than most of us believe. The most alienated Jews are probably not much more than two degrees of separation from the most affiliated. Moreover, these states are highly dynamic as people move between levels of connection depending on their place in the family lifecycle and their relationships with influentials and congregations that connect them to the Jewish community and who also influence their attitudes.

The Network concept and the close connection between affiliated and unaffiliated Jews it suggests also challenges the idea that the community consists of disconnected concentric circles with committed Jews at the core and unaffiliated, unreachable Jews at the periphery. This is the central insight developed by Rabbi Hayim Herring in his excellent paper, “Network Judaism: A New Image for Understanding the Organization of American Jews,” prepared as part of a Wilstein Institute symposium on the network idea.

The Tipping Point, by Malcolm Gladwell, provides additional critical insight into the networks that tie our lives and our communities together. Gladwell suggests ways that beliefs within communities can be tipped, changing attitudes and reshaping social reality structures. He describes three rules of epidemics: the law of the few, the stickiness factor, and the power of context. He believes that by understanding these factors we can change the social reality in which we live. In his words, “little things can make a big difference.”

What must underlie successful social change in the end is a bedrock belief that change is possible, that people can radically transform their behavior or beliefs in the face of the right kind of impetus.... We are actually powerfully influenced by our surroundings, our immediate context, and the personalities of those around us.... That's why social

change is so volatile and so often inexplicable because it is the nature of all of us to be volatile and inexplicable.

But if there is difficulty and volatility in the world of *The Tipping Point*, there is a large measure of hopefulness as well. Merely by manipulating the size of a group, we can dramatically improve its receptivity to new ideas. By tinkering with a presentation of information, we can significantly improve its stickiness. Simply by finding and reaching those few special people who hold so much social power, we can shape the course of social change. In the end, Tipping Points are a reaffirmation of the potential for change and the power of intelligent action. Look at the world around you. It may seem like an immovable, implacable place. It is not. With the slightest push — in just the right place, it can be tipped.

And isn't that exactly our challenge? Somehow we are called upon to join in a revolution that must reshape the attitudes of a generation hungry for meaning, but not knowing where to find it and searching for community, but not knowing quite how to create it. As part of this larger struggle we are testing the proposition that our federation and congregational movements have a role to play in this great adventure. At the heart of Gladwell's idea is "the law of the few." He suggests that our society is tied together by relatively few connectors, really key influentials who seem to know everybody and who carry messages and ideas across vast distances with amazing speed and accuracy. He also describes mavens who seem to know everything and who carry the content of these ideas and salespeople who close the sale and drive the new ideas home. Federations and congregations control vast financial resources but they also influence even more potent human resources. By understanding these human resources and the way they and communal agencies and institutions connect our community network, we can strengthen communal life and help drive the revolution of *Torah*, *Tzedek* and *Chesed* upon which the future of Jewish communal life can be built.

Several years ago, the Boston Hebrew College and CJP created *Me'ah*, the remarkable adult education program described earlier in this paper. The program developed without much advertising or print media, no electronic media and limited direct mail. But we started the program

in its first years in two highly visible, fast growing young affluent congregations and targeted to the extent possible younger, more visible congregants. It spread from congregation to congregation across Greater Boston. The results were extraordinary. The program already has over 1,000 graduates and the name *Me'ah* is recognized across Jewish Boston. More importantly, the reality structure of Boston Jewry has begun to tip with far more Jews believing in the power of Jewish learning to bring meaning and intellectual satisfaction to our lives. Of course, this would not have happened if the Hebrew College had not created an extraordinary product. But the placement strategy within congregations and word-of-mouth contagion must also be credited with the program's success.

The Synagogue Partnership and the Communal Network

Synagogues and congregations are the most widespread form of grassroots communal organization available to American Jews. All surveys show that American Jews continue to feel closer to their congregations than to any other form of Jewish organizational life and Jews of all kinds — inmarried and intermarried, Reform, Conservative, Orthodox, Reconstructionist and unaffiliated — continue to form synagogues largely out of their own volunteer energy, from renewed urban communities to the small synagogues that are forming in developing suburbs. These congregations must further develop their community building capacity before they can fulfill their potential as an important component of a Jewish renaissance network, but many are showing surprising energy, reflecting the power of volunteers who are hungry for real community and spiritual meaning in their lives.

CREATING A TIPPING POINT OF JEWISH COMMUNITY AND JEWISH MEANING

Against all odds the Jewish people have carried a powerful message of hope within a strong communal network for over 2,000 years. In a time that lacks vision and prophecy and that yearns for meaning, we're carrying an ancient faith in an ancient God so that our children and grandchildren will have spiritual options to fill their lives with light and joy.

In a time of greed and selfishness, we're part of an old — a very old — tradition of caring for strangers, love of the poor and oppressed, and responsibility for widows and orphans, the elderly and handicapped.

In a time of forgetfulness, we're part of the oldest living chain of learning and literature in the world, inheritors of an ancient and hauntingly beautiful culture.

In a time of anomie and loneliness, we carry the secret of community and caring to provide our children and grandchildren a sense of belonging.

In a time of rootlessness and alienation, we're connected to a 3500-year-old history and an infinite future.

Federations and congregations have a powerful role to play in renewing this message and strengthening and reshaping our communal network. If we carry out this great work with spirit and vision, we will create a tipping point of Jewish learning and community and justice, we will succeed in our great mission, and future generations will bless us for our work and our vision.

Barry Shrage is the President of Combined Jewish Philanthropies of Greater Boston.

Editor's Suggested Discussion Guide:

- Shrage describes a model in which federations and synagogues are dependent on one another.
 - In what ways do federations need strong synagogues according to Shrage, and in what ways do synagogues need vibrant federations?
 - Is this the way the relationship is conceived in your community?
 - What are the risks and benefits of active federation involvement in synagogue change?
- Shrage asserts that “Judaism is a life based in community.” What are the implications of this idea for Jewish education?
- In what ways is the case of Boston unique in your opinion? In what ways was their success attributable to leadership, optimism, and focus? What would you like to ask Shrage about the Boston experience that would help you to make the connection to your own community's realities?

- The article describes “a conscious movement from experimentation to institutionalized change.” Why was this important? Is your community ready for this shift?
- Shrage writes that Boston invested significantly in research and evaluation, functioning as a “learning organization” on many levels. To what extent does your community seek feedback and constant monitoring of results? To what extent are you flexible and able to adjust to changing realities and understandings?

Shrage cites Malcolm Gladwell's statement, “What must underlie successful social change in the end is a bedrock belief that change is possible...” Is this bedrock belief characteristic of your community's leadership? Do you as a group share this level of optimism? What are the obstacles to change on the communal level?

INTRODUCTION BY THE EDITOR

In this article, Rob Weinberg and Isa Aron report on lessons learned from their work with ECE (Experiment in Congregational Education) over the past decade. They present an encouraging image of the potential for transformative change in synagogues and congregational schools, while providing guidelines for clear thinking about dissemination of best practices. This will make important reading for lay and professional synagogue leaders as they think about replicating successful models and programs, including the case studies presented in this issue (see pages 39–49).

Revitalizing Congregational Education: Lessons Learned in the Trenches

ROBERT M. WEINBERG AND ISA ARON

Over the last decade we have witnessed a rekindling of interest in Jewish learning as increasing numbers of American Jews search for meaning in their lives and find it in their Judaism. Today, individual seekers are discovering that spirituality needs substance, and congregations have awoken to the fact that members as well as leaders need to be knowledgeable in order to be competent and confident in their daily practice of Judaism.

Into this climate have come a number of organizations and programs such as the Wexner Heritage program, the Florence Melton Mini-School, Boston’s *Me’ah* program, and the Union of American Hebrew Congregations’ adult study *kallot*. Yet not all of these programs operate within the context of the congregation. And, in many communities, congregations have had limited success in transferring knowledge and enthusiasm built through such programs into the synagogue context.

The Experiment in Congregational Education (ECE) was founded by HUC–JIR’s Rhea Hirsch School of Education in 1992 on the dual beliefs that congregational education could be dramatically revitalized and that, by becoming “congregations of learners,” synagogues could be transformed from member-service institutions into communities of meaning. We began this work and continue it with the assumption that Jewish learning is the primary pathway and best starting point to revitalizing a synagogue community. The sages acknowledged this in their listing of

obligations that cannot be measured. After a long list – which included performing acts of kindness and praying with sincerity – they concluded by saying “and the study of *Torah* is equal to them all.”

In today’s parlance we express it this way. Jewish learning is the primary portal to creating vibrant communities of actively engaged Jews because Jewish learning:

- offers a non-threatening point of entry;
- leads to a deepening of Jewish commitment and expanding Jewish practice;
- contributes to the creation of a strong sense of community; and
- develops a synagogue’s capacity to be self-renewing.

So, what lessons have we learned as we complete nearly a decade of this experiment and launch into the next major phase of our work? First, we discovered that congregations are, indeed, both willing and able to transform themselves. Second, we found that this process bears fruit in the form of innovative and valuable educational programs that can be disseminated and adapted to aid the revitalization of still other congregations. These learnings are driving our current efforts to employ internet-based communication tools and distance education technologies to disseminate Jewish educational innovations and create a virtual network of congregations engaged in learning-based transformation efforts. We will expand on each of these lessons in turn.

LESSON 1: SYNAGOGUE TRANSFORMATION IS POSSIBLE!

It is now accepted wisdom that synagogues cannot successfully transform themselves simply by introducing a rash of new programs. Change takes a lot of time, energy, and resources (both human and financial). The good news is that we have seen congregations go through a systematic, deliberative process and emerge as changed institutions. The experiences of ECE congregations – and of congregations that have adopted our approach – show that many congregations have the capacity to form a task force and a committed leadership team and to engage in a sustained process toward revitalization or even transformation.

Supported by text study materials, process guides, regular consultation, and a community of other synagogue teams, congregations are able to:

- examine their history and congregational culture;
- inventory and assess their current educational offerings;
- use imagination to envision their congregation as a “congregation of learners;”
- experiment with a number of short-term programmatic enhancements (“low-hanging fruit”);
- engage the broader congregation in meaningful conversation (through “focus group”-type discussions);
- explore a variety of ambitious, new educational programs; and
- adapt these programs for implementation over the long term.

These congregations became able to mount and support a coordinated set of specific, exciting and innovative educational outcomes. More importantly, they also developed congregational cultures that are expected to expand and improve their educational offerings and outcomes by continuing to experiment on an ongoing basis.

Implications

Among professionals and lay leaders, policy discussions should take into account the dual facts that congregations can, indeed, transform themselves and that success depends on a clear process with information, resources, and support to sustain it.

LESSON 2: VALUABLE INNOVATIONS OCCUR AND CAN BE DISSEMINATED BUT MUST BE ADAPTED STRATEGICALLY.

Many of the congregations we’ve worked with have produced exciting new educational innovations that can be adapted to other congregations seeking similar ends; an efficient transformation process does not require each congregation to totally reinvent the wheel each time it sets out to innovate. We believe the goal of successful dissemination of innovation in Jewish education is not, in fact, to disseminate innovations, but rather to create innovators. Nevertheless, innovators need sources for ideas and tools with which to work.

An important element of past ECE *kallot* has been the time for congregations to share their educational innovations. One such exchange occurred between members of Congregation Beth Am of Los Altos Hills, CA and of Westchester Reform Temple (WRT) of Scarsdale, NY. The Beth Am team talked about their *Shabbaton* program, an alternative to religious school in which parents and children study, worship, and celebrate *Shabbat* together. The idea was so compelling that WRT started its own *Shabbat*-based program, called Sharing *Shabbat*.

What is important about this simple example is that WRT did not simply copy the *Shabbaton* model. They created a program with similar goals and some similar components, but also with important differences designed to suit the particularities of their congregation. This example points to important implications for successful dissemination of educational innovations.

Too often those interested in disseminating “best practices” in Jewish education have treated “practice” as synonymous with “program.” Most efforts at disseminating successful practices have amounted to little more than publishing successful programs with little attention to what made them appropriate and successful in their original settings or what issues require consideration in adapting them to other settings.

Our experience with synagogues – as well as the educational and organizational developmental literature on dissemination of innovation – suggests that a more fruitful approach operates from two premises:

1. Best practices should be thought of at the level of generalizable principles and broad practice areas. An example would be that the *practice* of involving parents more in their children’s Jewish education yields better results.
2. The specific design characteristics of educational programs (such as a *Shabbaton* or *Sharing Shabbat*) intended to carry out such principles or implement such practices must be tailored strategically to the cultural, historical, ideological, resource, and geographical realities of each congregation.

Implications

This means that efforts to disseminate a “successful” program must be contextualized in a way that makes clear what circumstances led to development of the innovation, what goals it sought to achieve, how the program met the needs and constraints of the congregation that developed it, and what conditions are required to replicate (or, more likely, adapt) it. Sharing program descriptions and lesson plans is not enough. To adapt a program successfully, others need to know how the innovators *thought* about what they did.

With this perspective in mind we have begun a new phase of our work with the support of the Nathan Cummings Foundation and the Koret Foundation. We are investigating and disseminating innovative Jewish educational models. We have chosen the medium of distance education technology specifically because it will facilitate the richness of knowledge sharing that this approach requires.

Our first distance learning module focuses on alternative models of the religious school. Users of this and subsequent modules will be able to contextualize the profiles of each model with deeper information about the congrega-

tion, the process of innovation, the significant Jewish learning issues associated with the program, and the unique needs, problems, and opportunities to which the program responded. Through video and audio clips users will be able to make a rich virtual visit to see and hear the programs in action. But they also will see and hear both innovators and participants explaining their thought processes and experiences. A process guide that takes the user’s congregation through the deliberative process of considering its own context, needs, and goals and adapting what fits to its circumstances will accompany each module on programmatic innovation.

DEEP LASTING CHANGE

Through this kind of process, we have seen members of congregational task forces – and of the congregation at large – become aware of their potential to create a “congregation of learners” and of the cultural realities that affect their congregation’s ability to realize this vision. As a result, they have reconsidered long-held and deep-seated attitudes and beliefs and adopted new vocabulary. The result is educational innovation that is neither faddish nor change for its own sake. Rather, it is innovation that plants the seeds of meaningful and ongoing revitalization through learning deeply in a congregation’s cultural soil.

Robert M. Weinberg, Ph.D., serves as Director of the Experiment in Congregational Education (ECE), a project of the Rhea Hirsch School of Education of Hebrew Union College–Jewish Institute of Religion, Los Angeles.

Isa Aron, Ph.D., is Professor of Jewish Education at the Rhea Hirsch School and Founding Director of the ECE. She is the author of *Becoming a Congregation of Learners* and *The Self-Renewing Congregation* (forthcoming), both published by Jewish Lights Press.

Editor’s Suggested Discussion Guide:

- In talking about disseminating best practices, Weinberg & Aron make a point of distinguishing between best practices and excellent programs. What is this distinction and why is it important?
- Weinberg & Aron state that their goal “is not, in fact, to disseminate innovations, but rather to create innovators.” What do you think they mean by this, and

how does this work in the context of sharing successful programs?

- Identify a successful program or change that has been implemented in a congregational school that you would like to replicate in your setting. How would your school need to adapt that program in order to make it successful given “the cultural, historical, ideological, resource, and geographical realities” of your congregation?

INTRODUCTION BY THE EDITOR

This interview brings a sage voice from the larger world of education into the conversation about standards and results in part-time Jewish education. Ada Beth Cutler outlines the current thinking in and about the standards movement, discussing the advantages, disadvantages, and limitations of using standards as a lever for educational reform. This piece can be useful for groups deliberating on establishing or changing standards for curriculum or teacher training, either communally or nationally. Cutler's insights can assist in making sure that the conversation is informed, nuanced, and contextualized.

Avi West responds to Cutler's article by putting forth a model of "voluntary covenant" in which standards could operate to improve Jewish education without the element of accountability. In West's formulation, equity would be an expression of *tzedek*; legislated goals (*din*) would need to be balanced with specific circumstances and local realities (*rachamim*).

