

Exploring Associations Between Jewish Early Care, Education and Engagement

Final Report
MARCH 4, 2020

FUNDED BY
Crown Family Philanthropies

PREPARED BY CHILD TRENDS

Graduate School
of Education
& Human Development
THE GEORGE WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY



Dr. Michael J. Feuer
Dean
Principal Investigator

Exploring Associations Between Jewish Early Care, Education and Engagement

March 2020

Submitted to: Crown Family Philanthropies

Submitted by: Consortium for Applied Studies in Jewish Education

Principal Investigator: Michael J. Feuer, Dean
Graduate School of Education and Human Development
George Washington University

Study Directors: Tamara Halle, Child Trends
Mark Rosen, Brandeis University

Research Team: Elizabeth Karberg, Child Trends
Maya Cook, Child Trends
Heidi Schwartz, Independent Consultant
Ilana Huz, Child Trends
Monica Arkin, Child Trends
Berenice Rushovich, Child Trends
Tiffany Bamdad, Child Trends



CROWN FAMILY PHILANTHROPIES



casje

Graduate School
of Education
& Human Development

THE GEORGE WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY

About the CASJE Early Childhood Education (ECE) Project

In November 2016, the Consortium for Applied Studies in Jewish Education (CASJE) launched a major research initiative, funded by Crown Family Philanthropies, to explore the ways in which Jewish ECE may serve as a gateway for greater and long-term involvement in Jewish life. The research team was led by Dr. Tamara Halle and Dr. Elizabeth Karberg of Child Trends, together with Dr. Mark Rosen of Brandeis University. The initiative aimed to contribute rigorous research findings on Jewish ECE to the field to inform future research and practice.

The mixed-methods, multi-year study addressed three questions:

1. What does “Jewish engagement” mean to Jewish families with young children and to Jewish early childhood professionals?
2. How do Jewish ECE programs engage parents with young children, and what are the barriers to parental or family engagement?
3. How does Jewish engagement change over time for Jewish families with young children, and do these patterns differ for families who do and do not enroll their children in Jewish ECE?

Each of these three research questions corresponds to a primary research phase of the project:

1. Conducting a literature review, survey content analysis, and key informant interviews to develop a more precise definition of “Jewish engagement” with a specific focus on a wide range of Jewish families with young children;
2. Conducting site visits in three target communities to identify best practices utilized by Jewish ECE for engaging parents with young children, as well as barriers to engagement; and
3. Conducting a survey of Jewish families with young children to examine changes in Jewish engagement over time.

Three metropolitan areas were targeted to address the latter two research questions of the study: Chicago, IL, Seattle, WA, and Greater Washington, DC. These represent communities with diverse Jewish populations, and range from large and well-established, to highly transient, to small but rapidly growing.

Acknowledgements

Exploring Associations Between Jewish Early Care, Education and Engagement reports on the Consortium for Applied Studies in Jewish Education (CASJE) Early Childhood Education Project funded by Crown Family Philanthropies. Wendy Newberger, Rachel Giattino, Leslie Matsa, and Jaré Akchin provided valuable feedback throughout the project. The CASJE Early Childhood Education Project Team would like to thank the many participants in this research project from across the country, and the Jewish Federation staff from Greater Washington, DC, Chicago, IL, and Seattle, WA for their partnership and support, especially Sharon Sherry, Sabrina Townsend, Anna Hartman, and Noa Guter. CASJE would like to thank Janet Aronson, Mara Bier, Bill Robinson, Cynthia Krug and Anna Hartman for their expert consultation and review of specific aspects of our project work as well as the CASJE Advisory Board for their guidance on the development of this project.

