

Analyses of the online parent survey suggest that Jewish ECE influences Jewish engagement if initial levels of engagement are already at a certain threshold. Those families that were already “Connected” to Jewish life in many ways prior to the birth of a first child became “Connected and Affiliated” in Jewish life after enrolling their child in Jewish ECE. In contrast, families that expressed their Jewish engagement in more limited ways (e.g., were *highly* engaged just around holidays) prior to the birth of their first child did not experience a shift toward greater Jewish engagement based on enrolling their children in Jewish ECE. Although analyses controlled for the characteristics of parents to isolate the effect of Jewish ECE on Jewish engagement profiles, parents’ Jewish day school attendance and participation in Jewish infant and toddler programming were two predictors of Jewish ECE enrollment that could not be completely controlled. Thus, more research is needed to determine the *unique* effect of Jewish ECE on Jewish engagement among families with young children.

Implications for Policy and Practice

This Final Report began by noting that ECE programs are often embedded in a larger ecosystem of Jewish institutions such as synagogues, JCCs, and Jewish day schools. These, in turn, exist within a metropolitan area that has community-wide Jewish institutions such as Federations and foundations to support these institutions.

There is yet another level of support for Jewish ECE at the national level. Each denominational Movement has national staff to support Jewish ECE, and there are foundations with a national focus that recognize the importance of Jewish ECE in shaping the Jewish future. However, there is, at present, no single national Jewish organization with a specific focus on Jewish ECE.¹⁵ Thus, efforts to improve Jewish ECE remain piecemeal, depending on the inclinations of individual actors at the community or national level, whose domain of influence remains within their respect sphere.

Any policy recommendations must acknowledge all these interlocking and intersecting institutions as integral to the support of Jewish ECE.

With this overview of the ecosystem in mind, we offer the following observations about policy and practice:

1) Jewish ECE cannot be a lever for Jewish engagement unless families are enrolled.

No hard data are available on national enrollment in Jewish ECE programs, but the generally accepted “guesstimate” in the field¹⁶ is that somewhere between 20 and 25 percent of Jewish families enroll in Jewish ECE. Increasing this percentage would seem to be a logical way to use Jewish ECE to increase Jewish engagement. However, in order to monitor a national trend in Jewish family enrollment in Jewish ECE, an accurate count of the total number of Jewish families with children under age five nationally (denominator) and the total number of Jewish families enrolled in Jewish ECE nationally (numerator) would need to be reported with some periodicity (e.g., annually, every 5 or 10 years, etc.). The data

¹⁵ National organizations do exist to support other types of Jewish educational institutions. For example, Prizmah supports Jewish day schools and the Foundation for Jewish Camp supports Jewish summer camps.

¹⁶ Rosen, M. (2018). Personal communication.

systems for such an enterprise do not currently exist and may be difficult to establish, even if there were a national organization to support Jewish ECE. Currently, we are unaware of such an effort even at a more local or state level.¹⁷

We see a number of approaches that could increase enrollment:

- **Professionalize the recruiting process**, so that Jewish ECE programs learn about and adopt best enrollment practices from the broader early childhood field. The expertise necessary would need to be developed and funded by Federations, foundations, or national Jewish ECE professionals.¹⁸
- **Provide scholarships for families**. Cost of Jewish ECE is a barrier for some families. Scholarship programs or voucher programs could be expanded to help these families choose Jewish ECE if they would otherwise be unable to do so.
- **Provide full-time care**. The parent survey findings indicate that there are some families who enroll in Jewish ECE with a parent who stays at home; for such families, part-time child care is manageable. But most families include two working parents and there is a necessity for full-time care. Jewish ECE programs that are currently offering only part-time hours should consider expanding to full-time hours.
- **Offer infant/toddler care**. Working parents need care for their young children even when they are infants, yet most Jewish ECE programs do not accept children who are younger than two years of age. As the case study reports indicate, there is interest in offering infant/toddler care, but Jewish ECE programs find it difficult or impossible to comply with licensing regulations (e.g., having infant/toddler rooms on the ground floor of a building). Working on developing models to offer high-quality infant and toddler care would provide a strong bridge from Jewish infant/toddler programming to Jewish ECE. Infant/toddler care could also be a promising source of new enrollment for Jewish ECE in the context of free, public pre-kindergarten programs which is drawing families out of community based ECE in many states.
- **Expand the geographic reach of Jewish ECE**. New ECE programs could be opened in geographic areas that do not currently have Jewish ECE programs but do have growing Jewish populations. ECE programs usually exist within existing Jewish institutions that were built in the past to serve the Jewish population at the time. However, Jewish families, for a variety of reasons, now live in neighborhoods and suburbs outside of historically Jewish neighborhood “hubs” and that

¹⁷ JData did collect data from Jewish ECE programs but is no longer operative. We were unable to calculate the percentage of Jewish families enrolled in the three communities we studied. Some children in Jewish ECE programs are not Jewish. While the number of children enrolled was available, the number of Jewish children was not. Calculating the percentage of Jewish families in Jewish ECE in a community requires an accurate census of which children are Jewish and not Jewish in every ECE program. JCCs and ECE programs in Reform synagogues, where the percentages of non-Jewish children are higher, often do not tally these numbers.