This piece is a good tool for lay and professional leadership of central agencies. West's analysis of the role of central agencies could be equally applicable to other bodies or entities with natural school constituencies, regional as well as national.

An Interview with Dr. Ada Beth Cutler

CONDUCTED BY SHANI BECHHOFFER

What roles do standards play in the world of education today? On what levels do they exist?

I don't think it would be an exaggeration to say that we live in the age of standards in the field of education. Standards frame the conversation and debate around curriculum, student achievement, educator performance, and issues of equity.

In terms of public education, standards exist at state and national levels. National level standards do not come from the federal government, but rather from various professional and curriculum associations. The very first curriculum content standards came out of NCTM (National Council of Teachers of Mathematics) in 1991. All of the curriculum associations have formulated national standards since then, but they are not binding to anyone.

The federal government has mandated that all states have curriculum standards for students in each of the major curricular areas. In the new No Child Left Behind Act, it has now also required all states to have assessments that measure whether students are achieving those standards.

There are two main organizations that have developed teacher performance standards. INTASC (Interstate New

Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium) has developed standards for beginning teachers. These standards are used for the initial licensure of teachers in the 37 participating states that have integrated them into their state licensure standards. In many participating states, portions of the teacher licensure tests are based on INTASC standards.

The National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS), which is financially supported by the federal government and numerous foundations, has set standards for advanced-level teachers. This is part of an effort to distinguish between initial licensure by states and advanced certification at the national level. There are about 20,000 master teachers in the country who have earned certification from the National Board. How and whether this certification is recognized is a decision made by each individual state. Some states give certified teachers a one-time bonus, and some have an annual increment added to teachers' salaries.

Teacher education programs are now accredited by the National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) on the basis of INTASC and NBPTS standards. Whereas in the old days teacher education

programs were accredited on the basis of their facilities, faculty, course content, and other inputs, today NCATE judges these programs on the basis of their ability to demonstrate that their graduates can meet INTASC and/or NBPTS standards.

How are schools held accountable to those standards?

The tests that states use are the primary method by which schools are held accountable for meeting curriculum standards. So you'll see every year the school average scores published in the newspapers. That creates a great deal of furor in all kinds of school systems, including the middle class and upper middle class districts. Small differences and changes in scores often have nothing to do with the quality of education in that school. For example, since it's usually only fourth graders who are tested in an elementary school, they may be reporting scores from only 50-60 students in one school. This means a few students can skew the average and cause a furor about the quality of the school. Now, in public education, there are serious consequences attached to these test scores. The No Child Left Behind Act mandates that by 2011 all students in public schools have to be performing at a proficient level in reading and math. Schools have to show improvement over time, and if they don't, there are sanctions. The federal government is ratcheting up the stakes and putting serious pressure on schools and school districts to raise test scores.

What purposes do standards serve?

Before the advent of standards, schools focused on what students should be taught and what teachers should do, and there was a great deal of variance from school to school and from district to district in terms of what students actually learned and how high expectations were for student achievement. It was a focus on inputs rather than outcomes. That is like judging a restaurant solely on the basis of the list of ingredients used in its cooking! We can't predict quality or outcomes based on a list of inputs. But for years we've done that in education. Now standards have shifted the emphasis from what is taught to what is learned. In addition, standards tell us what all students should know and be able to do as a result of spending time in a particular grade or subject. This has serious implications for equity. No longer is it acceptable

for students in high poverty schools to learn less than students in wealthy schools.

Standards give people something very concrete to reach for and to measure their work against. For instance, say students are learning Jewish history. A teacher might think about which chapters should be covered. But if curriculum standards say what a student should know and be able to do at the end of the course, the teacher has to design lessons and assessments based on those standards. This helps teachers frame lessons in student-centered ways. The standards tell not what the teacher must do but what the students should be able to do as a result of learning.

The goal is thus to upgrade education and to level the playing field for students across groups such as socio-economic status. Standards have moved the conversation from teaching to learning and are equity-driven.

What are some of the critiques of the standards movement in education, some of the points of controversy about standards and the ways they are used? What would you caution those interested in implementing standards to think about?

Some people, especially progressive educators, are wary, at best, about standards. Criticisms leveled against standards-based reform begin from the assertion that standards often lead to inappropriate standardization. If you look at Dewey's work, learning is supposed to grow out of the lives of the students. If it's already been prescribed what they are going to be learning through a standards-based curriculum, there could be little room for teacher decision-making, for learning in context, or for allowing student interest to guide the curriculum.

What people in the standards movement say in response to this criticism is that standards don't mandate a particular curriculum. The local school district is supposed to take standards and translate them into curriculum. How to get the students to meet the standards is up to the individual school or district.

Sometimes, however, standards are poorly constructed, written in a way that micro-manages what students are taught, moving towards standardization of the curricu-

lum. There has been a huge controversy in the social studies standards: Should standards specify that students know certain dates? Or is that much too prescriptive? In Scarsdale, there are parents who have pulled their kids out from the testing as a protest against the state tests. A number of the schools had prided themselves on doing year-long themes in middle schools – for example, the Renaissance – and everything they did across the curriculum was wrapped around and through those themes. It was popular and successful. Now, the teachers say they can't do that any more; they have to stick to a more standardized curriculum in order to prepare for the state tests. Some parents are quite distressed. This is how standards can work against creativity and individual teacher judgment.

There are also issues with the testing that goes along with standards. Because these tests are often paper-and-pencil, one-shot assessments, they may not tell us what students actually know and how they perform over time. Yet students and teachers are judged on the basis of this kind of test. That is problematic in my mind and in the minds of many people who are against the standards movement. Often, ironically, curriculum standards are written in terms of what students should be able to do, how they can use and apply knowledge. But the paper-and-pencil tests are not aligned with those goals; they may ask students to regurgitate knowledge. Multiple-choice isn't a good format to measure students' capacity to use and apply knowledge.

In some states they do include portfolio assessments that provide a richer, fuller picture of student work and understanding. Some states are using multiple forms of assessment, but in most states it's a snapshot of learning rather than a full picture of student achievement.

Also, many people question the rhetoric that standards are equity-driven. In fact, unless more resources are given to poor and under-performing schools, standards can work against poor students by becoming an even higher bar that underachieving students cannot surmount. Standards can serve as a gatekeeper for these students unless they are given ample opportunity to learn and sufficient resources to support good teaching.

Lastly, there is a lot of controversy about the political nature of some standards. California, for instance, is one

of the states in the forefront of the standards movement and one of the states where politics play a prominent role. Take the example of mathematics. For many years, the California standards were based on the NCTM standards, which downplay rote computation and emphasize problem-solving and the use of calculators. That was quite in vogue when the Democratic administration was connected with more progressive educators. There's been a turn to a more conservative political base in California, and the math standards have changed to emphasize computational skills and de-emphasize problem-solving. So politics play a role in standards, and that's a problem.

Are there "better" sets or types of standards?

In general, the best standards are more inclusive and give more latitude to teachers and schools. It is important to take into account the context in which learning takes place. Standards should enable individual classroom and community needs and values to be addressed.

The national curriculum standards, which have been created by the professional and curriculum associations, should be the basis for state standards. They tend to be of higher quality, formulated by panels of educators, teachers, and higher education experts. Very often, states have used those standards as the basis for developing their own standards. ACHIEVE is an organization that reviews and evaluates state standards as well as state tests. As an organization, it has been most critical of the lack of higher order thinking assessed by state tests.

With regard to professional standards, it's important to note that, although this is not often the case in schools, beginning teachers and administrators should be expected to have different levels of expertise from more experienced educators. After all, they are beginners. There's another purpose for more advanced professional standards. Learning to teach takes place across a career, not just in preparation for a career. Figuring out what teachers need in terms of professional development ought to be tied to more advanced standards. We violate all that we believe and know about student learning when it comes to adults in schools. We provide one size fits all programs; we look at inputs (e.g. three in-service days this year), rather than looking at what we want teachers and administrators to know and be able to do as a result of the professional development, which should be very much tied to student learning.

What needs to be in place systemically in order for standards to play a powerful role in education?

That is another very important piece. Standards alone are necessary but insufficient to drive higher achievement. There has to be a system of accountability and assessments that measure in a fair and equitable way whether students are able to achieve the standards. There ought to be accountability to the standards. But we should look at multiple sources of evidence of whether students have achieved what the standards set out, not a one-shot test. Some of the best assessments look at samples of student work and assess the quality of it. Portfolios, performance assessments, assignments for which students actually have to do something are valid ways to judge student performance. They are also more complicated, but I think it's worth that complication because they give us a richer picture of what students actually know and are able to do.

Right now the conversation nationally is framed around assessment for accountability. That's unnecessarily narrow. There should be a balance between using assessment for learning and for accountability. In order to be useful to teachers, the data from assessments should be readily available to them and should be used to improve learning.

Standards are meant to be high, not minimal. They are meant to drive high achievement, while they're also meant to be where all students should reach. One of the problems with the way we do school is that we have held time constant and allowed learning to vary. We say, for instance, that you should be able to learn basic algebra in one year. Some students are able to, some are not able to, but if we have standards based education, we have to flip that around and allow time to vary and hold *learning* constant. Some schools are doing this. For kids who need more time to learn something, they give them more time, using after-school sessions, Saturday sessions, summer sessions, any additional learning time, in order to hold learning constant. It is an absurdity to assume that everybody needs the same amount of time to learn the same thing.

For all students to achieve high standards, we need "opportunity to learn" standards. That means identifying the resources that need to be in place, whether financial, structural, or human. Otherwise, setting standards is a form of magical thinking. So, if we want teachers to

learn to teach according to standards, we will need time and money for teachers to learn new ways of teaching, to collaborate on developing curriculum, and to improve their own content knowledge. (When it's no longer just a matter of students regurgitating rote knowledge, but rather a focus on more active problem solving, teachers need to have deeper content knowledge.)

In terms of professional standards, if they expect teachers to achieve advanced levels of accomplishment, schools have to be structured to achieve that. Time must be available for work-embedded professional development, which takes place not after school, but as part of their regular work.

I think the other piece is that there has to be community buy-in to the standards, and community can be a synagogue community. Parents and leaders and teachers and administrators all have to believe that those standards are good and appropriate for their students and teachers. Otherwise they won't take hold.

Do you have thoughts about the role that standards might play in Jewish part-time education?

Well, I think there's potentially a very helpful role standards might play in supplementary schools. Certainly we know there's a problem of attracting and developing qualified teachers. We don't have standards that say what teachers ought to know and be able to do. If we had those standards, then we could line up the resources and the policies and procedures that will get us there. It's a form of planning backwards, which means, using a curricular example, you start from what students should know and be able to do, and then you develop the assessments that will evaluate whether students have learned those things. Only then do you go back and figure out what the learning experiences should be. You can take that example and apply it to teachers. If you have decided what beginning and advanced Judaic teachers should know and be able to do, and you understand how you're going to assess that, then you can put into place on a community or national level whatever will help teachers get there.

This applies to Judaic curriculum as well. Very often in supplementary schools, teachers are left to their own devices to decide what students should be learning. What is it that they should know as a result of learning

Bereishit? If there are standards, it will help professionalize supplementary schools and really ratchet up the quality of curriculum in the schools. It has that potential; it's not automatic, because all of the other pieces have to be in place, such as resources, time, appropriate assessments that help you know whether or not students are achieving those standards, as well as professional development.

So, if anyone had the illusion that writing standards is an easy way to ensure quality, it really is an illusion. It's a piece of an entire system that is quite resource intensive, but the idea is that the results can be worth it.

Dr. Ada Beth Cutler is Dean of the School of Education at Montclair State University.

Editor's Suggested Discussion Guide:

- Cutler talks about both standards for student learning and standards for teacher performance and licensure. Underlying each of these areas is a results-oriented approach that focuses on outcomes rather than inputs.
 - The first step, then, would naturally have to be the creation of *consensus* in your group around desired outcomes for part-time Jewish education. To what extent is there agreement in your group about the results that you hope to achieve? What are the obstacles to achieving such consensus?
 - She also makes the point that *assessments* are the key to the impact of any standards. What would be needed to design and administer the sophisticated kinds of assessments Cutler advocates?
- Cutler acknowledges concerns about learning in context, about creativity and individual teacher judgment; yet she asserts, “There ought to be *accountability* to the standards.”

- What leads her to say this?
- What does your group think about whether there “ought to be accountability” in Jewish part-time education?
- Student achievement standards function in the arena of public education because there is accountability in terms of public image and even government sanctions. Who would be accountable to whom for student learning in your context?
- Cutler cautions against “magical thinking,” reminding us that we must have “opportunity to learn” standards. What are the financial, structural, and human *resources* you will need if you want standards to take hold in your context?
- One significant area Cutler discusses is standards for educators. To what extent would this be necessary or helpful in your context? How would you think about balancing expectations about quality with realities of supply of available teachers?

Central Agencies and the Voluntary Covenant: Making a Compelling Case for Standards

AVI WEST

Jewish religious institutions are no strangers to the debate over standards, so current in educational literature. The vocabulary of *halacha*, the Jewish way in life, is filled with terms of measurement and evaluation to determine whether or not an individual has fulfilled a particular ritual or sacred obligation. There are even legal and moral debates as to whether one must merely meet the obligatory minimum standard (*latzeit yedai chovato*) or exceed the letter of the law (*lifnim meshurat hadin*).

Judaism has always maintained that there are standards which demarcate proper from improper, but the tendency of Jewish tradition has historically been to keep those boundaries flexible. An example of the tension between obligatory standards and the need for flexibility is that of *Tefillah*. Jewish tradition has recognized that the prayers of every generation must be kept formalized yet fresh through the creative balance of *keva* (the fixed) and *kavannah* (the self-directed). Therefore, I would react to Dr. Ada Beth Cutler's comments using Jewish value-concepts: The use of

flexible standards could bring an increased measure of *tzedek* (righteous measure) and a balance of *din* (legislated goals) and *rachamim* (taking special needs into account) into our system of sacred education.

The national religious denominations and school associations have had very mixed results enforcing rigorous standards, and many central agencies have stalled in their attempts to craft local school or student assessments and standards for basic literacy. The quandary that modern Jewish communal institutions face with the issue of standards is a symptom of a more general issue: the nature of institutional authority in an era of what Rabbi Yitz Greenberg has called “voluntary covenant.” In Rabbi Greenberg’s formulation, the modern individual will choose to adhere to a standard when it is seen as *compelling*, but the time of *compulsory* adherence is gone. This voluntary covenant describes the potential relationship that central agencies for Jewish education could establish with their constituent schools around a “standards agenda.” The central agency has a number of opportunities to raise the standards banner in compelling ways.

CENTRAL AGENCIES AS CHANGE AGENTS

Central agency professionals are often the main conduit of information and research from general education to Jewish educators. For the standards debate in public education to begin to impact the Jewish school system, especially in the congregational schools, central agencies must create dissonance by moving standards to the top of the agenda. Teachers and principals must be exposed to the ever-expanding forms of learning assessment and to the more inclusive style of learning standards that give latitude to teachers and reflect the values and needs of the individual classroom and congregation.

The education of lay leadership in their supporting role in assessment and school-parent communication is critical. As Dr. Cutler points out, setting standards without identifying the financial, structural, or human resources that needs to be in place “is a form of magical thinking.” These same resources will need to be present at the communal level if the central agency is to embark on more effective consultation and training toward individual standards.

Central agency staff should have a working knowledge of each denomination’s standards so they may take congrega-

tions or denominationally affiliated day schools to the next step of self-assessment. There are good models in the private and independent school sector, in which accreditation teams guide a school through self-assessment, and then conduct site observations to confirm the adherence to a set of goals reflecting research-based, broadly accepted standards.

Informed professional and lay leadership, adequate resources, and a self-reflective model will help our schools overcome the “fear of accountability” factor and enter the world of standards.

