

(QRIS) have been implemented in 44 states and communities nationwide as of 2017.<sup>26</sup> Most QRIS are voluntary. Each QRIS provides technical assistance to individual participating programs to improve their quality along a set of quality indicators which are established by the state or community (there are often different sets of quality indicators for center-based and home-based programs); some quality indicators focus on administrative features of a program and some on the physical or interactive features of a program. The “rating” part of a QRIS is oriented toward consumer education. Advertising the quality rating of an ECE program can help families evaluate the quality of the program against others in the same geographic area or across the state, similar to how a star rating system has helped consumers compare hotels. Participating in a QRIS thus has the dual benefit of supporting quality improvement within an ECE program and helping to advertise the program’s quality to potential new families. **A clear recommendation for Jewish ECE aiming to reach Jewish families (especially those not currently Jewishly engaged) looking for high-quality care is to participate in state or local quality improvement activities through local CCR&Rs or state QRIS.**

Some Jewish directors said that they specifically choose not to participate in state or local quality improvement initiatives because they felt that the level of quality offered by their schools exceeded the level of quality measured by these efforts. This disconnect reveals **a need for observational measures of quality that accurately reflect the indicators of quality prevalent in Jewish ECE programs.** The Jewish ECE programs that we studied emphasized children’s social-emotional growth and development, employed teachers with diverse educational backgrounds, and offered flexibility in lesson planning so that teachers could respond to the interests of the children. Directors felt that these aspects of quality are not reflected in traditional measures of ECE quality, which focus more on the classroom’s structural features and teacher-child interactions. Previous research has developed a list of competencies that describe what excellence in Jewish ECE looks like.<sup>27</sup> **If programs choose to forego participation in local or statewide quality initiatives, future measurement development should translate the standards of excellence for Jewish ECE developed by the Rose Community Foundation into observational and survey measures that accurately capture the indicators of quality that are important to Jewish ECE programs (and consumers) for ongoing monitoring and reporting purposes.**<sup>28</sup>

## Implications for Future Research

This study represents the first rigorous investigation of Jewish engagement among families with young children, and the role of Jewish ECE in changing the nature of Jewish engagement among families with young children. A major contribution of the CASJE ECE Project is the development of a parent survey that gathers information about an expanded conceptualization of Jewish engagement among families with young children. While this study fills several gaps from previous investigations of Jewish

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<sup>26</sup> The Build Initiative & Child Trends. (2017). *A Catalog and Comparison of Quality Initiatives* [Data System]. Retrieved from <http://qualitycompendium.org/> on December 25, 2019.

<sup>27</sup> Rose Community Foundation (2017). *Standards of Excellence for Jewish Community Centers and Synagogues with Early Childhood Education Centers*. See <https://rcfdenver.org/blog/standards-excellence-jewish-community-centers-synagogues-early-childhood-education-centers/>

<sup>28</sup> Since the completion of the CASJE ECE Study in December 2018, there have been further advancements in developing assessment tools for Jewish ECE in Pittsburgh, PA, and a commitment by JCCA/URJ to drive work in this area forward.

engagement among families with young children, several gaps remain. In this section, we consider both the contributions of the present study, as well as remaining gaps for future research to address.

### Contributions of the Present Study to Understanding of Jewish Engagement Among Families with Young Jewish Children and the Role of Jewish ECE in Jewish Engagement

The CASJE ECE Project represents a major advancement in the applied study of Jewish ECE and Jewish engagement among families with young children. Through rigorous research techniques and a multi-pronged approach to addressing three central research questions, the study accomplished the following:

- Provided a comprehensive, detailed, and multifaceted definition of Jewish engagement for contemporary<sup>29</sup> families with young children based on a targeted literature review, comprehensive content analysis of extant survey items, and numerous key informant interviews with Jewish professionals and parents;
- Developed new survey items and modified/adapted existing survey items to measure this comprehensive and multifaceted definition of Jewish engagement using three rounds of cognitive interviewing methodology that confirmed items were working well and were understood by survey respondents;
- Simultaneously fielded an online parent survey to families with young, Jewish children ages birth to five in three communities across the country that assessed ECE choices and the expanded definition and measurement of Jewish engagement;
- Intentionally targeted young families who are not affiliated with Jewish institutions, including Jewish ECE, to participate in the online parent survey and successfully gained their participation;
- Used sophisticated analytic techniques (e.g., propensity score matching, latent transition analysis) to rule out many confounds of the effects of Jewish ECE on changes in profiles of Jewish engagement from pre-birth to time of survey administration;
- Conducted comprehensive scans of community characteristics that can affect the enrollment and experiences of families in Jewish ECE in three target communities; and
- Highlighted ways in which Jewish ECE programs in three targeted communities are attempting to address the needs of contemporary families with young, Jewish children for “finding meaning” in Jewish life and for community-building in effective ways.