Contents

Study Overview 1
Summary of Findings..... 2
Research Question 1: What does "Jewish engagement" mean to Jewish families with young children and to Jewish early childhood professionals? 3
Jewish Engagement from the Perspective of Key Informants..... 3
Definitions and Measurement of Jewish Engagement from Past Research..... 3
Summary: Defining and Measuring Jewish Engagement for Families with Young Children 4
Research Question 2: How do Jewish ECE programs engage parents with young children, and what are the barriers to parental or family engagement?..... 6
Jewish ECE programs emphasize families' involvement in school activities and activities of the host institution; they are somewhat ambivalent about promoting Jewish home practice and seldom promote Jewish engagement outside of the host institution 7
There are numerous barriers to enrolling children in Jewish ECE; some barriers can be addressed by ECE programs while others are more complex and difficult to overcome..... 8
Summary: A Focus on Jewish ECE 8
Research Question 3: How does Jewish engagement change over time for Jewish families with young children, and do these patterns differ for families who do and do not choose to enroll their children in Jewish ECE? 9
Practical factors such as cost, location, and hours of operation, as well as perceived quality, influence parental choice of ECE 10
Families that choose Jewish ECE were more likely than families that choose another type of ECE to engage in activities associated with the multidimensional conceptualization of Jewish engagement 11
Parents' reflections on the role of Jewish ECE on Jewish Engagement..... 14
Based on a subset of items, four distinct profiles of Jewish engagement were identified among a sample of families with young, Jewish children surveyed across three communities 16
Demographic and parent background characteristics distinguished the four Jewish engagement profiles 17
Data from the qualitative case study as well as the quantitative parent survey suggest that Jewish ECE can increase Jewish engagement among some families –at least over the course of their participation in the Jewish ECE program..... 20
Besides Jewish ECE, other levers of greater Jewish engagement among families with young children include the birth of a first child, participation in Jewish infant/toddler programming, and the parents' own childhood experiences with Jewish education..... 21
Summary: A Focus on Families with Young Jewish Children 21
Implications for Policy and Practice 22

Implications for Future Research	29
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	30
Remaining Gaps and Future Research	32
Future Directions	33

Exploring Associations Between Jewish Early Care, Education and Engagement

Study Overview

This project examined whether Jewish early care and education (ECE) enhances Jewish engagement among families raising Jewish children, particularly among those who are initially less engaged. The research team examined the relationship between Jewish ECE and Jewish engagement among families with young children in a systematic and rigorous fashion, using multiple data collection approaches.

The project focused specifically on three areas of investigation:

- (1) Defining and measuring Jewish engagement among families with young, Jewish children;
- (2) Identifying and describing promising Jewish engagement practices for families with young, Jewish children, both within Jewish ECE settings and outside of them; and
- (3) Examining child care choices and levels of Jewish engagement among families with young, Jewish children over time.

Multiple data collection approaches were used to address these three focus areas. The study began with important conceptual work to clearly define and operationalize the construct of Jewish engagement for this particular segment of the Jewish population. To define and measure Jewish engagement, **key informant interviews** were conducted with 44 Jewish professionals and 10 Jewish parents with young children from across the country to describe how they understand Jewish engagement, especially among families with young children. A **literature review** of 41 studies that met inclusion criteria for the review explored how Jewish engagement has been conceptualized in previous research and practice. We also conducted a **survey item content analysis** of 1,221 survey items (800 from the Berman Jewish Policy Archive's Jewish Survey Question Bank and 481 from surveys identified through the literature review) related to Jewish engagement. Finally, we conducted three rounds of **cognitive interviews** to develop and refine new survey items to capture Jewish engagement activities tailored to parents with young children on topics identified through the key informant interviews and literature review but not well-represented among extant surveys according to the survey item content analysis.

To examine the associations between Jewish ECE and Jewish engagement from the viewpoint of early childhood programs, we visited three Jewish ECE programs, one each in the three target communities (Chicago, IL; Seattle, WA; and Greater Washington, DC).¹ **Case study reports** were developed to

¹ The target communities were chosen after considering various criteria, including: the diversity of Jewish families in the community; the research team's familiarity with the community; travel costs; the community's size; the availability of resources dedicated to supporting Jewish preschools; and the willingness of Jewish institutions to cooperate with the study. The Chicago area has a large and established Jewish community of close to 300,000 Jews with 38 Jewish preschools. The local Federation and a foundation provide considerable support for these preschools and devote resources to programming for parents with young children outside of preschools. The Washington, D.C. area has a Jewish population that is about the same size as Chicago and has 42 Jewish

summarize information from focus groups with program staff and parents in the selected Jewish ECE program and interviews with up to six Jewish ECE directors of other programs in each of the three target communities. For each community, we also examined the broader ECE and early engagement landscape, along with Federation and foundation support, and summarized this information in a **community scan**.