Another compelling focus for a central agency’s standards agenda is the area of professional development. The National Staff Development Council (NSDC) has developed a set of detailed standards grounded in research that documents the connection between staff development and student learning. The Association of Directors of Central Agencies for Jewish education (ADCA) has explored the compatibility of these standards with the Jewish school systems, and we believe there is much to be gained by modeling these standards to our schools and helping to provide the context and support for individual schools to build learning communities for their faculty.

Trumpeting the message, “If you don’t know where you are going, how will you know when you arrive?” NSDC emphasizes the important role of mission and vision statements to help schools identify the course they should be steering. This is parallel to the language of change and transformation in business and non-profit communal organizations. Central agencies are well positioned to use consultation and training to advocate for vision and mission discussions in schools.

STANDARDS FOR CENTRAL AGENCY CONSULTING

My experience is that the consultative process in educational agencies is one of the most misunderstood and undervalued by lay leadership and funding agencies. The consultant often works behind the scenes, helping school personnel do their jobs more effectively. Credit is rarely attributed to the consultation process. And there are, of course, consultations which may not yield the desired effect, due to a variety of circumstances beyond any one individual’s control.

Consultation standards could help manage expectations, control some of the variables which limit effectiveness, and manage the expenditure of resources. A protocol of consultation standards based on the social worker-client model would define the steps of client service and include measures of confidentiality, objectivity, assessment, and prescriptive suggestions. A *brit avodah* between the agency and a school or an individual delineates what structures need be in place from the client's side and what services in which time frame would be provided from the agency's side.

While the educational world has entered the age of standards, central agencies for Jewish education continue to struggle with issues related to defining core mission, addressing changing client needs and expectations, establishing a balance between direct service and consultation, and projecting a sense of professionalism and credibility to the funding and client community. Many central agencies have developed split personalities – acting as “system maintainers” to maximize the current,

very loose system composed of voluntary associations of educational institutions, and as “change agents” charged by federations or community leadership groups with improving and transforming local education. National standards may not be feasible for the near term, but local processes around standards could have ripple effects of community-wide educational improvement. Central agencies will do well to focus on establishing internal standards for consulting and on strengthening their voluntary covenant with schools by making a compelling case for standards. In these ways, central agencies can move the stalled assessment and accountability agenda forward.

Avi West received a B.A. in Comparative Literature from Columbia University and a Bachelor of Hebrew Letters and M.A. in Education from the Jewish Theological Seminary. Mr. West presently holds the position of Executive Director of the Board of Jewish Education of Greater Washington, having previously worked there as an educational consultant and Associate Director. He is a board member of ADCA.

Editor's Suggested Discussion Guide:

- West assumes that central agencies, along with other bodies such as national school associations, will need to abandon accountability in favor of “making a compelling case” for standards among the schools and congregations which they serve. Is this a valid assumption?
- Educating teachers, principals, and lay leadership is one way West proposes to raise the standards of part-time Jewish education. How is this best done? Will it effect change?
- He also proposes guided/coached self-assessment (similar to the model developed by Emil Jacoby – see his article on page 25). This differs from the model offered by Ada Beth Cutler, who advocates externally-set standards focused on outcomes rather than inputs. What are the costs and benefits of the self-study versus the outcomes standards?

- West reflects on the need for standards for central agency consulting. To what extent would taking this step toward modeling accountability serve central agencies well in their attempts to “move the stalled assessment and accountability goal forward: in part-time Jewish education?
- West mentions the “fear of accountability” factor that will need to be overcome by schools in order to “enter the world of standards.” To what extent is this hesitation operative in your context? To what extent is it the primary obstacle to quality improvement in part-time Jewish education?
- West presents a model in which the religious denominations create standards for their affiliated educational institutions, whereas central agencies coach schools in reaching those goals. Does that seem to be the most logical role for central agencies and for religious movements with regard to part-time Jewish education standards?

INTRODUCTION BY THE EDITOR

Central agencies play a key role in part-time Jewish education. They are uniquely well positioned to both challenge and support schools to improve the education they provide, yet they operate under significant constraints as well. The following two articles describe different models of change driven and supported by central agencies for Jewish education. In each locale, the agency built on the strengths of its personnel to find a gateway to systemic, broad improvement for its community's congregational schools.

Emil Jacoby describes the ground-breaking accreditation process developed by the BJE of Los Angeles for its congregational schools. Modeled on regional independent and public school processes, the BJE's accreditation has been completed by over 70% of Los Angeles' congregational schools and has significantly spurred a variety of school improvement projects.

Nachama Moskowitz, of Cleveland's JECC, makes a compelling case for curriculum change as an instrument of organizational renewal. Project Curriculum Renewal utilizes the insights of *Understanding by Design* to coach and support schools through curriculum design and implementation, with a focus on the process of change and professional development.

These models of central agency intervention in part-time Jewish education will be thought-provoking for lay leaders and professionals involved in central agencies and interested in improving the quality of education provided by their agency-affiliated schools.

The Impact of the Accreditation Process on Congregational Education in Los Angeles

EMIL JACOBY

Over the last two decades, Los Angeles congregational schools have felt the impact of several trends affecting North American Jewish education as a whole. First, the proliferation of Jewish day schools has not only drawn enrollment from supplementary schools, but has also attracted many experienced teachers to more stable day school positions. Second, large numbers of families feel that children have less time to spend in their congregational schools due to changing family structures, lengthened public school schedules, and the increase in extracurricular activity options. These trends have led congregational schools to decrease weekly class time, revise instructional objectives, and provide special training for the less qualified teachers replacing experienced instructors.

Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, the Los Angeles Bureau of Jewish Education (BJE) responded to these

challenges with a variety of services designed to assist congregational schools and enhance the supplementary education system. The BJE provided direct consultation services, assisted with teacher placement and in-service training, offered family education programs, administered enrichment activities for youth, and created a Principals Council to facilitate networking among the schools. These initiatives laid the groundwork for what has become a most effective change management process.

In 1993 the BJE Board held a special daylong retreat to chart its course, identify goals, and establish priorities for achieving them. During the discussions, it became apparent that individual schools needed help with their planning and evaluation practices. The Board appointed a Task Force on Quality Jewish Education to recommend programs that would assist the schools in this area. The Task Force proposed the school accreditation process as an

effective approach for instituting and managing change through regular assessment, planning, and implementation.

Because several BJE affiliated day schools and yeshivot had already received accreditation for the general studies segments of their curricula from the Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC), or the California Association of Independent Schools (CAIS), the Bureau adopted their models for joint BJE/CAIS and BJE/WASC accreditation for the day schools. At the same time, the process was modified to create a unique protocol for congregational school accreditation. The BJE also initiated a joint accreditation program with NAEYC (The National Association for the Education of Young Children) for the early childhood centers.

The accreditation process utilized by WASC and CAIS in California's independent and public schools consists of three basic steps:

- Developing a clear vision of the school's mission followed by a systematic examination comparing existing facts with stated purposes;
- Planning activities that are based on the new priorities, developing standards that reflect the school community's goals and objectives, and implementing programs to achieve them; and
- Providing mechanisms for follow-up and maintenance of the standards, and ensuring a self-perpetuating continuation of the process.

Acting on the recommendations of the Task Force on Quality Jewish Education, the BJE Board:

- created a guided self-assessment program that would enable participating schools to qualify for Bureau accreditation;
- developed a set of standards against which the schools would assess their programs; and
- made grants available to support programs that were identified and approved through the self-study process.

The procedures that were used in the secular school accred-

itation system were applied to the Jewish schools, and a select committee of senior educators was entrusted with the responsibility for drafting the standards. The committee based its recommendations on the guidelines of the respective national ideological movements, as well as the local educational realities. BJE requirements of affiliation and personnel practices were incorporated into the procedures.¹

Unlike some other accreditation processes, which are often limited to administrative functions, accreditation by the Los Angeles BJE involves fuller institutional participation and has fiscal implications. Schools that fulfill the BJE requirements are entitled to subsidies, consultant services and other assistance. As an additional bonus, the accredited schools qualify for BJE/federation grants to fund accreditation-related projects. This specially designed accreditation process and the resultant close BJE/school relationship enabled the BJE – as a community agency – to significantly improve the quality of education provided by the schools.²

The impact of the accreditation process was most evident in the areas of educational programming, relationships between the synagogue and school, and integration with the community at large. The schools assessed their programs relative to standards in the following areas:

- Articulation of curricular and extra-curricular goals
- Promotion of summer camping, the Israel experience and enrichment activities
- Availability of library services and other resources
- Provision of special education and Jewish family life programs
- Provision of professional in-service opportunities for educators
- Involvement of teachers in the decision-making process
- Cooperation between the school and synagogue governance and administration
- Well-functioning school boards and efficient school administrations
- Educational continuity in the congregational community

¹ A description of the various phases of the process, including the entire list of standards, was published as *The Accreditation Manual for Jewish Schools* (Emil Jacoby, Los Angeles: Bureau of Jewish Education, 1998).

² The list of school improvement grants was published as *School Accreditation Grants for Program Enhancement* (Emil Jacoby, Los Angeles: Bureau of Jewish Education, 2000).

- Coordination of activities with the day school and supporting youth programs
- Participation in the Principals Council of the Religious Schools
- Serving on accreditation visiting teams and commissions
- Collaboration with the ideological movements.

To date, 36 of Los Angeles' 51 congregational schools have completed the accreditation process. According to educators and community leaders, the overall impact of the process on the enhanced image of the supplementary school, the excitement generated within the school community, and the degree of empowerment achieved by the professionals and lay leadership of the accredited schools may be equal to or greater than the benefits of achieving any specific standard.

According to several of the educators whose schools completed the process, accreditation requirements served as both the catalyst and the guide for significant school improvement efforts in their schools and in the broader Jewish education community. The process heightened the educators' awareness that their student populations were comprised of children and families from a variety of religious and cultural heritages and levels of education. This led them to re-think what they teach and how they teach it. The initial process of (re-)articulating their goals provided a framework for designing streamlined curricula to achieve realistic goals for their student populations in the reduced class time that was available. As a corollary, the process led the educators to produce more focused materials tailored to these goals and time constraints. The educators also identified areas for ongoing professional development to enable the teachers to achieve these goals. In addition, the reduction of class meeting time allowed (and motivated) educators to create innovative programs such as *Shabbatonim* and family education programs. The accreditation process itself created a culture that encouraged the schools to take advantage of consultation from the BJE staff, the Visiting Teams and other experts to design appropriate educational programs for their students and parents, including students with special needs and other populations within their settings.

Educators said that the accreditation process enabled them to:

- focus their goals more clearly;

"[It was] a wonderful process that called us to focus on our educational goals - to develop a more formal vision and direction."

- assess their performance relative to their goals;

"It afforded us an opportunity to evaluate, revise, and expand our educational policies. It helped us to look at whether we, in fact, were accomplishing our goals."

"I have found the accreditation process to be quite revealing in a positive manner. It allowed the administration of the school to not only see areas which could be improved in its structure but, equally as important, to feel a sense of validation on the job they and their teaching staff have been doing."

"It was gratifying to review our first self-study and Visiting Team report and note how much we had successfully dealt with the areas we identified as requiring attention, as well as the recommendations made by the Team. It became very apparent how much we had accomplished in the intervening years, and I/we felt a great sense of accomplishment."

- and engage stakeholders more actively.

"When lay leaders are involved at this level of study and decision-making, a sense of ownership evolves which inspires interest and involvement in the school's programs."

"An awareness of the oneness of all participants becomes apparent; the visiting educators, the home school's educator, the BJE, and the members of the steering committee, which represents the synagogue, its parents, its students. All are working toward creating excellence in the Jewish educational setting."

There is a general consensus in the community that the accreditation process has significantly contributed to the improvement of congregational education in Los Angeles.

- It has served as an instrument for positive change and as an ideal tool for assessment and planning by incorporating the Bureau requirements.
- The process has solidified the partnership between the Bureau and the individual schools.

- It has created a culture of accountability in Jewish education. Schools are required to report to the BJE on the implementation of their plans through written progress reports. Principals are also able to share their schools' accomplishments with their colleagues through the Principals Council.
- It has helped move congregational schools out of a "stepchild" role. Creating an accreditation system for supplemental schooling that is similar to the one employed for day schools has raised the status of supplemental schooling.
- It has transformed the culture by bringing lay leadership into meaningful involvement with the schools.

School improvement must be an ongoing process. The

school accreditation process has built-in features to address this need. Schools are accredited for a period of six years, after which the schools must reapply and demonstrate that they have made the improvements mandated in the previous cycle. By the end of this year, six of the 36 accredited schools will have participated in such a re-accreditation process. The procedures and standards established with the guidance of the community agency are also under periodic review. Thus, Los Angeles' accreditation process is a model that combines stability with opportunities for innovation.

Emil Jacoby is Senior Consultant of School Accreditation at the Bureau of Jewish Education of Greater Los Angeles, where he previously served as Executive Director.

Curriculum Change: An Instrument of Organizational Renewal

NACHAMA SKOLNIK MOSKOWITZ

For the last 15 years, Project Curriculum Renewal (PCR) has played a key role in shaping the teaching and learning processes in Cleveland's Jewish schools. Developed by the Bureau of Jewish Education¹ in 1987, PCR became one of the original initiatives funded by the Commission on Jewish Continuity in 1988.² It has been nationally recognized for the partnership it forges between Cleveland's Jewish Community Federation and local synagogues and was one of the innovative programs featured in JESNA's *Visions of Jewish Education*. This article will first offer a brief description of Project Curriculum Renewal and its role in the Curriculum Department of the Jewish Education Center of Cleveland (JECC). It will then outline the operating principles that guide PCR's strategy and reflect upon the challenges inherent in the JECC's efforts to engender educational change.

THE STRUCTURE OF PCR

Project Curriculum Renewal, the focal point of the JECC's Curriculum Department, offers four avenues of engagement with local schools and Jewish educators: a three-year

process of curriculum renewal, a three-semester curriculum practicum for educational leaders (in conjunction with the JECC and the Laura and Alvin Siegal College of Judaic Studies),³ an annual short-term curriculum writing grant, and miscellaneous consultations.

The three-year curriculum process is PCR's centerpiece. The application process involves a school's director and education committee tentatively identifying the curricular change they are seeking, typically targeting a department or set of grade levels needing attention. Once accepted, the school's leadership team engages with the assigned PCR professional to begin an intensive study process aimed at refining the focus of its curricular request. Stakeholders (including professional and lay leadership, clergy, faculty, and sometimes students) meet a total of eight to 10 hours to further develop the educational framework from which the curriculum shift will grow. After the faculty has refined the framework, curriculum is written during the early part of the summer so that it is ready for implementation at the beginning of year two.

¹ Cleveland's Bureau of Jewish Education joined with its Commission on Jewish Continuity in 1993 to become the Jewish Education Center of Cleveland (JECC).

² For the last dozen years, PCR has been funded by the Fund for the Jewish Future, administered by the JECC.

³ Formerly the Cleveland College of Jewish Studies.

Once the new curriculum is designed, the PCR professionals and the school's education director develop a structure to support its implementation. This includes staff development and coaching options for teachers,⁴ resource development, and education director support. The curriculum is evaluated during the implementation year and revised in the early part of that summer. In the third year, support continues as the locus of project control shifts to the education director.

THE OPERATING PRINCIPLES

Project Curriculum Renewal constitutes an integrated approach to school improvement through goal setting, curriculum development, professional development, and evaluation. Its work is built on a number of principles that have contributed to its success.

PCR is a priority of its central agency and receives its full support.

Directed by a senior member of the agency's staff, with one full-time and one part-time associate, PCR is the centerpiece of the Curriculum Department's work in the community. The Curriculum Department sets its agenda around the time commitments needed to advance and support the efforts of its PCR schools. The Curriculum Department is able to coordinate efforts of other parts of the agency on behalf of PCR projects, involving at various times the Retreat Institute, Teacher Center, Ratner Media and Technology Center, Israel Programs Department, Adolescent Initiative, Special Education Department, and Professional Development Department.⁵

PCR respects the uniqueness and autonomy of its participating schools.