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<sup>29</sup> We took into account the changing context of American Jewish families, including patterns of later marriage and family formation, greater rates of intermarriage, and declining involvement in organized religion across all faiths. For more detail, see Schwartz, H., Halle, T., Cook, M., & Rosen, M. (2019). *Defining and Measuring Jewish Engagement among Families with Young Children*. Washington, DC: Consortium for Applied Studies in Jewish Education.

In addition to the contributions of the rigorous research methods utilized for this project, the study's findings also make significant contributions to the field.

- Findings from the parent survey indicate that **parents who choose Jewish ECE, compared to their peers who choose another type of ECE, are less likely to consider cost, location, hours of operation, and quality of the program** (i.e., the most common reasons for choosing ECE in the general population) as very important reasons for choosing an ECE program and *more* likely to consider the warmth of the staff, meeting other families with Jewish children and providing a Jewish education for their child as important reasons for choosing ECE. As noted in the section above, there are clear practice implications for these findings. **Jewish ECE programs and other Jewish communal organizations need to address issues of cost, location, hours of operation, and quality of Jewish ECE programs in order to attract Jewish families that do not already have Jewish educational choices as a priority in choosing an early childhood program.**
- The case studies and parent survey that were conducted as part of this project **demonstrate an increase in Jewish engagement following the enrollment of children in Jewish ECE.** Jewish ECE directors interviewed as part of the case studies reported that Jewish ECE families increased their Jewish engagement through taking on more *Shabbat* practices and by increasing their institutional attachment (e.g., synagogue membership, Jewish summer camp). Parents with children enrolled in Jewish ECE self-reflect that they had increased their level of Jewish engagement in several ways as a result of Jewish ECE; however, we did not have comparable data from parents with children enrolled in other types of ECE. The parent survey data also revealed that parents with children enrolled in Jewish ECE, as a group, endorse more strongly an expanded list of items conceptualizing Jewish engagement than do parents who enroll their child in another type of ECE. In addition, LTA analyses of the parent survey found that parents with a child enrolled in Jewish ECE are more likely than parents with children enrolled in other ECE to transition from being represented by a “Connected” profile (pre-birth of first child) to being represented by a “Connected and Affiliated” profile (currently). This latter finding from the parent survey reinforces the qualitative findings from the case studies indicating that Jewish ECE professionals see families’ institutional attachment (i.e., synagogue affiliation or JCC membership) as a desired outcome of enrolling young children in Jewish ECE; indeed, Jewish ECE directors report that Jewish parents who enroll their children in Jewish ECE are more likely to increase their institutional affiliation – at least over the course of the families’ participation in the Jewish ECE program.
- Although factors such as parents’ previous day school attendance and participation in Jewish early engagement programs could not be fully “balanced” between the matched groups of families that did and did not send their child to Jewish ECE, sophisticated analyses of the parent survey do indicate **an effect of Jewish ECE enrollment on changes in Jewish engagement profile membership.** Specifically, families that were already “Connected” to Jewish attitudes and behaviors prior to a child’s birth were more likely to move to a “Connected and Affiliated” Jewish engagement profile if their child was enrolled in Jewish ECE compared to their peers

who sent their child to another type of ECE. **This suggests that Jewish ECE does have an independent effect on Jewish engagement, albeit among families that have reached a certain threshold of Jewish engagement prior to their first child’s birth.**

- Analyses of the parent survey data also revealed interesting similarities across Jewish engagement profiles. Specifically, regardless of profile membership, parents think that transmitting to their children the value that Judaism is a matter of religion is less important than transmitting the values that Judaism is a matter of culture, heritage, and/or an ethical roadmap to living one’s life. This speaks to how complicated defining Jewish engagement is; **questions about religious engagement, which are typical in surveys of Jewish engagement, may not address the values and aspects of Judaism most important to young parents today.**<sup>30</sup>

### Remaining Gaps and Future Research

An initial hypothesis that was tested in the CASJE ECE Project by the parent survey was whether families that have initially low levels of Jewish engagement might move to profiles of higher engagement by virtue of their child’s enrollment in Jewish ECE. This hypothesis was not confirmed by the data. Families with a “Baseline” or “Holiday-based” profile of Jewish engagement did not change profile membership based on Jewish ECE enrollment versus enrollment in another type of ECE. **Future research, policy, and practice should explore the ways Jewish ECE can better attract families that are not already represented by a “Connected” or “Connected and Affiliated” Jewish engagement profile.**