Finally, to explore parents' ECE choices and the nature of families' Jewish engagement (and whether families' types of Jewish engagement, or "profiles," change over time based on enrollment in Jewish versus "other" ECE), an **online parent survey** of Jewish families with a child up to age 5 was implemented in the three target communities and made available more broadly through online sharing. With the support of local Jewish Federation staff, the research team was able to advertise the online survey to families participating in PJ Library activities in the three communities, as well as local Jewish ECE settings. A total of 1,223 parents participated in the online survey in the summer of 2018.²

It should be kept in mind that Jewish ECE settings cannot be studied or understood in isolation. They operate within a larger "ecosystem." The vast majority of Jewish ECE programs are embedded in Jewish institutions, specifically synagogues, JCCs, day schools, and Chabad centers. These ECE programs and the institutions that house them are also an integral part of a larger community – a Jewish metropolitan area. The community-wide Jewish institutions that serve the metropolitan area – Federations, foundations, and in some communities, Jewish education agencies – frequently provide support to ECE programs and to the institutions that house them. These community-wide institutions may also sponsor programs for families with children too young to enroll in an ECE program. Such programs are often described as "early engagement" programs.³

Summary of Findings

Findings from the various data collection efforts and subsequent analyses are summarized below, as they relate to the main research questions for the project. Reports based on individual data collection efforts associated with (1) defining and measuring Jewish engagement among families with young

preschools. While the Federation does support local preschools and does sponsor programming for families with young children outside of preschools, it does not do so to the same extent as Chicago. Seattle's Jewish community is smaller and has fewer resources than Chicago or Washington, D.C., but is expanding rapidly and has a variety of programs available to meet the needs of the growing community. Seattle has approximately 63,000 Jews and 11 preschools. At the time of our data collection, there was no Federation or foundation support for Jewish preschools in Seattle.

² More detailed information about the methodology of all data collection efforts is available in Appendix A of the Final Report.

³ At ECE programs, children are dropped off by an adult and are enrolled for a specific term. In contrast, early engagement programs always require that an adult participate along with a child and are generally "one-off" programs that do not require long-term enrollment. Programs target specific developmental levels for children under the age of 3 (e.g. infants, toddlers) and vary widely with respect to program content, usually including some combination of music, arts and crafts, physical activity, or storytelling, all with an age-appropriate Jewish flavor. Most programs include time specifically designated for parents to socialize. Sponsors can include Jewish preschools, Federations, JCCs, synagogues, Jewish family service agencies, Chabad, day schools, or foundations. Venues can sometimes be Jewish institutions, but programs may also take place at public locations such as libraries, book stores, or toy stores.

children, (2) lessons learned from Jewish ECE programs and early engagement programs regarding supporting families with young children to deepen their Jewish engagement, and (3) parental decision-making around ECE and the association between Jewish ECE and Jewish engagement over time are available in several supplemental reports.

Research Question 1: What does “Jewish engagement” mean to Jewish families with young children and to Jewish early childhood professionals?

Findings from the key informant interviews, literature review, and survey item content analysis contributed to answering this research question.

Jewish Engagement from the Perspective of Key Informants

Through key informant interviews, Jewish professionals defined Jewish engagement as involving **connecting with others**, engaging in a **variety of behaviors**, and **attributing Jewish meaning** to those connections and behaviors. Professionals typically measure Jewish engagement as attendance at programs and events but consider these measurements of engagement to be of limited use.

Jewish professionals noted that **engagement today should not be assessed in the same way that it was assessed in the past**, through indicators such as lighting *Shabbat* candles or synagogue membership. They acknowledged the need to track program enrollment or attendance in order to meet institutional goals, but they wished they could also measure other aspects of Jewish engagement, such as what happens outside organizational walls.

There is a growing recognition that Jewish life can and should take place outside organizational walls. Sometimes this means encouraging **participation in Jewish life within families’ own homes**; alternatively, it can mean sponsoring **Jewish activities in public spaces** like parks and bookstores. Either approach can attract new participants who might not be comfortable venturing into conventional Jewish settings like synagogues or Jewish Community Centers. One ECE director pointed out that in her conversations with parents she avoids using the word “synagogue” and says “community” instead, to rebrand her organization as a community – a word prospective families may find more appealing.