The PCR professionals understand that while they have much depth in curricular understanding to offer schools, the school educators bring their own expertise in institutional culture to the process. To build the partnership and

set direction for the three-year process, the school and PCR educators deeply study current educational research and/or Judaic texts. Together, they decide the "why, how and what" of the curricular shift. The JECC's Curriculum Department takes on a chameleon-like role, matching its approach to the particular school with which it is working. The department professionals push themselves and the educators with whom they work to move to the cutting edge of educational research and practice. Yet, at the end of the day, PCR respects a school's autonomy; final decisions rest with the school's educational leadership.

PCR work is consistently aligned with a coherent educational philosophy.

Over time, the Curriculum Department has developed a coherent educational philosophy that undergirds its work in the community. It is rooted in constructivist principles⁶ in which the conception of the teacher's role shifts from that of traditional provider of information to the "guide on the side," and the image of the students shifts from sponge-like recipients to empowered learners.

*Understanding by Design*⁷ is used as the department's model for curriculum development. All those who work with the Curriculum Department learn to use "enduring understandings"⁸ as the foundation of their educational work. Each curricular decision is closely aligned with the educational framework agreed to by a school in the early stages of work.

PCR helps develop the human and material resources necessary for the implementation of new curricula.

The scope of curriculum development and impact is broadly defined by the JECC Curriculum Department. While most of its projects result in documented curricula, the department looks beyond a written curriculum guide to focus on shifts in school culture that support a coherent educational philosophy. These shifts involve rethinking the roles of both teachers and school administration.

⁴ Teachers receive stipends to complete a ten-hour course and/or for participating in three to four "coaching cycles."

⁵ Note that the JECC has a "supra-department" called the Curriculum Resources Department, comprised of the Teacher Center, Ratner Media and Technology Center, and Curriculum Department.

⁶ For more information, see Brooks (1999) and the tutorial section of the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development's website (<http://www.ascd.org/tutorials>); scroll down the page and click on "Constructivism."

⁷ *Understanding by Design*, by Grant Wiggins and Jay McTighe (Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development; book, 1998, handbook, 1999).

⁸ These are statements that represent an engaging big idea at the heart of a discipline (e.g., history, theology), having enduring value beyond the classroom. An example of an enduring understanding: "Jewish families stand witness to Jewish history, transmitting memories through ritual and stories."

The Curriculum Department works hand-in-hand with educational leaders to support teachers in their work with students. Teachers in the three-year PCR process are consistently guided to:

- focus on teaching as a means to enhance the learning process;
- base learning on big ideas, rather than on collections of facts and disparate projects;
- move from a frontal role, in which the teacher tries to transfer the information in his or her head into the minds of the students, to a more facilitative one, in which students are empowered as learners;
- use traditional Jewish texts and other primary sources, rather than textbooks and workbooks; and
- become reflective practitioners, involving themselves comfortably in Judaic and pedagogic discussions.

PCR also supports school directors in their quest to focus on the educational components of their job, not just the administrative tasks. The time-intensive three-year process provides heads of school an opportunity to partner with a colleague, a rarity in most educational circles.⁹ Many directors report, “It is as if the Curriculum Department is sitting on my shoulder, whispering in my ear!” These educators have gained the pedagogic flexibility to actively apply what they learned through PCR to a variety of other settings.

The Curriculum Department is committed to making life a little easier for those involved in the intensive PCR process, focusing on the development of “no excuses” curricula. Different from “teacher-proof,” a “no excuses” curriculum offers a variety of resources to the classroom teacher and the school so that a teacher can’t offer the excuse, “I did not have *x*, so I could not try what the curriculum guide suggested.” Jewish education is quite resource-poor, missing the availability of the wide array of materials to which general studies teachers have access. The Curriculum Department partners with other departments in the JECC to locate and, at times, fund the cre-

ation of posters, special software, and student resource books that complement the curriculum.

PCR develops curriculum with and for specific sites.

With the exception of the JECC’s Immediate Response Curriculum,¹⁰ developed for a wide-ranging audience experiencing crisis, the Curriculum Department’s work is highly site-specific. By focusing on the needs of a particular school or institution, rather than a one-size-fits-all approach, PCR is able to create high quality, coherent curricula. In spite of the site-specific nature of the process, however, many other schools are able to successfully implement the “products” developed through PCR.

PCR recognizes that the change process demands strong school leadership.

Curriculum Department professionals are very conscious of the ways in which the change process invariably arouses anxiety and puts pressure on already complex systems. They work with school directors to manage change in their settings, educating them to the challenges brought on by school change, anticipating problems before they arise, and helping resolve issues after they rear up. In order to protect the JECC’s investment of \$150,000-200,000 per PCR school over the three years, schools are accepted on the basis of both leadership stability and administration’s demonstrated willingness to be pushed to think broadly about the educational enterprise.¹¹

PCR prefers to focus its efforts on key unresolved issues in Jewish education.

Schools that present PCR with a stimulating, under-explored area of curriculum development have a better chance of acceptance into the three-year process. Over the last seven years, the department has enjoyed the challenges of:

- considering whether Hebrew language can be successfully taught in a three-day afternoon Hebrew school, without compromising the “synagogue skill” priority that many set for themselves;
- developing problem-based learning units as the base of a

⁹ The PCR staff commends local directors for opening their schools to “outsiders” for three years. The department tries to make the process as safe and respectful as possible, noting that education is an imperfect art replete with challenges.

¹⁰ The Response Curricula may be found on the JECC’s website, www.jecc.org. Click on “Educational Resources,” then on “Curriculum;” scroll to the bottom of that page.

¹¹ Generally, education directors and senior clergy need to be in their positions for two years before a school is accepted into the three-year PCR Process A. However, its school director may change either *during* the three years or within a year or two of the process’s completion.

supplementary school program and discovering how to help teachers move from the traditional role of “sage on the stage” to “guide on the side;”

- experimenting with *Understanding by Design* as the basis of Jewish curriculum development;
- exploring ways to bring text study to the fore in supplementary school classrooms; and
- deciding how the new research on identity development can inform and change the structure of a supplementary high school program.

The department’s staff is looking forward to working with a local preschool in the coming year and to deepen its work with area day schools.

PCR is committed to meaningful assessment and evaluation.

The Curriculum Department consistently assesses the impact of shifts in teacher practice on student learning. In addition to normative classroom-based assessments (journal samples, written work, performance assessments, and scored rubrics), it has recently begun to gather baseline data from teachers, students, and parents using a questionnaire with items found on national identity surveys. It is hoped that this type of information will allow PCR to measure shifts in thought and practice, as well as in attitudes to Jewish education.

THE CHALLENGES

While Project Curriculum Renewal enjoys a good reputation among Cleveland’s schools and is recognized nationally, it continues to engage in self-assessment and reflection. The project faces issues related to the change process, to the partnering of professionals in a central agency and school, and to intense efforts on behalf of a single site.

Change

Change is difficult and potentially threatening. The Curriculum Department understands that quality changes occur: when those involved feel dissonance between “what is” and “what could be;” when they have a clear image of what the change will “look like” when it is done; when they are personally committed to making the change; and when they have specific, practical steps to help them get started. Managing this process, especially the initial dissonance, can be tricky.

Once the initial discomfort is overcome, the next challenge is one of unrealistic expectations. The summer prior to implementation of new curriculum is filled with idyllic images of what “could be.” But the reality of school life, with all its complexities, sometimes means that the ideal does not become reality.

The change process can be confounded by the inconsistency engendered by personnel turnover. At times, a year’s work must be repeated due to the unforeseen changeover of school leaders or teachers. Particularly when the Curriculum Department has made the investment of a year or more of education and coaching of professional staff, personnel shifts challenge an institution’s capacity to deeply implement a specific curricular change.

Change also takes time. While three years of support may seem significant, most educational changes take at least five years to take deep root. The current director of PCR, in place for eight years, can now look across Cleveland’s Jewish school system to see the flourishing of seeds planted years earlier and the synergy of the department’s efforts with other Jewish continuity projects throughout the educational system.

Partnership

The PCR process represents a delicate dance between the JECC and a school. As mentioned above, to open one’s school and thought processes to outside influence requires courage and commitment. This commitment is subjected to the gentle tug-of-war that takes place between PCR staff and school leadership when considering the implications of research and practice for a particular curriculum or class. The final success of PCR thus depends greatly on the relationship forged between its staff and those of its partner institutions. Mutual respect and PCR’s support for the director’s right to make final decisions for his or her school help the two partners bridge their inevitable differences.

Process vs. Product

Most work of the Curriculum Department is site-specific, fulfilling the needs of the school requesting assistance; a document is produced, but the meaningful results come in the shifts of educational practice achieved within the school. While PCR could distribute its curricula well beyond Cleveland, many of the PCR curricula rely on

pedagogic support in the form of workshops and coaching. The PCR director has discouraged some schools from purchasing its problem-based learning curriculum, for example, because teachers not supported while learning to facilitate this model of teaching are not likely to succeed.

On the other hand, certain PCR products could fruitfully be utilized by other schools despite the site-specific context in which they were developed. Because of the efforts needed to polish a piece of curriculum into final form and the time-intensive nature of publication and distribution, however, the Curriculum Department made a conscious decision not to advertise the availability of its materials beyond Cleveland. While this is a realistic reflection of the capacity of the JECC at this time, it means that much cutting-edge work accomplished by the JECC is not nationally accessible.

CONCLUSION

The Jewish Education Center of Cleveland's Curriculum Department, through the work of Project Curriculum Renewal, shifts the landscape for Jewish education via a holistic model that pays close attention to the nexus of curriculum development, professional development, and organizational change. The department's longevity in the Cleveland Jewish community and years of investment in long-term change processes have made a powerful impact on the capacity of Cleveland's Jewish educational professionals and institutions.

Nachama Skolnik Moskowitz is the Director of Curriculum Resources for the Jewish Education Center of Cleveland. She is an author of books, textbooks, and articles, as well as a popular teacher and conference presenter. Nachama received her M.A. from the Rhea Hirsch School of Education of HUC-JIR and was recently awarded an honorary doctorate by the same.

Editor's Suggested Discussion Guide:

- Both Jacoby and Moskowitz see their projects as powerful ways to effect and manage change in supplementary schools. What are the elements of each of these programs that make it effective? Could either program have been as effective without any of those elements?
- The accreditation process in LA involves schools assessing their progress on the basis of a number of standards. Do these standards represent best practice in your view? Are they achievable and relevant? Do you feel there is merit to developing generic standards for a large number of schools? How do you suspect the schools in your area would "measure up" to those standards Jacoby lists?
- Moskowitz's model is based on a particular educational approach, *Understanding by Design*, which is utilized across the board in their work with schools. What are the advantages and disadvantages of this level of commitment to a single curriculum model?
- Beyond the direct impact of these two initiatives

upon school programs, both articles mention as a benefit the closer working relationships that developed between the schools and the central agencies.

- How did these processes benefit both the supplementary schools and the central agencies?
- What are the implications with regard to national versus local-level school change efforts?
- How does this align with the model put forth by Avi West in this issue (page 22).

- Both authors utilize goal-setting as a key element of their processes, with the LA schools identifying global institutional goals and the Cleveland schools focusing on specific curricular goals.
 - How do these two gateways to change work differently?
 - How would you choose between them?
 - What are the benefits and drawbacks to articulating goals in the context of congregational and communal education?
- What different kinds of expertise are needed for a central agency to implement one or the other approach? What are the differences in central agency resources required for implementation?

INTRODUCTION BY THE EDITOR

Effecting change on a national level in a decentralized educational system represents a major challenge. Both practical constraints and commitment to the ideal of local control narrow the options for national bodies such as the religious movements. Yet below are updates on two current initiatives which have embraced this challenge and are moving forward to advance the cause of congregational education.

Temma Kingsley describes the logic behind the Conservative Movement's new set of standards for its congregational schools, *Framework for Excellence*. She outlines the realities that led to their development, and explains the elements that were integrated into these national standards.

Rabbi Jan Katzew introduces CHAI – Learning for Jewish Life, the new curriculum under development by the Reform Movement. He provides insight into the Jewish and educational philosophies that undergird the design of this national curriculum and identifies its key components. These descriptions will be helpful for groups deliberating on setting policy on a national level, as well as for leadership of synagogues and congregational schools seeking to implement these initiatives.

A New Set of Standards

TEMMA KINGSLEY

As the chairperson of the Task Force on Congregational School Standards of the United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism, I am very proud of the work we have done in creating the new Framework for Excellence standards. The Framework offers six models for congregational schools. Each model requires certain basic elements and benchmarks for quality and then offers different emphases. With the help of the United Synagogue education staff, the school selects the model that will maximize the opportunity for quality Jewish education in its setting. A school may want to emphasize *Shabbat* participation, or family education, or an increased number of program years or expanded hours in the high school years. Mandated elements include planned and congregation-supported staff development as well as clergy involvement. The entire Framework for Excellence in Education document along with the Aims Statement for Synagogue Schools is available at the United Synagogue website (www.uscj.org) under “Lifelong Learning.”

EVALUATING THE EXISTING STANDARD

Our task force began deliberations almost three years ago with discussions about the standard that existed at that

time: five years of school, three sessions each week, each session to be two hours long. None of the sessions was to take place on *Shabbat*. We understood the importance of maximizing class time and frequency of contact. We looked at research that corroborated our intuition that time and frequency lead to the greatest mastery of material. We listened to testimony from outstanding, successful school leaders who feared that changing the 5x3x2 formula would “water down” Jewish education.

On the other hand, upon examining attendance records to see whether youngsters were actually attending all the mandated sessions with regularity, it became apparent that changing demographics were contributing to erratic attendance patterns in some areas. Jewish families living far from the synagogue were unable to make the long trip three times a week. Shared custody arrangements meant that many children spent weekends in communities away from their schools. In focus group after focus group, in every one of United Synagogue's regions, lay and professional leadership shared their frustration with these situations and strongly requested that we consider this in designing the new standards.

Under the guidance of Rabbi Robert Abramson, the Director of Education for the United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism, we evaluated what was happening in our congregational schools. We paid particular attention to schools producing positive results: young people in significant numbers were staying in school beyond the years required for *bar/bat mitzvah*; families were becoming involved in their children's and their own Jewish education; or there was significant *Shabbat* and holiday attendance by a large proportion of the school population. What was happening in these schools that enabled them to produce the results that we as the lay leadership of the Conservative movement viewed as crucial to the perpetuation of Judaism? We learned that the schools that met the six-hour standard and were committed to quality education were indeed producing desirable results: but that the six-hour standard alone did not define or determine effectiveness. Because Rabbi Abramson and his staff are in constant touch with our congregational schools and in dialogue with the principals, he was aware of the locations around the country where the best results were being achieved. We were then able to include elements of the programs of those schools in the Framework.

FRAMEWORK FOR EXCELLENCE

The most effective schools reward and improve their faculty by both encouraging and enabling professional development for principals and teachers. This became a required element of our new set of standards, the Framework for Excellence. Congregations are expected to move toward appropriate licensing and certification for schools and faculty. Principals are expected to avail themselves of the networking and learning possibilities afforded them by membership in and attendance at conferences of the Jewish Educators Assembly.

Because we understand the impact of informal education and experience-based education, our new standards expect that schools will encourage Jewish camp (*Ramah*), youth activities (USY), and appropriate Israel trips.

Because our task force feels that an increase in the mandated years of study will have a major positive impact on the education of our youth, we encourage congregations to offer a Jewish early childhood setting where the population exists. According to a study done this year by Ilene Vogelstein and David Kaplan for the Jewish Early

Childhood Education Partnership, "New understandings about the development and transmission of cultural behaviors and beliefs, coupled with the knowledge that children spend substantial amounts of time in early childhood programs, suggest that early childhood education is the perfect opportunity to shape the Jewish identity of young children and their families and to lay the foundation for subsequent Jewish experiences and involvement." Thus, the early childhood program provides a most effective entry point for families into the synagogue world and the initial offerings of family education that take place informally in that setting. The early childhood experience often fosters a positive attitude toward Jewish education and connection, setting the stage for the attainment of the aims of the Conservative synagogue school.