¹⁸ The BUILDing Jewish ECE initiative in Denver offers an illustration of how this might be done. See <https://rcfdenver.org/what-we-do/programs-and-initiatives/building-jewish-ece/> and <https://ejewishphilanthropy.com/continuing-to-build-jewish-early-childhood-educatio/>

currently have few or no Jewish institutions. Because families, in general, choose ECE that is conveniently located to their home or work sites, they are unlikely to commute long distances with a young child to the neighborhoods and suburbs that do have Jewish ECE in order to enroll them, even if Jewish ECE is a preference for their child. Federations and foundations could investigate whether it is feasible to open Jewish ECE programs in areas where young Jewish families are residing despite the lack of institutional infrastructure currently in these areas.

2) Programs for families with infants and toddlers are a promising gateway to Jewish ECE.

Early engagement programs offer much promise for acquainting families with Jewish peers and influencing their ECE decisions. Given the “window of opportunity” around the birth of a child, Jewish early engagement programs are an ideal vehicle for engaging families in new Jewish practices, strengthening existing practices in the context of a growing family, and building communities of families in a similar life stage. Early engagement programs reach parents starting with the birth of their first child. Many ECE programs offer little for children under age 2, and consequently lose an opportunity to reach parents prior to enrollment.

- **Jewish infant and toddler programming is most effective when it is designed to address the needs and interests of parents at various stages of child development.** In practice, this requires a keen attunement to the needs of parents of young children and constant feedback from “customers” attending programs. Parents of newborns, parents of infants, and parents of toddlers have different needs.
- **Experiment to find successful early engagement approaches.** It was once noted that parents vote with their strollers.¹⁹ Success is defined by attendance. There needs to be a willingness to experiment on the part of program providers in order to find the right combination of program content, program leader, schedule, and venue that will attract parents of infants and toddlers to targeted Jewish programming and generate repeat “business.”
- **Programs need to be geographically tailored and offered in a variety of locations.** Neighborhoods and suburbs vary with respect to the types of parents who live there. For example, urban families may be more likely to have two working parents, and certain suburbs may have much higher percentages of intermarried families. Programming for families with infants and toddlers needs to be adapted to the prevailing types of families that reside in a neighborhood or suburb. In addition, parents are not inclined to drive more than 20 minutes to attend a program with a very young child, so offering locally based programming rather than centrally based programming is a must.
- **Parents respond best to peers.** Having locally based peers in a neighborhood or suburb who can help parents to feel comfortable and introduce them to other nearby Jewish families appears to be a very effective way to bring parents into Jewish community. Such parents were known as

¹⁹ See Rosen, M.I., Allen, M.L., Lowenstein, A., Steinberg, S., Kartseva, T., Meiseles, A., Kibrit, J. (2010). *Jewish early engagement in New York: A feasibility study prepared for the Commission on Jewish Identity and Renewal of UJA-Federation of New York*. Report to UJA-Federation of New York.

“ambassadors” in the programs we interviewed, and they appeared to be as important as program offerings in reaching parents.

- **Quality is important.** Jewish programming for families with infants and toddlers is often indistinguishable to the casual observer from programs offered for families with very young children in secular venues. Baby yoga, for example, is not particularly Jewish in content. Because parents are discerning consumers and because secular businesses have sophisticated marketing expertise, Jewish programs targeting families with very young children need to be as good as, if not better than, programs offered by secular businesses.
- **ECE programs should consider offering programming to families with infants and toddlers who are not yet enrolled in ECE.** Traditionally, ECE programs have focused almost exclusively on “paying customers,” that is, on families who are enrolled. In recent years, some ECE programs have begun to offer programming for parents and children who are not yet preschool age. These parents usually do not initially have a relationship with the ECE program. The motivations for offering such programs are twofold. First, the programs help parents with children too young to enroll in ECE an opportunity to learn about local Jewish preschools, thus potentially serving as a recruiting tool. Second, the programs create community and help parents to connect with other local parents who are also Jewish, regardless of whether the parents ultimately choose to enroll their children in Jewish ECE.