Definitions and Measurement of Jewish Engagement from Past Research

Analysis of the extant literature confirmed that a definition of Jewish engagement among families with young children is multidimensional. With respect to families with young children, Jewish engagement is often characterized and studied in the literature in terms of **socializing with Jewish friends**; celebrating **Jewish holidays and *Shabbat***; **making Jewish educational choices for one's children**; taking part in **Jewish rituals** such as prayer, candle-lighting, and saying blessings; **attitudes toward being Jewish**; **belonging to Jewish organizations**; and **taking part in Jewish family programs**.

The content analysis of extant survey items also confirmed that Jewish engagement is multidimensional. The three most frequent constructs captured by survey items of Jewish engagement were *non-synagogue organizational involvement*, *social interaction*, and *attitudes/values*. Among families with

young children, the most common Jewish engagement constructs captured by survey items were *non-synagogue organizational involvement*, *Jewish education for children*, and *media/culture*.

The content analysis also indicated that a single survey item could be construed to capture more than one dimension of engagement within a single survey question. The lack of precision in the construction of extant survey items is potentially problematic if a goal is examining the ways that individual dimensions of Jewish engagement co-exist in unique patterns across individuals or families, and how these patterns of engagement might change over time. Although engagement is multifaceted, the measures we use to operationalize different aspects of engagement should be precise and unambiguous.

We concluded from the content analysis, as well as the literature review and key informant interviews, that future survey item development related to key aspects of Jewish engagement, especially as they relate to families with young children, should (in addition to capturing attitudes/values, social interaction, Jewish education for children, and media/culture) focus more on home practices and holiday celebrations, and involve cognitive testing of survey items to ensure that respondents are understanding the intended meaning of the items. In the current study, we used cognitive interviews to develop new survey items for the online parent survey that addressed these additional constructs of Jewish engagement for families with young children; we also cognitively tested, and adapted to ensure precision of interpretation, extant items that we identified for inclusion in the online parent survey.⁴

Summary: *Defining and Measuring Jewish Engagement for Families with Young Children*

Engagement for families with young children is multidimensional and encompasses at least seven factors: behaviors, attitudes/values, Jewish institutional attachment, home practice, connection/interaction with other Jewish families, making Jewish educational choices for children, and finding personal meaning in Jewish life. While the first three factors of Jewish engagement have been commonly measured among Jewish teens and adults for decades, the remaining four factors are beliefs and behaviors that are particularly salient to contemporary Jewish families with young children. In addition, these latter four facets of Jewish engagement have received less attention in the literature and in survey development/use among Jewish populations, especially families with young children.

- **Behaviors** are associated with religious and cultural practices among Jews. Behaviors associated with religious observances include *Shabbat* and holiday celebrations, synagogue attendance, keeping kosher, having a *bar/bat mitzvah*, and wearing Jewish apparel (e.g., *kippah*). Jews may also engage in Jewish behaviors that do not have a religious focus, such as attending Jewish cultural events, consuming Jewish media (e.g., news, music, movies), eating Jewish foods (e.g., *latkes* on *Chanukah*), and displaying Jewish identity publicly by wearing jewelry or clothes with Jewish symbols. These cultural behaviors are not ones that have been traditionally captured by extant survey items.

⁴ See Arkin, M., & Halle, T. (2019). *Developing the CASJE ECE Project's Parent Survey: The Cognitive Interview Process*. Washington, DC: Consortium for Applied Studies in Jewish Education.