We also understand that if we allow students to conclude their Jewish education at the end of their *bar/bat mitzvah* year, we relinquish the opportunity to influence the high school years of adolescent identity development. Because it is exceedingly important to reinforce their Jewish identity before students go off to college and meet the influences of the world at large, we now require education through the high school years. Schools entering the Framework must begin to provide legitimate Jewish education for the high school age students. This may be achieved in a classroom setting, as an independent study program, as a distance learning experience, or in a flexible plan designed by the rabbi or educational director.

Schools are now required to document that the education of their youth has been developed through a collaborative effort of parents, faculty, lay leadership, and clergy. In particular, we see rabbinic input, concern, and participation as critical in creating a solid educational program.

The United Synagogue Department of Education recognizes that it must continue to serve as a resource, along with the Davidson School of Education and the Melton Institute at the Jewish Theological Seminary for the creation of exciting and innovative curricula. The *Etgar* curriculum is currently in the process of development by a team of educators representing those institutions.

The response of congregations to the new standards has been overwhelmingly favorable. Many synagogues and their schools have already been visited by Wendy Light, the new consultant in the Department of Education whose

portfolio is helping schools to select their model and move towards its enactment. Each school administration is anxious to develop a program that is in keeping with one of the six models defined in the Framework. Our congregational schools are required to move toward full compliance with the new standards. The entire staff of the Department of Education will continue to make themselves available to assist the schools of our member congregations. Professional and lay leadership are eager to raise their schools to new levels and to meet the standards for the new Framework for Excellence. Right now the standards are mandated only for schools with more than 75 students. We will be reviewing and revising the standards for smaller schools in remote communities. We hope that in five years, all of our congregational schools will be part of the Framework and will provide our next generation with a solid foundation on which to build a Jewish life.

We know that we are only at the beginning of a long and developing process, but initial reactions indicate that our institutions are ready and excited about meeting standards based on best practices in institutions that have produced results. It is our hope that our youth will benefit from all of our efforts, growing to become educated, caring Jews and to live meaningful Jewish lives.

Temma Kingsley, Vice President of the United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism, is the chair of the Blue Ribbon Task Force for Congregational School Standards and the co-chair of the Education Commission of the United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism. She is a retired Jewish early childhood educator and past President of the Jewish Early Childhood Association, as well as of the National Jewish Early Childhood Network.

CHAI – Learning for Jewish Life

RABBI JAN KATZEW

CHALLENGE

The fundamental challenge we face in Jewish life in general and Jewish education in particular transcends any single movement. How can we help episodic Jews who live Judaism from time to time to live fully as Jews who live Judaism all the time? How can we nurture those who are Jewish by choice, who knowingly, passionately, and joyfully identify as Jews? Accepting the premise that we live in an age defined by choice, how can we raise a generation that will consciously choose to learn and live as Jews? All Jewish schooling is supplemental. Jewish families still serve as the primary educational institution in the Jewish community. When the Judaism lived at home is dissonant with the Judaism learned in school, home wins and consequently, too often, Judaism loses.

In the Reform Movement, approximately 120,000 children study in congregational schools, complemented by up to 5,000 that study in day schools. “Does the Reform Movement have a curriculum?” is an important and urgent question. Up until now, we have equivocated.

“Each congregational culture is unique.” “A curriculum is not a document; it is a living portrait, a dynamic shared learning experience.” “Textbooks do not constitute a curriculum.” All of these statements may be true, but they do not tell the whole truth.

Whom are we kidding? We are short on teachers who are as Jewishly literate and competent as they are caring. We lack teachers who are committed to Reform Judaism and who come to class with a clear, cogent, and compelling lesson plan. In the *yeshivat ma’alah*, the ideal class, we would have learners and teachers who are fully present and who understand Jewish learning as central to their lives. But, in our schools and in our synagogues, in our real lives as Jewish educators, the teachers are avocational. They are busy, and despite their intentions, they often do not have the time to develop a well-conceived plan for a lesson, to say nothing of a unit or a year.

At the 2001 UAHC Biennial in Boston, Rabbi Eric Yoffie articulated his clearest vision to date of the Jewish school residing at the heart of congregational life:

Moses understood that while Jews would need an army to defend their land, they would need schools to defend their values. And for the next 3,000 years we built our communities around schools, and as stated in the most famous of our prayers, we took the words that God had commanded us in order to teach them diligently to our children...We know that the school cannot succeed on its own — that it needs the active participation of parents. It also needs the commitment of the entire synagogue, which should be an interdependent learning community of which the school is but one part.

RESPONSE

We are going to help, and while no school and no class can be taught by remote control, we have developed resources that will meet the needs of teachers and in turn, the needs of students. To respond to the fundamental educational need in the Reform Movement, the UAHC, in partnership with the Hebrew Union College and the National Association of Temple Educators, is developing CHAI – Learning for Jewish Life.

CHAI was designed by:

- UAHC regional educators and curriculum specialists
- HUC-JIR education professors
- NATE educational practitioners.

CHAI is designed for:

- education committees
- congregational boards of directors
- parents of children ages 3–14
- families with children 7–14
- teachers who have little or no prior training.

CHAI is designed to:

- provide students with a balance of *torah*, *avodah* and *g'millut chassadim*
- provide a shared Movement-wide curricular core for one hour of class per week, giving each congregational school time to build its own unique identity
- provide teachers with a complete, developmentally appropriate, Judaically authentic lesson

address the entire family as Jewish learners

- provide a self-paced Hebrew learning program that formulates Hebrew as a living language of the Jewish people
- invest congregational leaders in their own learning to model lifelong Jewish education.

CHAI – Learning for Jewish Life adapts a powerful educational tool called “Understanding by Design,” by the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, to suit our needs as Jewish educators.

Over the next five years, we expect to develop a curricular core for children in grades 2–7 which will be shared by Reform congregations throughout North America, a core that preserves the independence of each synagogue and promotes the interdependence of the Jewish community. We believe that every child who comes to a Jewish school should find a home in *Torah*, should be at home in a sanctuary, should be able to make her or his home into a sacred space, and should live what he or she learns. CHAI resources provide for achieving balance in Jewish life – among mind, heart, and soul; among knowing, feeling, and doing. At all stages of Jewish life, knowledge is requisite, but knowledge is complemented by attitude and completed by action. We want our students, youth and adult, to know, love, and live *Torah*, and we can achieve that sacred goal by providing texts and contexts that allow children and adults to find a home in Judaism that is as deep as it is open.

Since *Bereishit*, Hebrew has been elemental to Jewish life, and we are committed to providing our teachers and their students with the most creative and effective Hebrew learning tools we can devise. Called *Mitkadem* – Hebrew for moving forward and making progress – our program promotes individualized learning in heterogeneous classes. This means that students will be in the same room with their age peers, but they will likely be on different pages or even on different levels. The Reform Movement has become increasingly serious about the significance of Hebrew, but until now, the UAHC has not offered a comprehensive program of Hebrew learning for youth that is sound in terms of language acquisition theory and best practice, that embraces Hebrew as a sacred Jewish language through *Tefillah* and *Torah*, and that enables parents to be active partners in the process of Hebrew learning. “Hebrew is the perfect language to express the central concepts of Judaism,

Jewish thought, and the way we talk and think of God.” This quote from the *Mitkadem* rationale expresses an enduring understanding about Hebrew. It reminds us not only what we are teaching when we teach Hebrew but why we are teaching Hebrew. *Mitkadem* treats Hebrew as a living language, and therefore includes grammar and other linguistic devices, but emphasizes the unique role of Hebrew in Jewish life, especially in *Tefillah* and *Torah*, prayer and sacred texts.

A distinguishing if not defining characteristic of *Mitkadem*, and indeed all of the resources associated with CHAI – Learning for Jewish Life, is flexibility. Whether classes meet once, twice, or three times a week, these lessons will fit unique schedules. Whether a student begins Hebrew language in grade 1 or 4, the CHAI resources will enable the learner to proceed at her or his own pace, depending upon intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, parental support, native intelligence, and the intensity of the learning. After gaining decoding skills and the self-confidence that accompanies making progress, students will move ahead to learn aspects of Hebrew grammar, vocabulary, and reading and spoken comprehension. One of the greatest acts of resurrection in modern Jewish life has been the rebirth of the Hebrew language, and we need to share in the celebration by giving the next generation of our people the tools to learn it, and then, we hope, to love it.

CHAI is intended to facilitate lifelong learning; therefore, its components reach beyond the student in school and into the areas of family, parent, teacher, and board education.

Complementing the curriculum core and reinforcing the values of *torah*, *avodah* and *g'millut chassadim* in a conscious attempt to bring them home, each year-long curriculum includes three sessions specially designed for families to learn with and from each other. These family sessions offer great flexibility to the educator in order to meet the unique needs of each community. Since educating families is qualitatively different from teaching children alone, we have developed a comprehensive, user-friendly guide to create and support a significant family education program in each congregation.

A subset of family education aimed at the adult members of the family, adult education sessions offer parents the opportunity to realize that in Judaism “homework is the

essence and schoolwork the supplement.” The parent curriculum considers the challenges of living a consciously Jewish life that is as liberal and tolerant as it is rich and deep. For parents of preschool age children, CHAI provides a variety of sessions designed to be welcoming and embracing, to make it clear that the youngest members of our community are a treasure who serve as guarantors for the Jewish future.

To assure teacher education, we have developed two online courses, one for new teachers who have less than three years of experience and one for experienced teachers who may wish to consider acting as mentors. These courses consist of eight 90-minute lessons and are taught by respected educational leaders. Classes will be limited to 25 participants and will cost \$100 per teacher. We consider this a serious opportunity for teacher recruitment, development, and retention. The online courses, including a special course for teachers in Reform Judaism, can be accessed at uahonline.ecollege.com. We will also be holding special CHAI retreats for teachers and educators at three UAHC camps during the summer of 2002.

In order for Jewish education to succeed, we need to build partnerships, and none is more vital than the one between professional and volunteer leaders. In two separate but complementary guides, we have endeavored to guide synagogue leaders through a process that helps clarify the integral roles they play in building a community of learning, learned Jews. Again, our aim has been to give maximum flexibility to each congregation and to realize that while some synagogues would want to create a board retreat around issues in Jewish education, others would strongly prefer to devote up to half an hour of each board meeting for a year to Jewish education, and still others would prefer to devote quarterly meetings entirely to education matters. Whatever the method that suits a congregational culture, it is our intent to support congregations in taking Jewish education seriously as a primary function of congregational life, indeed as a vital organ in Jewish life.

ANTICIPATION

CHAI represents a significant policy shift in the educational practice of the UAHC. It involves acknowledging and respecting the decentralization of Jewish learning. It requires an investment in human resources even more

than print and online resources. It accepts the premise that our relationship to educational theorists and practitioners is one of mutual dependence. Arguably above all, CHAI is predicated on the belief that the congregational school deserves to be a source of accomplishment and joy in Jewish life for everyone connected with it, i.e., everyone who is a member of the congregation.

CHAI – Learning for Jewish Life will grow as congregations provide feedback on its various elements. The curriculum core will develop as we form realistic expectations of our teachers and students. The online and onsite teacher training programs will respond to the needs of faculty from diverse backgrounds, while the resources for families and parents will address their unique needs. Our hope is that congregational schools will become even

more vital as the educational heart of the synagogue community. Quality curricular resources are necessary but insufficient to yield quality learning. Other variables include the students, the teacher, and the culture. CHAI is an exercise in evolutionary cultural change because it seeks to improve the status quo by building on the existing structure. CHAI ultimately depends on the reservoir of goodwill with our congregational partners. Its success will be determined by the number of congregations willing to adopt it and then adapt it to fit their needs. In the next year, we will focus on three congregations in each of the 13 UAHC regions, and together we will learn how to give CHAI – Learning for Jewish Life a life of its own.

Rabbi Jan Katzew, Ph.D., RJE, is Director of UAHC Department of Jewish Education.

Editor's Suggested Discussion Guide:

- Both Katzew and Kingsley introduce their articles by describing the shortcomings of the Jewish education currently offered in congregational schools. To what extent do you find that these critiques apply to your local synagogues?
- Both of these national initiatives have carefully crafted a balance between local and central roles in upgrading congregational education. In what ways does each initiative achieve this balance? To what extent does each initiative mandate, encourage, reward, suggest, guide, support, and/or envision change for its congregational schools?
- What will it take on the national and local levels to have these initiatives adopted and implemented?
- What do you see as the potential impact of each of these initiatives? What will be the ripple effects of these changes?
- How is a curriculum different from a set of standards?

INTRODUCTION BY THE EDITOR

The following cases illustrate the potential of part-time Jewish education to provide an arena in which limits can be challenged and excellent practice can flourish. The first two case studies occur within the synagogue setting. Sharon Morton and Rabbi Harold Kudan focus on the role of the synagogue educator and the partnership between educator and rabbi that results in the integration of the educational program into congregational life. Cyd Weissman and Rabbi Marc Margolius outline the implications of a paradigm shift toward seeing the congregation as a system, within which both synagogue and school function as interrelated elements.

From the communal setting, Nadav Caine and Nechama Tamler report on the achievements and special issues facing a community-based supplementary high school, while Linda Echt and Aviva Richman describe an unusual after-school Hebrew school. Both of these programs embrace diversity. Each is marked by a unique vision that drives the institution and serves as a centripetal force keeping its diverse constituencies together.

The Rabbi–Educator Partnership

SHARON MORTON AND RABBI HAROLD KUDAN

A good educational program will shape the identity of a congregation by touching the hearts and minds of members within every age grouping at the synagogue. It has power because it leads to the understanding that Jewish education gives life to study, worship and religious action for all temple members. An excellent rabbi-educator-congregation partnership nurtures this vision.

A strong partnership between a congregation's rabbi and educator leads to an educational program that is woven into the very fabric of the congregation. Such a partnership creates and reinforces the fundamental understanding that Jewish education is a part of every facet of the congregation. It models an expansive and integrated view of congregational life. It comes about through careful work of the congregants on the search committee and hard work, luck and commitment on the part of the rabbi and the educator to instill the excitement of education within the total congregation.

In 1976, only four years after its founding, Am Shalom was ready to engage its first full-time educator. After several lengthy interviews, Sharon Morton was asked to take the position. When she asked why the search committee chose her, she was told, "If we closed our eyes and listened to your words, but not the sound of your voice, it

was the rabbi speaking. Therefore, we knew it would be a good partnership." And so it began.

Rabbi Harold Kudan was the founding rabbi of the congregation. Having majored in Religious Education in rabbinical school, he sought an educator who would be open to new ideas, enthusiastic about looking at new models of education, and willing to risk trying them out. He wanted an educator who would understand his/her role in Jewish education in the broadest sense. He felt that Sharon Morton could be that person. And so it continued.

Shared philosophy, beliefs, vision and commitments are essential cornerstones of a successful partnership between a congregation's rabbi and educator, specifically:

- belief in the integrity of the learner at any age, that nothing should be taught that must be unlearned at a more mature age.
- belief that respect for all – the parent, teacher and child – is paramount.
- belief in the challenge and the excitement of a Jewish life nourished through Jewish education.
- belief that involvement of the congregation in the wider community is essential to the success of the educational program, and vice versa.
- belief in a systems approach to Jewish education reflect-

ed in a life-long education committee that oversees the task forces related to various departments of education.

- belief in a holistic education program for all members of the congregation reflecting their age, interests, needs, and abilities.
- belief in the awe and wonder of education and the learner.
- belief that education is an intrinsic part of every program and project of the congregation.

As in all successful teams, each partner must complement the other. At Am Shalom, the educator:

- is willing to ask, to question, to help build conceptual goals and programs alongside the rabbi.
- is willing to enlist the help of the Rabbi, the staff, the teachers, and the congregants.
- is willing to listen to the voices of temple members and other experts, in order to see the big picture.
- holds a vision that the position of educator extends beyond the school, to all aspects of the congregation.
- is self-confident as a person and as an educator.