3) Jewish ECE thrives when it has strong support from the institution in which it is embedded.

As noted earlier, the vast majority of ECE programs are embedded in Jewish institutions such as synagogues, Jewish Community Centers, and day schools. At some synagogues, host institutions are simply landlords who rent space to ECE programs. Other synagogues primarily see ECE programs as revenue generators that support the institutional bottom line, but synagogue leadership is otherwise uninvolved with the ECE program. However, in a smaller subset of synagogues, including the ones we studied, ECE programs are closely integrated with their host institution. We argue that when an ECE program is well-integrated with its host institution, and the institution is also focused on engaging families, there can be a “multiplier” effect such that efforts of the ECE program to engage families are amplified by the institution’s parallel efforts.

- **At synagogue based ECE programs, ECE leadership and synagogue leadership need to work together closely.** For synagogue based ECE programs, having the support of synagogue leadership, including the clergy, the executive director, other staff, and the board of directors is critical for promoting integration of the ECE families into synagogue life and possibly greater Jewish engagement beyond the specific institution. However, it should be noted that many Jewish ECE directors tended to have a limited, institutionally focused view of Jewish engagement as a goal for their families.
- **ECE programs need help in advocating with synagogue leadership.** In cases where synagogue leadership is not strongly supportive and is focused primarily on the revenue generated by an ECE program, ECE leadership would benefit from outside help from ECE professional consultants

to advocate with synagogue leadership so that they come to understand the greater potential of the ECE program that operates daily within their walls.

- **ECE programs based in Jewish day schools may help to recruit families.** ECE programs based in Jewish day schools can attract families who might not otherwise have considered a day school education for their child. Bringing these parents in the door on a daily basis can help them to appreciate the community they could become a part of through enrolling their child and may give them a greater appreciation of the value of Jewish learning.

4) Staff are the foundation of Jewish ECE. Recruitment, training, and retention are vital for the future of Jewish ECE.

Throughout our case study research, we heard a similar story across all of the ECE directors we visited and interviewed. There is an acute shortage of qualified professionals in the Jewish ECE field. This is not a new finding. It is discussed frequently among professionals.²⁰

It is through staff that children are supported in their developmental growth and learn about Judaism; staff also have the potential of connecting with parents to form partnerships in support of a child's ongoing development and inspire Jewish learning among parents.

- **Work toward providing a competitive salary for the ECE workforce that will encourage highly qualified staff to stay in the field.** One of the primary reasons that individuals are not attracted to the ECE field is pay, and one of the reasons that staff leave is for better pay elsewhere. Unless pay issues are addressed, the field will not attract highly competent staff and turnover will continue. Because pay levels in the field are low, it is especially important for staff to be compensated in other ways, through generous benefit packages, professional development, recognition, and ongoing respect. ECE workforce compensation (both wages and benefits) is a long-standing, major concern not only within the Jewish community but for the larger ECE field.²¹ Recent proposals for national compensation reform suggest that achieving wage parity with K-3 educators should be part of the solution.²² Anecdotal reports suggest that early care and education programs affiliated with synagogues and JCCs can sometimes be viewed primarily as revenue generators for their respective institutions by some senior administrators and boards;²³ educating these individuals about the importance and difficulty of attracting qualified ECE professionals might help them to better understand the need for competitive salaries.
- **Offer ongoing professional development and have a professional development plan.** Training is vital for any profession and ECE is no exception. Jewish ECE staff could benefit from programs that help them understand child development and developmentally appropriate practice as well

²⁰ See, for example, <https://ejewishphilanthropy.com/code-blue-a-call-to-save-jewish-eces/>

²¹ See, for example, <https://cscce.berkeley.edu/from-unlivable-wages-to-just-pay-for-early-educators/> and https://www.naeyc.org/sites/default/files/globally-shared/downloads/PDFs/our-work/initiatives/p2p_decision_cycles_78.draft_for_field_review.pdf.

²² McLean, C., Whitebook, M., & Roh, E. (2019). *From Unlivable Wages to Just Pay for Early Educators*. Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, University of California, Berkeley.

²³ Rosen, M. (2020). Personal communication.

as incorporate Jewish rituals and values into their classroom activities. To ensure that these professional development opportunities are ongoing, they could be part of a written plan and funding could be provided to support ongoing professional development for ECE directors and teachers.