- **Attitudes/values** refer to beliefs and opinions about being Jewish. These attitudes and beliefs can encompass identifying as Jewish, feeling pride in being Jewish, feeling an emotional attachment to the Jewish people and/or the State of Israel, and/or believing that Jewish law and values provide moral guidance to one's life.
- **Jewish institutional attachment** refers to the ways that families relate to Jewish organizations. Traditional conceptualization of institutional attachment has been measured by *belonging to Jewish organizations*, and this is still a metric valued by Jewish professionals. However, today's families are more likely to attend programs offered by Jewish organizations but not seek long-term membership in these organizations. Thus, *taking part in Jewish family programming* is a metric of Jewish institutional attachment that is commonly measured among contemporary Jewish families with young children. However, families may attend programs sporadically when their children are young.
- **Home practice** refers to Jewish behaviors that occur within the family's home, often around *Shabbat or holiday celebrations*. However, it can also involve reading stories, singing songs, or engaging in other *media/cultural activities* inside the home. Some Jewish professionals feel that the home is an optimal place for *Shabbat* and holiday observance, and others feel that home observance is a more practical option for families with children.
- **Connection/interaction** refers to finding and making Jewish friends and building community. Families with young children enjoy *socializing with Jewish friends*, either in their own homes, in others' homes, or at other venues both *inside and outside of Jewish institutions*. Families often report having more Jewish friends after becoming parents, and parents who send their children to a Jewish ECE program can connect with a community of other Jewish parents.
- **Jewish educational choices for children** is a unique aspect of Jewish engagement for families with young children. The choice to take part in Jewish family programming⁵ is a form of Jewish educational choice for children, as is participation in Jewish ECE.
- **Finding meaning** in Jewish life refers to the ways that the ordinary occasions of family life (like bedtime rituals) get related to or imbued with Jewish ideas, words, and values. Learning to understand of Judaism's applicability within the real world of families' daily lives can help all types of Jewish families feel connected to Judaism's rich customs and traditions.

Jewish engagement can change over time, and there may be important “windows of opportunity” for increasing Jewish engagement for families with young children. Jewish professionals and parents both identified the birth of the first child and a child's entry into Jewish ECE as important times when families may become more engaged in Jewish life. Jewish professionals reported that the experience of having a young child often creates a feeling of openness to new experiences among parents.

⁵ Jewish early engagement programming is a subset of Jewish family programming that is targeted to families with children ages birth to three.

Many Jewish professionals pursue a relationship-based approach to engagement with families with young children. In practical terms this could mean that educators and clergy get to know families in one-on-one meetings, as well as during group programs that include ample time for families to get to know one another. It can also mean that encouraging families to spend time together outside of Jewish institutions is as important as families engaging with Jewish institutions through membership or programming. This is not to say that Jewish content is unimportant. However, it does mean that Jewish professionals are increasingly focusing on listening to families' individual stories in order to discover which opportunities might best engage them in Jewish life.

Research Question 2: How do Jewish ECE programs engage parents with young children, and what are the barriers to parental or family engagement?

Findings from the key informant interviews, as well as site visits to and community scans of the three target communities, were the primary sources for addressing this research question.

Promising practices to promote Jewish engagement include educating parents about Judaism and fostering relationships among families to create community

Through the site visits, it became clear that **Jewish ECE programs see their main role as educating children and their parents about Judaism's practices and values and encouraging children and families to "find meaning" in Jewish life.** Strong ECE programs integrate Jewish learning in everyday school activities seamlessly. For example, teachers will plan snacks around the holidays (e.g., dried fruit for *Tu B'Shvat*) and then teach about the holiday in an engaging way. The schools highlighted in the CASJE ECE Project also prioritize social emotional learning, which is well aligned with teaching Jewish concepts like *Tikkun Olam*. The Jewish ECE programs that were part of the CASJE ECE Project site visits all used a Reggio Emilia-inspired teaching approach and emphasized teaching universal values through a Jewish lens. These are values that all families, including non-Jewish ones, prioritize for their children.

Jewish ECE programs also try to support Jewish families forming relationships/connections with one another and creating community. Some of the activities around relationship-building and creating community happen *within the institutional building*. For these activities, Jewish ECE professionals need to get creative to address the barriers that young families face for participation. Parents with young children want to form relationships but are busy and often have inflexible schedules. Jewish ECE programs that hold events at convenient times (e.g., after work, Sunday mid-morning) and reduce burdens on the parents (e.g., provide dinner or brunch) can help engage these parents in programming and facilitate social interactions among young Jewish families. Several programs included a meal and/or child care in an attempt to make it easier and more attractive for parents to attend events. Successful Jewish ECE programs also ensure the events are not too long so that families do not need to disrupt their normal routine to attend. The other important piece is that these events include the entire family – parents, grandparents, the child, and siblings. One example of such an event is a monthly parent bagels and coffee, which is a time for parents to meet each other as well as for program staff to interact with parents.