The rabbi at Am Shalom:

- is willing to ask, to question, to help build conceptual goals and programs alongside the educator.
- actively functions as an integral part of the school, the adult education programs, even the education committee.
- holds the view that the position of educator extends beyond the school to all aspects of the congregation.
- is self confident as a person and as a Rabbi.
- consistently provides honest support and feedback.

The involvement of the rabbi in the educational program is only one side of the dynamic partnership; the involvement of the educator in a range of aspects of congregational life is equally important. At Am Shalom, Ms. Morton sits with the Rabbi on the worship committee in order to look at educational components of worship. She staffs the social action committee, which discusses issues based on awareness, education, activism. It created a life long education committee with task forces for the school, the adult education program, family programming, and youth committee.

What are the actions of a congregation that recognizes the valued role of the educator in the congregation?

- The educator is sometimes asked to sit on the bimah, read *Torah*, and deliver the sermon.
- The office of the educator is in a prominent place in the building.
- The congregation finds opportunities to highlight and honor the educator.
- The educator sits on the Board of Directors and the Executive Committee of the congregation and has a voice in their deliberations.
- Temple board meetings sometimes highlight educational issues and the work of the educator.
- The salary and benefits of the educator are on equal par with other members of the congregation's senior staff.
- The successes of the educator are noted in congregational publications.
- The educator's name is listed on all publications, bulletin boards, and newsletters of the congregation.

As a result of the active partnership between the rabbi and educator at Am Shalom, the whole congregation sees the educator and Jewish education as an integral part of congregational life. Educational issues and decisions permeate the work of many committees. The open collaborative relationship between the rabbi and the educator is reflected throughout the congregation and characterizes the way the congregation functions. It allows exciting new projects and ideas to be passed or shared by whichever committees and organizations are appropriate. Examples of the collaboration of rabbi, educator and congregational leaders follow.

- Joint meetings of the education and worship committees inform decisions about family worship services. Joint efforts of the social action and the education committees have resulted in raising \$55,000 to purchase an ambulance for Magen David Adom. The project began with the wishes of a grade in the religious school to raise funds for the ambulance. The adult social action committee picked up the idea and through the hard work of the committee and the school, a child and an adult, and the generosity of the congregants, the project succeeded.
- The congregation holds an "all-committee" dinner and meeting at the beginning of each year. The dinner provides a wonderful opportunity for all of the programming groups within the congregation to meet together,

to discuss the summer, and to ready themselves to return to a full schedule in fall. Each year, an annual theme is announced at the dinner, such as the Year of Education, the Year of Social Action, or the Year of Sacred Moments. Each committee decides on ways to integrate its work into the major theme of the year. During the Year of Education, the library planned a series of book displays. The worship committee incorporated educational information in the weekly *Shabbat* newsletter. The communications committee focused on raising the educational value of the congregational bulletin by adding educational features.

- Chairs of each of the programmatic committees of the congregation meet with the rabbi and the educator three to four times a year. It is an opportunity for the lay and professional leaders of the congregation to share and to learn what is happening in each arena of congregational life, to reflect on how they are fulfilling their responsibilities, and to become reinvigorated. The meeting is also a forum for addressing challenges and seeking solutions.

When an educator and a rabbi see that they are partners in the same endeavor and when they are able to share a common vision not only for the religious school but also

for the congregation as a whole, then both the educator and the rabbi are fulfilled in their roles within the congregation. This situation comes about through mutual trust and respect and an openness to learning from one another. It comes about when the rabbi and educator are willing to discuss frustrations, failures, and problems as well as successes. It comes about when the rabbi and educator can deal with issues with flexibility, humor, enthusiasm, and willingness to share responsibilities.

After writing this paper together, we sat down and I, the educator, said to the rabbi, “Why do you think it really works here?” He thought for a minute and then said, “Because neither one of us cares who gets the credit or the attention for a particular program. We work as a team.” Perhaps that is the whole article in a nutshell.

Rabbi Kudan has been the rabbi of the Am Shalom in Glencoe for 30 years and will retire in June. Sharon Morton has worked successfully with him for 26 years. A new rabbi has been chosen for the congregation. Both Sharon and Rabbi Kudan believe that the search committee has exercised great wisdom in choosing the new rabbi. And everyone looks forward to the coming years with hope, anticipation, and excitement.

A Systems Approach to School and Synagogue Change: The Case of Beth Am Israel

CYD. B. WEISSMAN AND RABBI MARC J. MARGOLIUS

In recent years, Jewish supplemental schools have begun reimagining themselves not only as transmitters of Jewish knowledge, but as builders of Jewish identity. However, despite efforts to reform supplemental education through family education, revised textbooks, and innovative curricula, such initiatives have not sufficiently transformed supplemental schools into effective instruments for the construction of Jewish identity.

Efforts to reform supplemental schools through programmatic change have overlapped with the current trans-denominational movement for synagogue change. Jewish educational leaders, including Jonathan Woocher and Isa Aron, have challenged the Jewish community to look at the issues of supplemental education and synagogue change in tandem. Congregations and their schools are

being asked to re-envision themselves holistically, focusing on systemic transformation rather than “additive change” such as new and innovative programs. Synagogues and their schools are seeking ways to operate as an integrated whole, creating communities which focus on imparting Jewish knowledge in a way which strengthens their members’ core sense of Jewish identity.

Congregation Beth Am Israel, a Conservative synagogue in suburban Philadelphia, is one congregation laboring toward the intersection of school and synagogue change. Over the past decade, Beth Am Israel has begun to think of itself as an integrated community in which the synagogue and supplemental school are interrelated and interdependent. As a result, the congregation has become a community of shared practice, celebration, and

learning, rather than a synagogue with a school as an adjunct component. Change at Beth Am Israel has been transformative, rather than merely additive, because it has been guided by a systems framework.

DEFINING A SYSTEMS FRAMEWORK

The use of systems analysis has permeated almost every academic discipline in the past 50 years (Palmer, 1998). The word system comes from the Greek verb *sunistanai*, meaning “to cause to stand together.” Peter Senge describes a systems approach “as a discipline for seeing wholes” and “a framework for seeing interrelationships rather than things, for seeing patterns of change rather than static ‘snapshots’” (1990, p. 69). A systems approach promotes a comprehensive view in which a set of elements functions as a dynamic whole to achieve a given purpose. A systems framework, then, is a perspective that focuses on identifying and managing all of the factors impacting the achievement of a desired goal.

TOWARD THE CREATION OF AN INTEGRATED SYSTEM

Ten years ago, Beth Am Israel effectively functioned as a provider of Jewish services and programming for diverse constituencies. It defined its mission as “allocat[ing] resources to: worship; adult and child education, including a religious school; opportunities for involvement with Israel; social action in the Jewish community and the community at large; and social, musical, artistic and inter-generational activities.” This programmatic “smorgasbord” approach often promoted a sense of sub-communities pursuing distinctive agendas, with relatively little communication or effort at integration.

While this approach often produced strong and popular programming, over time its limitations emerged. Programs sometimes exacerbated conflicts between constituencies or undermined significant shared goals. For example, it became clear that scheduling religious school and family education on Sunday mornings conflicted with the objective of fostering a strong *Shabbat* morning worship community in a few ways; while an extensive family education program Sunday mornings strengthened parental involvement in children’s learning, it also reinforced the disincentive for families to attend services on *Shabbat*. Although many families with preschoolers

adopted the practice of attending “Tot *Shabbat*” morning services, they stopped participating regularly on *Shabbat* once their children were old enough to attend supplemental school on Sunday mornings.

Beth Am’s staff realized that by independently pursuing different programs, the congregation and the school were operating a self-defeating system. This insight was a first step to working within a systems approach, in which the synagogue and school recognize themselves not as separate entities, but rather as instruments to achieve a common goal. Instead of seeking to improve an inherently flawed model, the staff determined to try a new, more systemic approach.

THE PROCESS OF IDENTIFYING A COMMON GOAL

The congregation’s rabbi, educational director, and lay leaders began by involving the community in clarifying its shared goals. The staff engaged congregants and committees in reflective exercises to identify common core values. Like many synagogues, Beth Am went through a lengthy process of developing and articulating a vision statement. As part of the process, staff and lay leaders shared research on alternative models of synagogues and schools with the education committee and the synagogue board. One result was a shared commitment to the ideal of all elements of the synagogue community striving to work together in an integrative fashion.

The visioning process produced a statement identifying several important shared goals: 1) the expectation of member engagement; 2) a focus on building a community that lives according to the rhythm of Jewish time and is marked by commitment to Jewish learning and practice; and 3) the identification of *Shabbat* as the primary time for building community. Beth Am articulated its goal as becoming a “*Shabbat*-centered community” anchored by the sacred time, activities, and language of *Shabbat*.

PROCESS TO REDESIGN: ALL PARTS WORKING TOWARD A COMMON GOAL

Within a systems framework, once a goal is determined, it is necessary to examine each component of the system in reference to the goal. After identifying the ways in

which each part contributes to or undermines the goal, the next step is redesigning each element of the system to align with its goals.

In the case of Beth Am Israel, it would have been easy to simply conclude that the Sunday school and its family education program undermined the goal of fostering *Shabbat* community, and that the solution was to move them to *Shabbat*. Such a conclusion, however, would have been inadequate and simplistic. The congregation understood its goal as applying to the entire community, not simply to the school or the existing *Shabbat* morning community. In order to achieve the goal of creating a *Shabbat*-centered community, all parts of the synagogue needed to engage in a process of reflection, experimentation, and alignment. As a result, the goal became the central focus for redesigning scheduling, curriculum, programming, staff development, and synagogue governance, for adults and children alike: in other words, systemic change.

TIME CHANGE SUPPORTS COMMON GOAL

Shabbat became the primary time for integrating the various components of Beth Am Israel's synagogue system. Realigning the synagogue's calendar with its goals brought adult, child, and family learning and celebration together at a common time. Integrating the synagogue's gatherings and programs brought diverse constituencies—day school families, “empty-nesters,” and religious school families—together in time and in purpose, creating a new shared center.

Beth Am's staff and lay leadership developed a pilot program in which families with school-aged children could elect to educate their children on *Shabbat* morning, rather than on Sunday. Parents who selected this option (termed *Beit Midrash*) understood that they themselves were expected to participate regularly in the *Shabbat* morning community through study and worship. Today, more than six years after its inception, more than half of Beth Am Israel's families with school-aged children select the *Beit Midrash* option. (Third through sixth graders also attend on Thursday afternoon. The *Beit Sefer* program, for families who do not choose *Beit Midrash*, includes adult and family learning in addition to children's attendance at *Beit Sefer* on Sunday and Thursday.)

On a typical *Shabbat*, more than 120 *Beit Midrash* children and their parents gather with other congregants of all ages for coffee, croissants, and conversation, followed by a morning of shared learning, worship, and socializing. From 9–10 am, *Beit Midrash* children are in their classrooms, teens are acting as *madrichim* (teaching aides), and adults are learning in other classrooms. As many as five or six adult education classes, including study of the weekly *Torah* portion with commentaries, are offered simultaneously. These classes bring together congregants of all ages with diverse interests, including *Beit Midrash* parents, day school parents, and teenagers. The Learning Council, a lay committee, organizes offerings, recruits congregants to teach individual sessions or mini-series, and coordinates the adult learning schedule with the children's.

Afterward, adults assemble in the sanctuary to continue the worship service, while students gather for age-appropriate *minyanim*. Often, parents and other adults visit students in their classrooms, and parents join their children in family education or *minyan*. At the end of services, adults and children gather for *kiddush* or a luncheon.

Organizing the congregation's life around the structured time of *Shabbat* creates opportunities for the repeated encounters needed to nurture relationships across diverse constituencies.

CURRICULUM CHANGE SUPPORTS COMMON GOAL

Beth Am Israel's curriculum for both adults and children has been re-aligned with the *shul's* goals to build skills and understanding, enabling meaningful participation in a *Shabbat*-centered community, in which learning and living *Shabbat* permeate and enrich daily living during the rest of the week. The community cultivates a common language around *Torah*, prayer and *mitzvot* for all ages which is affectionately known within the congregation as *Beth Ameese* — a shared communal vocabulary. Each year, the Learning Council determines a theme that runs through the educational programming for adults and children alike. There is a conscious effort to link and coordinate the content and process of adult and children's learning.

STAFF DEVELOPMENT SUPPORTS COMMON GOAL

Because teachers play a key role in the synagogue's system, their needs have been part of the realignment focus. Teachers are now integrated into the community through regular connections with congregants and parents on *Shabbat* morning. They begin the year by attending a *Shabbaton* retreat where they build a sense of *kehilah* and support among themselves. Additionally, teachers learn together on *Shabbat* several times each month, while younger students attend *minyanim* with their parents and older students join the larger congregation in services. Teachers are immersed in the language and values of the community so they can reinforce them along with parents.

ARCHITECTURE SUPPORTS COMMON GOAL

By a fortunate coincidence, the synagogue is designed so that the sanctuary is the center of the building and the classrooms line its edges. There is no separate educational wing. In the coming year, Beth Am Israel will break ground for a new facility that will replicate this design that integrates the congregation's learning and worship functions and connects children and adults. The architecture expresses the concept that the congregation's center is *Shabbat* and that the learning components represent gateways by which diverse groups find a way to that shared center.

GOVERNANCE STRUCTURE SUPPORTS COMMON GOAL

The realigning process has led to a new governance structure which allows for integrated planning. The rabbi, educational director, and lay leadership collaborate closely to coordinate programs, schedules and curriculum. Two newly formed committees nurture the change process. The Learning Council oversees learning for adults to ensure that there are links with learning for children, while a Developing Community Committee creates programs and policies to maximize congregants' engagement and sense of belonging.

EVALUATION

Evaluation is an important aspect of a systems approach because it can keep the decision-makers focused on the power of a change to further organizational goals, rather than simply allowing them to react to feedback on whether participants enjoyed a particular program. For Beth Am Israel, the relevant question for evaluation is whether a change fosters a *Shabbat*-centered community. A mark of the success of the Beit Midrash experiment, for example, was a survey in which families who participated in the program identified its most important aspect as the sense of belonging to a community.

CONCLUSION

While many challenges remain for Beth Am Israel, the insights gained from its small-scale experiments have resulted in a broader, systemic perspective. The congregation now strives to design its governance structure, curriculum, scheduling, staff development, and even its architecture so as to achieve a common goal. Lay and professional leadership share a vocabulary and perspective on institutional change that reflects an understanding that the congregation is a living organism that is strengthened when it operates as an integrated whole. Based upon Beth Am Israel's experience, a systems approach is a promising tool for congregations seeking to move beyond disjointed efforts at change and pursue a more integrated model of Jewish religious community.

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Rabbi Marc Margolius has been spiritual leader of Congregation Beth Am Israel, Penn Valley, PA, since 1989. He is a graduate of Yale Law School and the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College.

A Community-Based Supplementary High School Program: The Peninsula Havurah High

NADAV CAINE AND NECHAMA TAMLER

In this article, we reflect on our experiences over the past few years with the Peninsula Havurah High (PHH), a community-based supplementary high school serving approximately 190 teens in grades 9–12 in the heart of the Silicon Valley. While we cannot possibly be comprehensive, we offer some observations on the tensions inherent in creating and maintaining a school serving teens from diverse synagogues.

The PHH began four years ago as a collaborative project of two synagogues in the Palo Alto area of California (a 2000 family Reform congregation and a 600 family Conservative congregation) and the Bureau of Jewish Education, which provides direct educational programs as well as support services and resources for educators.

Today, we are no longer a start-up but moving into a period of stabilization. The first few years were tumultuous. We had three directors in four years, we saw the complete turnover of rabbinic personnel in the largest of our synagogue partners, and two additional synagogues came on board. We also professionalized our governance structure, established a core faculty, and underwent a thorough outside evaluation by JESNA. While there remain issues to be resolved, we have learned some important lessons from our experiences.