- **Provide guidance on how to connect with parents.** ECE staff are trained to work with young children, but not trained on principles of adult learning. Yet in order for Jewish ECE programs to foster engagement, staff need to be sensitive to parents and intentionally engage parents in Jewish lifelong learning. Several programs that were featured in our case studies shared innovative ways to build relationships with parents and accommodate parents' busy schedules and competing demands, such as using a classroom app to communicate and share information about a child or sending home *Shabbat* and holiday toolkits. These efforts to connect with busy parents in a flexible, non-time-bound way can facilitate engaging parents Jewishly.
- **Make Jewish resources available for staff and parents.** We suggest that Jewish curriculum resources be made available in every ECE program, collectively generated by the staff. These resources could be used not only to help staff develop new classroom activities but could also be made available to interested parents.
- **Develop programs to bring new faces into the field.** Very few young Jewish adults are choosing ECE as a career path. Innovative programs to attract recent college graduates as well as mid-career professionals could be developed and implemented. We saw two such initiatives in Chicago.

5) Federations and local foundations can play a significant role in strengthening Jewish ECE across a metropolitan area.

Historically, most Jewish communities had Jewish education agencies, originally known as bureaus of Jewish education (BJEs) that were separate from, but funded by, local Federations. BJEs in larger Jewish communities usually had a Jewish ECE specialist who worked with local ECE programs. In recent years, the responsibilities of BJEs in most metropolitan areas have been taken over by Federations. Some of these Federations, like those we studied in Chicago and Washington, DC, take Jewish ECE very seriously and offer various types of support. In other Federations, like Seattle, which we also examined, there is little support for Jewish ECE.

In a metropolitan area where there is a well-funded Federation that has early childhood in their strategic plan, it is possible to have financial resources to support community-based Jewish ECE programs and synagogues. **The Federation can employ staff with an exclusive ECE focus, direct resources toward certification and fellowship programs for teachers, promote community partnerships between Jewish ECE programs and other local Jewish organizations, and offer other programming for young families that engages them broadly.**

When early engagement programs are under the auspices of Federations that partner with local Jewish institutions, these institutions benefit as well because some parents come in the door who might not

otherwise show up. **Branding the programs** with a name other than the Federation's makes the programs more accessible.

Federations can also help make the transition from Jewish ECE to other Jewish education, like day school, by connecting parents with these schools and Jewish educational organizations.

Federation-initiated **collaborations across community institutions** (e.g., synagogues and JCCs) can extend the advertising of and infrastructure for programs to reach a broader audience of young families. In addition, **bringing ECE professionals from different institutions together** fosters professional development and learning as promising practices are shared. It also promotes cooperation across institutions, with the overarching goal of bringing more families into Jewish ECE wherever they choose to enroll. The shared goal then becomes attracting parents to Jewish ECE rather than attracting them to a particular ECE program.

Foundations can provide financial support for Jewish ECE, either independently or by partnering with a local Federation. When a local foundation additionally plays the role of thought partner and works with local professionals, the results can be impressive. We saw this model in Chicago, where two local foundations work closely with the Federation, not just to provide financial resources that support Jewish ECE, but also as thought partners to foster experimentation and new directions.

6) Jewish ECE could benefit considerably from greater involvement with national and state ECE initiatives that already exist to improve the field.

The ECE case studies in the current project revealed a disconnect between the indicators of quality expressed by Jewish ECE directors and those endorsed by national- and state-level ECE quality initiatives and accreditation bodies. For example, in one of the three communities, none of the programs we visited was accredited by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), a professional membership organization that works to promote high-quality early learning for all young children, birth through age 8, at the time of the interviews. Although many Jewish ECE in this community were NAEYC accredited in the past, these programs had intentionally not renewed as they viewed NAEYC accreditation no longer relevant to their curriculum standards.²⁴ This trend among Jewish ECE programs to forego affiliation with national ECE organizations and accreditation bodies is in contrast to the practices of most Jewish day schools which typically affiliate with the National Association of Independent Schools (NAIS). The NAIS provides services to member schools but also requires them to be accredited by an approved accrediting organization and to adhere to the NAIS Principles of Good Practice.²⁵

State and local quality improvement opportunities for early care and education professionals are plentiful; they include pre-service and in-service training offered through local two-year colleges and four-year universities and professional development through state PD systems administered by local child care resource and referral agencies (CCR&Rs). In addition, quality rating and improvement systems

²⁴ Bier, M. (2019). Personal communication.

²⁵ See <https://www.nais.org/membership/school-membership/>.

(QRIS) have been implemented in 44 states and communities nationwide as of 2017.²⁶ 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.²⁷ **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.**²⁸

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

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

²⁷ 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/>

²⁸ 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.