Jewish ECE programs emphasize families' involvement in school activities and activities of the host institution; they are somewhat ambivalent about promoting Jewish home practice and seldom promote Jewish engagement outside of the host institution

Site visits and director interviews indicate that **Jewish ECE programs are heavily invested in engaging families in their ECE program or, when applicable, the synagogue or JCC in which it is housed (i.e., institutional attachment)**. This type of engagement might more appropriately be called "family involvement" in Jewish institutions, rather than engaging families in Jewish life more broadly. **Jewish ECE programs are also invested in helping families form relationships/connections and "find meaning" as noted above; but some are less focused on promoting other aspects of Jewish engagement, such as home practice.** There are several reasons why home practice is not emphasized by some Jewish ECE programs. First, most Jewish ECE programs welcome families who are both Jewish and non-Jewish, and therefore take a judgment-free stance when it comes to families' level of Jewish observance. Likewise, some ECE programs have many non-Jewish staff for whom Jewish home practice is unfamiliar. Second, some directors indicate that they don't want to "push" Jewish home practices too much and too fast for fear of alienating families. Third, teachers and ECE directors know that families are extremely busy and thus they are reluctant to make suggestions about what families could do at home. In contrast, directors at other Jewish ECE programs recognize that home practice develops when children bring home what they learn in their ECE program and then ask parents to engage in the rituals they have just learned, such as singing Jewish songs, lighting *Shabbat* candles, or saying blessings over *challah*. Directors in this latter group are attentive to finding new avenues to enable children to bring Judaism home. They may send home a *Shabbat* box or give children song sheets to bring home. Another way to build relationships and share information involves the use of technology. One Jewish ECE program used a classroom app to facilitate information sharing and encourage relationship building between teachers and parents.

Examples of Jewish ECE successfully engaging in relationship-building and community-building activities *outside the institutional building* were rare. One Jewish ECE created a listserv for each class so that parents can communicate with one another outside of the program. This same program also had two room parents for each classroom who organized outside get-togethers for parents and families, such as moms' nights out, family socials, and group activities. While Jewish ECE programs may provide structures for families to build relationships outside of the program, the initiative to build those relationships still needs to come from the parents themselves.

As part of the site visits, the research team looked at the Jewish ECE programs' mission statements to see if they mentioned engaging families in Jewish life more broadly as a goal. For the most part, mission statements did not mention a mission to engage families broadly in Jewish life. As one example, the mission statement for a JCC, which houses a Jewish preschool that was visited, has as its mission creating a warm, welcoming, Jewish learning community for people of all denominations.

There are numerous barriers to enrolling children in Jewish ECE; some barriers can be addressed by ECE programs while others are more complex and difficult to overcome

Jewish professionals and parents enumerated several barriers to engagement, including **cost**, parents' **lack of time**, the **location of Jewish organizations relative to where families live**, and **negative feelings** about religious organizations based on parents' childhood experiences. Professionals (but not parents) also remarked that some parents feel uncomfortable in Jewish settings or among Jewish people whom they perceive to be "more Jewish" than they are, resulting in social barriers to becoming more involved in Jewish programming (but not other aspects of Jewish engagement).

Jewish ECE programs are, in part, meant to increase Jewish engagement among families. But Jewish ECE cannot be used as a catalyst for further Jewish engagement unless families with young Jewish children choose to send their children there. Jewish ECE directors from one community noted **three factors that may dissuade parents from sending their child to a Jewish ECE program: shorter hours of care, a lack of services for children with special needs, and the inconvenience of being closed on Jewish holidays**. Many Jewish ECE programs in the three communities had increased from part-day to full-day programs to accommodate parents' working schedules. An ECE director in one community highlighted that many Jewish organizations and Jewish ECE programs are not equipped to serve children with special physical or developmental needs and this is a major barrier to families' involvement in activities and programs offered by Jewish organizations.