The Jewish engagement profile analyses presented in this report rely on a relatively small set of engagement indicators that were captured at two timepoints: prior to the birth of a first child (retrospectively) and at the time of survey response (currently). This small set of indicators included many of the “traditional” survey items that have represented Jewish engagement in past research, such as reports of *Shabbat* and holiday observances, as well as some new items, such as reporting on celebrations with family and friends. **Additional analyses on the broader set of Jewish engagement items developed for the CASJE ECE parent survey, such as current Jewish and Israel-themed cultural activities, child-centered Jewish materials in the home, and relational engagement with Jewish professionals, family and friends should be pursued in further research with this rich dataset.**

Parents’ Jewish day school attendance and children’s participation in Jewish programming for infants and toddlers (i.e., early engagement programs) were two predictors of ECE enrollment that could not be completely controlled in the propensity-matched sample used in the current set of analyses of the parent survey data. Thus, when differences were found between parents who sent their child to Jewish ECE and those who sent their child to other types of ECE, the effect of early engagement programs and parents’ own Jewish educational experiences could not be fully ruled out as influencing the outcomes of interest. **More research is needed to determine the *unique* effect of Jewish ECE on Jewish engagement.**

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<sup>30</sup> This theme also emerged during our key informant interviews. See Schwartz, H., Arkin, M. (2018). *Report on Key Informant Interviews conducted as part of CASJE’s study of the associations between Jewish ECE and Jewish engagement*. Washington, DC: Consortium for Applied Studies in Jewish Education.

There were additional challenges for this research project, including the challenge of finding and recruiting families that are not affiliated with Jewish institutions, including Jewish ECE. The best source of these families are PJ Library email lists, which are understandably guarded from survey over-use. However, it should be noted that even unaffiliated families that are on the PJ Library lists are receiving some form of Jewish “intervention” and are not entirely disassociated from Jewish life. Still, PJ Library email lists are the best source of young, Jewish families with likely initially low levels of “traditional” indicators of Jewish engagement. **Any future research focused on young, Jewish families with initially lower levels of Jewish engagement will be most successful in partnership and collaboration with Jewish Federations and their PJ Library staff and participants.**

Ideally, one would want to **survey families right before their children start ECE and follow them over time.** A future research project may therefore wish to recruit a large sample of Jewish families prior to this important educational decision and follow them across multiple time points to determine similarities and differences in their trajectories of Jewish engagement over time and in relation to their choice of Jewish ECE versus other types of ECE. This type of study will be difficult to execute, as longitudinal research is expensive due, in part, to how difficult it is to recruit the target families and maintain a large enough sample for meaningful analysis over time. Such research may require “refreshing” of survey samples and recruitment in multiple communities across the country.

Although the current study explored the factor of “dosage” of Jewish ECE and did not find a statistical effect of number of hours of care per week on indicators of Jewish engagement, **further research on the role of full-day versus half-day Jewish ECE programs would be useful.** For example, further analyses could examine characteristics of parents who enroll their children in full-day versus half-day Jewish ECE programs.

Along with dosage, another critical factor to examine in future research is the quality of care children receive in Jewish ECE. **Future studies of the role of Jewish ECE on family outcomes should include quality of ECE in the analytic model.**

Finally, **the role of Jewish programming for families with infants and toddlers on ECE choice deserves more research focus.** Participation in Jewish programming for families with infants and toddlers was considered explicitly by Jewish ECE directors and other Jewish professionals as a possible “feeder” to Jewish ECE for families with young children. Similar to the research into Jewish ECE, there have been few rigorously designed research studies of the role of Jewish infant/toddler programming as a unique lever to Jewish engagement, particularly as an onramp to Jewish ECE and future Jewish engagement.

## Future Directions

The CASJE ECE Project represents the first rigorous investigation of Jewish engagement among families with young children, and the role of Jewish ECE in changing the nature of Jewish engagement among families with young children. While the findings presented in this report are promising and provide many suggestions for practitioners, policymakers, funders, and researchers, this report provides just the beginnings of what we can learn about Jewish ECE’s role in supporting Jewish engagement among young families. We hope that the findings from the CASJE ECE Project inform future efforts to strengthen the quality and reach of Jewish ECE within communities across the country, starting with a focus on

recruitment, training, and retention of high-quality ECE staff. We further hope that practitioners, funders, and researchers interested in the role of Jewish ECE in deepening families' engagement in Jewish life will make use of the rich data that was produced by this project, both to mine it for further insights and practical applications, and to plan for and implement additional applied research efforts.