COLLABORATION

Partners understand that in the interest of bringing together a critical mass of teens for weekly learning and socializing, they must be willing to trade off some benefits of running their own programs. Nevertheless, within the organizational processes of planning and policy-making, tensions invariably arise. The collaborating partners experience the contradiction of simultaneously wearing their *institutional hats* (whereby they represent their institution in the partnership) and their *community hats* (whereby the school's community-building goals are primary).

Confirmation is one example of this dilemma. How can

the school protect the confirmation program of the Reform synagogue, providing the rabbis of that congregation the time they need with their students, without hindering the rest of the program? Beyond time allocation, the issue is complicated by the concern that a strong confirmation program may adversely affect retention in the 11th grade (since confirmed teens feel they're "done"). Should the confirmation program of one partner, already compromised by time given to school-wide programming, be diluted further?

Another problem is the perception that when the community high school meets at a synagogue with better facilities, partners are sacrificing their member loyalty and connection to their own synagogue. It seems that they are "losing" the parents in order to better serve the teens.

In the community model, each partner will occasionally ask the tough questions: Are we still doing right by our own denomination, our synagogue's needs, and our goals for our teens? On the other hand, would shifting the balance compromise our shared goal of imbuing our teens with the comfort they will need in a trans-denominational setting to take on leadership roles in the college Hillel and beyond?

These tensions may well be irresolvable. They cannot, however, be ignored. We have learned that time must be set aside for listening to each others' needs and concerns in order to turn self-interest into enlightened self-interest.

Before opening our fourth school year, PHH held a Vision Retreat, using an outside facilitator, to focus on areas of success and tension and to revisit our original founding principles. The good will generated at the retreat renewed support for the shared vision of the PHH and engendered a feeling of cooperation and willingness to work with subcommittees addressing specific issues.

The Vision Retreat, along with a thorough formative evaluation conducted by JESNA, helped us formalize some of

the implicit understandings that partner institutions had developed during the initial “experimental” phase of the collaboration. It proved to be particularly important for each partner to articulate, for themselves and for the partnering synagogues, the gains and losses their institutions associated with the collaboration.

Our next step will be to add “at-large” members to our Partners Council. These members will represent the community, rather than individual partners. Such independent voices may free the partners to represent their own institutional issues more often. They will ensure that the Council continues to consider the integrity and long-term health of the program as a whole.

PROGRAMMING

Just as tensions arise when balancing partner and communal needs the great challenge of programming a community school is the tension of *variety versus vision*. We knew our mission was general enough to accommodate a wide spectrum of student needs and backgrounds, as well as the denominational differences. We also knew better, however, than to succumb to the “being-all-things-to-all-people” syndrome.

Synagogue education directors are used to requests for additions to their programs, such as Israel-advocacy programming, advanced Hebrew classes, community service options, traditional text study, arts and music options, and so on. They are used to explaining that their schools cannot do everything. We have seen, however, that in a community school, if one institutional partner feels that it has given up its own program, it wants to be compensated by offering classes that may not fit the evolving vision of this new program.

The principal’s job is to protect the “character” of the school. For community high schools to attract and retain teens, they must maintain authenticity; they must stand for something and thus have a *vision* even if this means not offering everything that every partnering congregation requests. Teens who continue to attend a Hebrew high school often do so because they perceive it as representing authenticity in contrast to the larger consumer culture, which fawningly caters to their wishes without standing for anything.

In our school, we have chosen to model adult-level interaction with the Jewish tradition by holding programming up to the model of “the step before college” instead of the “the step after 8th grade.” Teens judge everything, including Jewish programming, not by what it says, but by what it does. We make sure our classes and retreats do not meet in settings obviously meant for children. Our 9th grade curriculum includes the study of classical texts, from commentary on *Genesis*, to the sources of Milton Steinberg’s *As a Driven Leaf*, to *Kabbalistic* texts. Our electives include a number of comparative religion courses that prepare students for late-night discussions in a typically diverse college dormitory. We are developing a drama elective, not just to have the kids put on a show, but rather to model an adult actors’ workshop, appropriate for students who are often starring in complex high school productions. And in general, we encourage teachers to model a genuine adult enthusiasm and interaction with Jewish sources. They thereby *show* rather than *tell* their love of learning; they are mentors and role models, rather than merely conveyers of information.

Our focus does limit our ability to respond to the programmatic suggestions of the synagogue partners. It also forces us to discount some options for attracting kids to school on a short-term basis with programs that do not fit into our model. If the school attracts teens by claiming to be focused on “adult Jewish life,” but then contradicts itself in its community service class by having the teens make clay *hanukiot* to give to the Jewish Home for Elders, teens will quickly notice the disconnect. If the program assures 11th and 12th graders, “If you come back, we won’t waste your time,” it cannot then offer them a class in Jewish cooking. In that case, the teacher ought not be surprised that teens prioritize working on an A.P. History paper or reading *Siddhartha* than on program attendance, even when the teens themselves had begged for the “fun cooking class.” We work hard to avoid mixed messages.

COMMUNITY SUPPORT AND RELATIONSHIPS

During its first few years, the PHH did not create a visible community presence; the weekly successes of the school did not travel beyond the school site. There were members of the local regional Federation Council who were unaware of our school, and even those who were aware of it did not know precisely what it was. Although our princi-

pal made it a priority to visit with each rabbi and educator at the four partnering congregations, the PHH did not permeate the consciousness of those synagogues, remaining more or less invisible except to the families with teens attending the program.

One might wonder why the PHH remained such a well-kept secret for so many years.

When the school opened, it received a grant from a Supporting Foundation of the Jewish Community Endowment Fund through the BJE, but the local Federation Council was not asked for its input or financial support. Garnering local federation support was not on the list of priorities, since the school had a generous grant, and there were plenty of other things that needed to happen to ensure a successful program. Thus, the local Federation Council and Allocations Committee were not involved in the initial planning phases of the PHH, nor were they instrumental in securing funding from the Federation's Endowment Fund due to the internal structure by which the federation handles endowment matters. The local council therefore had no ownership of the program's success.

The synagogues also were not responsible for general and financial support; they were responsible for providing the site and rabbis to teach. They were not responsible for any community outreach to unaffiliated teens, or to help find potential funders.

Complicating matters, the PHH mostly serves teens whose parents are members of synagogues. In this federation community, there is a tension between funding non-syna-

gogue programs and providing material supports to synagogues to serve their own members. This causes reluctance to support programs perceived as exclusively serving synagogue memberships.

A final factor was turnover: The head rabbi at the largest synagogue and his colleagues (educator rabbi and associate rabbi), who were key players at the inception of the school, had all moved on. Their replacements were asked to embrace a vision they had not helped to create.

For all of these reasons, we have extensive work ahead of us as we deepen our relationships with the Federation Council and the synagogues in order to build broader support for the Peninsula Hebrew High. This year we began by inviting members of the Council to come to school one night for an interactive text learning session. After a lively evening of *chevruta* learning and *beit-midrash* buzz, the adults understood that they had participated in something the teens experience weekly – that is, engaging in stimulating and intellectually challenging Jewish conversations.

Nadav Caine is Principal of the Peninsula Havurah High and a doctoral candidate in Modern Jewish Thought at Stanford University. He holds a Bachelor's from Princeton University and Master's from Harvard University in Religious Thought.

Nechama Tamler received her undergraduate degree in humanities from U.C. Berkeley and earned an M.A. in Marriage, Family and Child Counseling. She spent a year as a Jerusalem Fellow before joining the staff of the Bureau of Jewish Education in San Francisco as the Director of the Teen Initiative four years ago.

Kesher Community Hebrew School/After School

LINDA ECHT AND AVIVA RICHMAN

Kesher Community Hebrew School/After School was founded in 1992 with the idea of combining quality after-school care with the finest Hebrew and Jewish education. It began as a means to address both the needs of working parents and their desire for strong Jewish education and community. Ten years later, Kesher's reputation for strong curriculum and

child care is well established, and it now has a waiting list as long as its list of current families.

Kesher, Hebrew for "connection," is a program that combines K-8 after-school child care with Jewish learning. In a joy-filled, nurturing environment, the program provides the Jewish knowledge, sense of community, and

vitality of spirit that lay the foundation for the formation of proud, educated Jews. In an atmosphere of respect and camaraderie, children and their families come to value Jewish learning as a process unfolding throughout their lives.

DIVERSITY AND KAVOD

Currently Keshet has families from seven different towns. Approximately 57% of Keshet families are affiliated with area congregations and *chavurot*, while 43% are unaffiliated. Among the families there is a wide range in levels of observance. Keshet's inclusive policy and attitude have attracted a number of families who, for various reasons (e.g., being mixed-faith or same-sex parents), have felt dissatisfied or unwelcome elsewhere in the Jewish and secular communities.

The program recognizes the salience of a family's need to be part of a community, particularly a Jewish community, and therefore Keshet emphasizes community building. As a foundation of its community, Keshet emphasizes *kavod* (respect) in all aspects of life: respect for oneself, for others, and for shared environment and space.

At the beginning of each year, every group of children in Keshet creates a *brit* (contract or agreement) centered on *kavod*, serving as a guide steeped in Jewish values to support what they learn and help them navigate together as a Jewish community. The children are also recognized and acknowledged by their teachers and their peers for performing "acts of *kavod*." *Kavod* is the cornerstone at Keshet from which the curriculum is built.

COMMUNITY OF TEACHERS

The leadership of Keshet is passionate and committed to the Jewish education of all of its constituents, including the *tsevet* (staff). The emphasis that Keshet puts on creating a learning community among its *tsevet* is critical to the success of creating a larger Keshet community.

Keshet leadership believes that its teachers and administrators should be learning and growing both professionally and Jewishly. They also believe that teachers should be very connected to the children and their families' lives. Most of the teachers work at least 24 hours a week, which gives them time to meet with education directors,

discuss individual students, plan and study, and play with the kids before structured learning time. This also allows for regular staff meetings to discuss and reflect upon curriculum and program structure.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

Keshet's philosophy of curriculum and instruction is learner-centered. This leads to a flexible approach, allowing for a range of modes through which one can learn, accommodating a variety of abilities in one classroom, and encouraging the reflection of teacher interests and strengths through the curriculum.

We enact the Judaica curriculum in much the same way as the Rabbis studied the *Torah*, each time discovering new ideas and experiences with an ever-growing depth. For us it is not only the *Torah*, but the entirety of Jewish tradition that beckons us to "turn and turn." In order to provide these turns, we have created a three-year cycle, each year setting the course for a different journey through the same Jewish text. Our cycle includes a year that focuses on Jewish values and ethics, a year that focuses on Jewish history, and a year that focuses on the Jewish calendar. Over the course of three years, Keshet students will encounter certain core ideas at different developmental levels. With each encounter, they are able to glean something new and relevant to their lives.

Keshet's program for teaching Hebrew language is based on the proficiency approach. Essential to this approach is that the language becomes relevant to the learners. This learner-centered method emphasizes the ability to function in the language. Students are divided into groups that are based on proficiency and developmental readiness. Unit themes are designed to be relevant to the kids' lives, such as Keshet environment, family, home, holidays, and Israel. The students improve their proficiency levels in all the skill areas: reading, writing, speaking, listening, and grammar. Students at all levels work with the same themes at the same time, creating a cohesive environment.

THE KESHER MODEL

We believe that creating a warm learning environment based on Jewish values is critical to the foundation of Jewish learning. By taking a holistic view of Jewish edu-

cation and creating a diverse learning community, Keshet acknowledges the changing demographics of America's Jewish families while helping children, families, and teachers understand that we each have a place in Jewish history and that we are responsible for our Jewish future. Keshet is grateful to the Covenant Foundation for recognizing the significance of its pioneering new method of teaching Hebrew and Judaica in an informal setting.

Linda Echt is the Founding Director of Keshet. She has a Master's Degree of Administration & Education from Lesley College.

Aviva Richman is the Associate Director of Keshet. She has a Master's Degree in Education in Creative Arts in Learning from Lesley College.

Editor's Suggested Discussion Guide:

- Morton & Kudan list indicators of a congregation that "recognizes the valued role of the educator."
 - To what extent does your congregation meet their criteria? Which of these criteria seem "unthinkable" in your congregation, and why? What would need to change in your congregation in order to institute these changes? What, if anything, do you think this says about the rabbi-educator partnership in your synagogue?
 - Are you convinced by their thesis that the relationship between the rabbi and the educator plays a crucial role in embodying the role of Jewish education within the synagogue?
 - To what extent is the successful rabbi-educator partnership a function of specific personalities, and to what extent is it a matter of role delineation and structural factors?
- Weissman & Margolius caution against rushing to "inadequate and simplistic" conclusions, endorsing

"a process of reflection, experimentation and alignment." What were the elements in the process of change in their synagogue? Do you believe the process can tend to be of equal importance to the product in effecting transformative change?

- Unlike the after-school program described by Echt & Richman, which operates outside of any institution or denomination, the Havurah High described by Caine & Tamler operates cooperatively with various institutional partners. What are the challenges and strengths of each of these models? Will they tend to serve different constituencies? What strategies are necessary for success with each model?
- All four of these cases push us to think beyond categories and divisions toward integrated visions of Jewish education that forge connections and blur boundaries. In your context, what are the new ways you could be thinking about your institutions, your professionals, and your constituents?

INTRODUCTION BY THE EDITOR

In his article on federation funding of congregational and supplementary schools, Steven Kraus provides an overview of the financing of part-time Jewish education, noting recent developments and emerging trends. His findings indicate an increase in federation funding of congregational and communal supplementary schools. He highlights some communities in which federations have provided funding for supplementary schools through funding formulas or allocations linked to school improvement initiatives. This survey of the field will provide context for federations in the process of rethinking their stance on the funding of congregational and communal part-time education.

Federation Funding of Congregational/Supplementary Schools

STEVEN KRAUS

As Jack Wertheimer asserts in his article on Jewish education in the United States (1999), “The 1990s saw a resurgence of interest in reviving and even recreating supplementary education.... Suddenly, the supplementary-school system – long regarded as the most pedestrian, if not hopeless, setting for Jewish education – became ‘hot,’ as Jewish educators rushed to reconceive the entire enterprise in bold, if experimental, terms.”¹

Wertheimer posits several reasons for this turnabout. First, few educators were prepared to scrap the largest school system in the field of Jewish education. The fact that the majority of Jewish children continue to enroll in supplementary schools, and not day schools, made it unrealistic to give up on this form of education. Second, a reexamination of the entire system prompted a reconsideration of basic issues.² Steven Cohen’s contention that “no Jewish education is the least effective, and that a lot of Jewish education helps Jewish identity a *lot*, and a little Jewish education helps Jewish identity a *little*,”³ prompted Donald Feinstein and Barry Shrage, two leading federation professionals, to warn against “writ(ing) off the great middle group of Jewish children who get a ‘limited Jewish education.’”⁴ Third, some educators

argued for a new approach to this type of Jewish education – creating a different set of goals that would nurture a positive attachment to Judaism and Jewish peoplehood, rather than focusing primarily on the transmission of information and the development of skills.⁵ The argument was that this approach would lead to the results actually desired from supplementary school education.

HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

The congregational/supplementary school system is a multi-million dollar endeavor that historically has suffered from insufficient financial resources.⁶ The bulk of financing has come from tuition fees paid by parents and the indirect taxation of all congregational members to cover the costs of the schools. One policy question with which the Jewish community has wrestled over the decades has been whether the larger community should finance Jewish education. A study of the Boston Jewish community in 1975 concluded that “while of great importance to respondents... (the) sponsorship (of Jewish education) may be seen as a synagogal rather than a... federation or communal function.”⁷

Nevertheless, federations have a history of allocating

¹ Jack Wertheimer, “Jewish Education in the United States,” *American Jewish Year Book* (1999): 62.

² Wertheimer, 62.

³ Wertheimer, 62.