Summary: A Focus on Jewish ECE

Jewish ECE programs tend to focus on educating children and their parents about Judaism's customs, practices, and values and encouraging children and families to "find meaning" in Jewish life. For example, Jewish ECE programs integrate Jewish values into everyday learning through *Shabbat* and holiday celebrations and by teaching human values through a Jewish lens. The best programs continually innovate to find new ways to incorporate Jewish content into the general ECE curriculum. Jewish ECE programs also care about creating a warm and inclusive community for families. Many Jewish ECE programs strive to be accepting of parents with varying levels of Jewish knowledge and practice; they also enable parents to choose when and how to participate in events and activities sponsored by the Jewish ECE program. While some Jewish ECE programs prefer to hire Jewish teachers, most Jewish ECE administrators are more concerned with hiring teachers who can identify with and teach human values through a Jewish lens, and who can build strong relationships with both children and parents. However, when asked how they measure Jewish engagement among families enrolled in their program, Jewish ECE directors tend to focus on *institutional attachment* – either in the form of Jewish ECE enrollment, participation in Jewish family programming, or becoming members of Jewish institutions such as JCCs or synagogues.

Forming relationships or connections with other Jewish families is another priority of Jewish ECE programs; this goal is aligned with young families' desires for social interactions with Jewish friends. The reputation of Jewish ECE programs as being a "warm" place that emphasizes "community" was a theme heard across interviews with Jewish ECE directors. Forming connections among Jewish families is mostly

addressed by Jewish ECE programs through activities *within the institutional building* rather than outside of it. Listservs allow parents to connect with each other outside of the Jewish ECE program, but this is often accomplished through the parents' own initiative.

Finally, Jewish ECE directors and teachers are ambivalent about encouraging families to increase Jewish home practices, even as they aim to infuse Jewish meaning in everyday activities within the Jewish ECE setting. There is a belief and desire that parents will take on new home practices after being exposed to them within the Jewish ECE setting, and by the children's enthusiasm for these home-based Jewish practices. However, Jewish ECE directors and teachers also want to be respectful of individual family decisions about home practice, and do not want to make explicit suggestions or push "too hard, too fast" for changes in home practice for fear of alienating families. Instead, they aim for an indirect approach. That is, Jewish ECE directors note that parents become more involved in Jewish life, including home practice, through and in support of their children.

Most families that choose Jewish ECE do increase their Jewish practice, such as celebrating *Shabbat* and holidays and participating in Jewish ECE events, often with friends whom they met at the Jewish ECE program. However, involvement in Jewish activities and programs sponsored by Jewish institutions is not always sustained over time even if Jewish friendships endure.

The emphasis on *Jewish institutional attachment* and supporting Jewish families' *connections within the institutional building* rather than outside of it, coupled with indirect attempts to encourage home practice collectively suggests that Jewish ECE programs and directors may have a narrower view of what Jewish engagement means for families with young Jewish children in contrast with the broader conceptualization that this project has identified and described. An alternative interpretation is that Jewish ECE programs and directors may hold a comprehensive understanding of what Jewish engagement means but feel it is not their place to have as their mission engaging families in Jewish life more broadly. Regardless, Jewish ECE programs are aware of the desire for *relationship-based engagement* among contemporary Jewish families with young children and therefore aim to build one-on-one relationships with families as well as support connections among families enrolled in their programs.

There are known barriers to enrollment in Jewish ECE, some of which are easier for programs to address than others. There may be other barriers that Jewish ECE programs are unaware of because they have no mechanism for learning from parents who do not engage with their program.

Research Question 3: How does Jewish engagement change over time for Jewish families with young children, and do these patterns differ for families who do and do not choose to enroll their children in Jewish ECE?

The primary source of data for addressing this research question was the online parent survey administered in summer 2018. However, additional information, especially around parental choice of ECE, was provided by the literature review and case studies.

Practical factors such as cost, location, and hours of operation, as well as perceived quality, influence parental choice of ECE

A review of the literature indicates that **cost, location, and hours of operation** all have an influence on parents' choice of early care and education.⁶ A study of Jewish families in the greater Boston area found the most important factor in preschool selection was "teachers create a warm environment."⁷ In the Boston study, cost was the fourth most important factor, following "convenient drop off and pick-up times" and "educational approach." This study also found that parents with more Jewish friends were more likely to choose Jewish ECE.

As noted earlier, Jewish early engagement programs can be "feeders" to Jewish ECE. Positive experiences with Jewish early engagement programs may influence some families to choose a Jewish ECE program over a secular program if scheduling, location, and cost are not barriers.