⁴ Wertheimer, 63.

⁵ Wertheimer, 64.

⁶ Wertheimer argues that, based on an estimate of \$1,500 per student to deliver a supplementary school education, the system expends \$750 million per year. Wertheimer, “Talking Dollars and Sense About Jewish Education,” *The AVI CHAI Foundation* (2001): 4.

⁷ Wertheimer, “Jewish Education,” 27.

FEDERATION ALLOCATIONS FOR CONGREGATIONAL/SUPPLEMENTARY SCHOOLS AND DAY SCHOOLS

Year	Federation Allocations For Cong/Supp Schools	Cong/Supp School Allocation as % of Total Jewish Ed. Allocation	Cong/Supp School Allocation as % of Total Local Allocation	Federation Allocations For Day Schools	Day School Allocation as % of Total Jewish Ed. Allocation	Day School Allocation as % of Total Local Allocation
1996	\$4,466,000	7.1%	1.7%	\$26,762,000	42.4%	10.3%
1997	\$5,083,000	7.9%	2.0%	\$27,457,000	42.4%	10.7%
1998	\$6,204,000	8.7%	2.2%	\$34,836,000	48.9%	12.5%

funds for Jewish education. In 1998, between 3%–55.8%, with a median of 27.5%, of total local allocations went to Jewish education. The lion’s share of that amount (between 3%–27.5%, with a median of 10.25%) went to central agencies for Jewish education, the local organizations established to support Jewish education on the community level. A portion of the money did make its way into the schools, as well. In earlier years, federations primarily supported communal schools, often the local *Talmud Torah*. But, as the number of communal schools decreased and the number of congregational schools increased, the question of federation involvement became far more complicated. The sheer immensity of the costs and the potential pitfalls of having to negotiate ideological and denominational issues had to be confronted.

The proliferation of day schools helped to complicate the debate about federation funding for Jewish education. Initially there was strong opposition to communal support for day schools on the grounds that they served only a narrow segment of the population and the interests of particular denominations, rather than the total community. And even day school advocates conceded that if federations wanted to make a serious dent in day school costs by assuming responsibility for half their budgets, the entire domestic spending of the federated system would have to go solely to fund Jewish education, a completely unrealistic option.⁸

RECENT DEVELOPMENTS

So, where are we today? The table above compares fed-

eration allocations for congregational/supplementary schools and day schools for the years 1996-98.⁹

The table illustrates the ratio of allocations to congregational/supplementary schools and day schools. Day schools received five to six times the share of federation funding that congregational/communal supplementary schools received in 1996–98. It is important to keep several things in mind when interpreting these figures. More than 66% of students who are currently enrolled in Jewish education are in congregational or communal supplementary schools. Although enrollment in day schools is much lower, annual per capita costs for day school education are nearly seven times supplementary school costs. It is estimated that the average annual cost of a day school education is \$10,000 per student compared to \$1,500 per supplementary school student.¹⁰

Furthermore, the table above only reports funding to schools provided through the federation allocation system. Day schools, in particular, also receive significant amounts of communal funding from other sources (e.g. restricted funds and endowments). In addition, although data for years later than 1998 are not available, it is likely that the level of allocations to day schools in recent years is even higher than listed in the table above.

EMERGING TRENDS IN FEDERATION ALLOCATIONS TO CONGREGATIONAL SUPPLEMENTARY EDUCATION

Currently, there is some evidence that federations are beginning to re-examine and modify their approaches to

⁸ Wertheimer, “Jewish Education,” 29.

⁹ Based on allocations reports published by the Council for Jewish Federations from 1996-1999.

¹⁰ Wertheimer, “Talking Dollars and Sense,” 3-4.

funding congregational supplementary education. The subsidization of congregational schools by federations signals a significant change in federation-synagogue relations.

JESNA began to update information about federation allocations to congregational supplementary schools by sending an email query to directors of central agencies for Jewish education during the summer of 2001. The directors were asked to provide information about funding that was distributed through the central agencies as well financial support going directly to the schools. Thirty-one of the 66 central agency directors who are members of the Association of Directors of Central Agencies (ADCA) responded to the query.¹¹

Although the data gathered from the central agency directors is preliminary and incomplete, several noteworthy trends emerged that merit attention:

- Community schools (compared to congregational schools) continue to receive higher levels of financial support from the federations.
- Most communities that fund congregational schools seek to link allocations to factors that will positively influence the quality of education (e.g., contact hours for students, professional development for teachers, written curricula) in addition to any per capita allotments. In a few communities, funding is also provided to the congregations for scholarships.
- Many communities offer special grants to spur development in designated areas (e.g., creating and upgrading family education programs, use of technology).
- Several communities are funding “school improvement initiatives” to support transformational change in congregational schools. Such initiatives are organized on the local level (e.g., Philadelphia’s Designated Schools Initiative or Hartford’s *La’atid* Initiative) while others are national (e.g., the Experiment in Congregational Education or Synagogue 2000).

Federation Allocations to Congregational Schools

Central agencies administer the distribution of communal funding to congregational supplementary schools in 14 of the 31 responding communities. The total allocations to congregational schools in these communities

range from \$300 to \$700,000. The ranges vary greatly, even when broken down by community size. Criteria for determining the allocations include:

- Meeting community standards for minimum number of hours of instruction per week (e.g. six hours/week)
- Formulas based on teacher salaries and number of students
- Formulas based on number of students who receive tuition assistance
- School enrollment and grade levels served
- Money spent by schools on school programming
- Grants through RFPs

Congregational supplementary schools receive funding directly (without central agency involvement) in 17 of the 31 responding communities. Mechanisms for providing financial support to congregational supplementary school in these communities include:

- Grants through RFPs
- Grants to support school improvement/change initiatives
- Formulas based on teacher salary and number of students
- Support for technology initiatives
- Funding for family educators
- Support for special education programs
- Initiatives directed toward specific geographic areas

Scholarship Support for Congregational Schools

Two communities, Philadelphia and Detroit, provide funds ear-marked for scholarship assistance to each school in the community as part of their annual allocations to supplementary schools. Both of these programs began within the past five years. In Philadelphia, the amount is dependent on the school enrollment in the previous year and the range of assistance allocated is between \$300 and \$5,000 per school. Detroit also uses a formula that is based on need and is related to synagogue dues. This year Detroit is disbursing \$500,000 for this program.

¹¹ Based on results from an email survey of the Association of Directors of Central Agencies conducted by Steven Kraus of JESNA, July 2001.

Funding Linked to School Improvement Initiatives

Four communities, Los Angeles, Broward County, San Francisco, and Columbus, have created funding models that seek to maximize contact hours, encourage professional development, and promote school improvement.

- *Los Angeles, CA.* The BJE of Los Angeles has been allocating funds to qualifying K–12 supplementary schools on a per-pupil basis for over 40 years. To qualify, schools must meet a variety of institutional requirements and the students must enroll for the equivalent of six hours per week. Schools enrolling approximately 5,000 of the 14,000 supplementary school students in Los Angeles qualify. Recognizing that continuing Jewish educational involvement in the high school years is vital and that supplementary secondary schools rarely meet for six hours weekly, a per pupil subsidy was also established for those studying fewer than six hours per week. In 1994, the allocation system was expanded beyond per-capita grants to include program grants for implementing activities recommended through a newly initiated school accreditation process. Schools can receive grants ranging from \$3,750 to \$7,500 to implement school improvement initiatives that are recommended through the accreditation process. Los Angeles' allocation process achieves several programmatic goals, such as increasing the number of hours of instruction per week and encouraging improvement through the accreditation-related grants.
- *Broward County, FL.* Broward County's Synagogue School Funding program has two requirements: 1) the educational director, or a designated synagogue professional, must attend the monthly meeting of the Council of Education Directors; and 2) teachers in the schools must attend professional growth workshops equal to twice the number of hours/week they teach, up to a maximum of eight hours. Teachers are given an hourly stipend, beginning with the third hour of professional growth. The balance of the funding allocated through a formula that takes into account the number of hours of instruction and the number of students in each school. In addition, schools receive an additional \$125 for each licensed teacher they hire. Broward County's process, which has been in place for more than 12 years, ensures the participation of teachers and principals in ongoing professional growth opportunities.
- *San Francisco, CA.* San Francisco allocates approximately \$150,000 to its 23 congregations in two ways: 1)

all schools that meet basic criteria (or minimum standards) may apply for school improvement funds based on student enrollment and the number of hours of instruction. A smaller sum of money is available for innovation grants.

- *Columbus, OH.* Columbus' Jewish Federation implemented an allocation system in 2001 that establishes minimum standards and seeks to foster innovation. In order to receive federation funding for students in grades K–12 congregations must meet the following standards:
 - There must be a responsible lay structure that meets regularly to establish policies and procedures.
 - There must be a clear written statement of educational goals and objectives for the school program.
 - Faculty must use written curricula that include learning objectives, subjects, texts, and resources. There must be a formal process to review curriculum.
 - The school must have a paid professional leader.
 - There must be adequate facilities, equipment, and supplies for educational programming.
 - The school must have a formal process, outlined in writing, for the assessment of student progress.
 - The institution must have a written Professional Development Plan for all staff that is approved by the Education Committee. This should include a process for each member of the staff.
 - Classes must meet for at least six hours per week.
 - The school must have a written student attendance policy.
 - The institution must have a written statement of required and desired qualifications for teachers.
 - The school should adhere to a consistent and appropriate salary scale for teachers and aides in writing.
 - The school must provide regular reporting to Federation, as requested.
 - The congregation and school must regularly acknowledge Federation in material promoting the school and other appropriate publications.

Once schools meet these eligibility standards, potential funding is divided into two pools. First, schools receive allocations based on a formula that factors in the number of students and the hours of instruction. Second, incentive grants are available for projects to enhance the quality of the educational programs.

CONCLUSION

Congregational supplementary schools have traditionally received a minimal percentage of federation allocations, both in absolute terms and compared to allocations to day schools. However, some evidence is beginning to emerge that federations are increasing their financial support to congregational schools. This signals the community's renewed interest in congregational supplementary education as well as new thinking about ways to

improve the quality of this form of Jewish education. Additional research will be needed to document the effects of linking standards and professional development to the allocation process, providing scholarships for needy families and providing incentive grants for improvement and programming.

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Editor's Suggested Discussion Guide:

- Kraus presents a variety of models currently used by federations to provide funding for part-time Jewish education in their communities. Some are aimed at increasing access to Jewish education, while others are directed to improving the quality of that education. Should communal funding be contingent on cri-

teria related to educational quality? What criteria would you choose?

- Shrage writes that "any serious effort to engage the federation in the work of educational change and Jewish continuity would...require a serious working collaboration with congregations. What role could funding play in building this partnership?"

INTRODUCTION BY THE EDITOR

In 1994, Dr. Lidsky was honored by the CFJE and the Jewish Federation of Metropolitan Chicago with the Alexander M. Dushkin Distinguished Educator Award. Anne was recently recognized when she was chosen from hundreds of candidates as one of the 1998 recipients of the Covenant Foundation Award, the first person in Illinois to be awarded this prestigious recognition. Designed to identify and encourage outstanding Jewish educators in North America, the Covenant Foundation is centered in New York and was established by the Crown Family Foundation in partnership with JESNA.

An Interview with Dr. Anne Lidsky, a 1998 Recipient of the Covenant Foundation Award

Anne, what do you see as your greatest achievements in the area of congregational education?

I believe I have helped to create a school where children develop a sense of pride and love for their Judaism and bring that passion home to their families. We have a religious school where children feel at home, connected to and part of the community. There is a “buzz” in the classrooms filled with the laughter and chatter of happy voices, whether that be in the kindergarten class or in our Confirmation program.

Rather than focus on one fabulous program as a “great achievement,” it is this sense of energy and spirit that one feels amongst the staff, within the circle of parents, in the sanctuary filled with children, or within the typical classroom. Families love being in our school, and solid Jewish memories are being established.

What are some key factors contributing to effective congregational education?

The support system for the school needs to be strong, from clergy to faculty, from lay involvement to custodial team. Parents need to see themselves as partners with synagogue staff in our efforts to educate their children. They therefore need every opportunity to learn and grow Jewishly as their children blossom in school.

Congregational education can no longer be seen solely as formal classroom education during school hours. Instead, *Shabbatonim*, retreats, youth group activities, and Israel experiences are all facets of congregational education.

If you were to offer advice to congregational leaders about strategies that can have a great impact on their congregational education, what would you tell them?

It is healthy for children to see that adults in their synagogue are also active in congregational life. Encourage an increased parent interest and participation in your programming.

The rabbi should be a presence in the building on Sunday mornings, interacting with the students.

Take time to recognize and compliment the successes of your faculty. It is all too easy to complain about an oversight, yet easy to forget a simple compliment like, “Job well done!”

Board members need to be as interested in their schools as they are in the building structure and budget. They need to attend programs even when their own children have graduated and moved on.

How do you define success for your congregation’s educational program?

I think every educator shares a similar image of the “successful graduate” of a synagogue school. That child would possess a solid foundation of knowledge about God, *Torah*, and Israel, having absorbed the key aspects of a well-constructed curriculum. That same graduate would love Judaism with soul and spirit, imbued with pride and self-worth as a Jew. The successful graduate would live life according to *derech eretz*, truly understanding the concept

of being a *mensch* and striving to be one. And last, the graduates we hope to produce would feel a personal connection to God, even exploring their disappointments and conflicts, understanding that this sacred relationship will continue to change as they mature.

Teachers, too, need support from the educators so that they can grow, both professionally and personally. Teachers need to understand that they often are the central Jewish role models for their students and that the spirit with which they teach is often more important than the facts behind the subject matter. Their behaviors and the way they treat children are central to successful congregational education. If a teacher is passionate about Judaism, that passion will be contagious to the students.

The school culture must allow for every student to be a “star.” No matter what academic or social ability he or she possesses, every child must feel acceptance and connectedness – a sense of home and belonging. At the same time, parents must feel that the synagogue is where they want to be as a family unit.

A congregation’s education program must be seen as part of the larger center for learning in the synagogue. Adult education, intergenerational programming, informal youth programming, social action and family education go hand-in-hand with religious school education – all are parts of the large picture of success.

What are your dreams for the future of your congregation’s educational program?

My dreams involve enough physical space, financial support, and qualified personnel to plan, create, and then facilitate a significant number of interactive programs. I see yearly weekend retreats for each class from 4th through 10th grades. Increased family and parent education programs are a must, so that children are not being educated in a vacuum, and parents are given every opportunity to become their children’s teachers.

Dr. Anne Lidsky has been the Director of Education at Temple Jeremiah, Northfield, IL, for the past 21 years. Anne has become known in the Chicago area Jewish community through her leadership as a workshop facilitator for the Community Foundation for Jewish Education and for Temple Sisterhoods, both in and out of the Midwest region. Highly regarded for powerful workshops on spirituality and God, Anne has touched the hearts of children and adults alike. Dr. Lidsky has also been instrumental in creating a seminar series for pre-marrieds for the Jewish community in the Chicago area.

Anne is a licensed clinical psychologist, receiving her Ph.D. from Northwestern University. For the past 19 years, she has been a therapeutic support group leader for the Les Turner ALS Foundation in Skokie, IL, an internationally recognized foundation focusing on Lou Gehrig’s Disease.

Editor’s Suggested Discussion Guide:

- What are your congregational school’s greatest achievements?

- How do you define success for your educational program?

- What do you see as key factors contributing to effective congregational education?

Additional articles on this same topic can be found in the March 2002 edition of *Sh'ma*.

Leading educators share theoretical ideas and best practices in a special issue of *Sh'ma: A Journal of Jewish Responsibility* (March 2002) devoted to rethinking the Congregational Religious School. Included are essays: Isa Aron, Sara Lee and Robert Weinberg on Redesigning the Religious school with a response by David Schoem, Sharon Feiman-Nemser on training teachers, Cherie Koller-Fox on creating healthy school environments; and Innovative Models for enhancing small schools and holiday celebrations.

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