From the case studies conducted in the three communities as part of the CASJE ECE Project, we found that parents consider many factors when choosing an ECE program, only some of which are related to Jewish content or practice. In general, parents were more likely to choose programs based on their **perceived quality and convenience** rather than based on Jewish content. From the CASJE ECE parent survey, we found that the largest proportion of parents reported that the **quality of care, reliability of the program, and the warmth of staff** were very important when choosing an ECE program. These findings from the CASJE ECE Project are consistent with previous research on parents' ECE choice.⁸

Demographic and parent background characteristics are associated with whether families choose Jewish ECE. Based on findings from the CASJE ECE parent survey, interfaith families and families that identify as secular or Reform were more likely to send their child to another type of ECE than to Jewish ECE. Families that identified as Orthodox or Conservative, those with at least one parent born in Israel, and those in which the respondent did not work outside of the home were more likely to send their children to Jewish ECE than to another type of ECE (see Table 1).

Table 1. Denominational Identification and Other Family Characteristics by ECE Choice

	Attended Jewish ECE	Attended Other ECE	Total
Judaism "Branch"			
Orthodox	75%**	25%	100%
Conservative	62%**	38%	100%
Reform	38%*	62%	100%

⁶ Forry, N. D., Tout, K., Rothenberg, L., Sandstrom, H. & Vesely, C. (2013). *Child Care Decision-Making Literature Review*. OPRE Brief 2013-45. Washington, DC: Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

⁷ Rosen, M. I. & Schwartz, H. (2015). *How Jews Choose: A Study of Early Childhood Decisions Among Jewish Parents in Greater Boston*. Combined Jewish Philanthropies.

⁸ Forry et al., 2013; Rosen & Schwartz, 2015.

Secular	28%*	72%	100%
Other Family Characteristics			
Interfaith marriage	25%**	75%	100%
Ashkenazi ethnicity	46%	54%	100%
At least one parent is Israeli-born	65%*	35%	100%
Respondent employment status			
Works full- or part-time	45%*	55%	100%
Stays home	62%*	38%	100%

Note. N = 569-717. Chi-square analyses were conducted to determine differences between Jewish ECE And Other ECE.

* $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$

Results from the parent survey also indicated that there were differences between the factors parents who chose Jewish ECE rated as very important compared to the factors parents who chose other types of ECE rated as very important. Specifically, **compared to parents who chose other types of ECE, parents who chose Jewish ECE were:**

- Less likely to report location, cost, times during the day the program provides care, and quality of care as very important reasons for choosing an ECE program.
- More likely to report recommendations from friends, warmth of the staff, meeting other parents with young children, and giving their child a Jewish education as very important reasons for choosing an ECE program.

Families that choose Jewish ECE were more likely than families that choose another type of ECE to engage in activities associated with the multidimensional conceptualization of Jewish engagement

The CASJE ECE parent survey included survey items that corresponded to our expanded, multidimensional definition of Jewish engagement among families with young children. In addition to the more traditional survey items that capture attitudes about being Jewish, *Shabbat* and holiday observances, and religious activities (e.g., attending synagogue services), we asked about current Jewish and Israel-themed cultural activities, child-centered Jewish materials in the home (e.g., children’s books and board games), and about relational engagement with Jewish professionals, family, and friends.

With regard to current Jewish and Israel-themed cultural activities, a majority of respondents ate Jewish food and used Jewish books, words (including Hebrew and Yiddish words), and media at least once a month (Table 2). Slightly less than half of respondents listened to Jewish music and wore Jewish clothing at least once a month. All of these cultural activities were significantly more prevalent among Jewish ECE families than other ECE families, except the use of Jewish words.

Parents reported that they frequently engaged in child-centered Jewish home practice, which was measured by reports of using Jewish-themed learning materials in the home. Nearly all parents reported using Jewish children’s books at least once or twice a month, which was not a surprise since many of the parents who responded to the survey were recruited from PJ Library⁹ listservs, an organization that sends Jewish-themed children’s books to members each month. What is interesting to note is that significantly more families with children enrolled in Jewish ECE compared to families with children enrolled in other types of ECE reported using Jewish learning materials such as Jewish toys, puzzles, and games on a monthly basis. Few respondents, regardless of type of ECE their child attended, reported using Jewish card games at least once or twice a month (Table 3).

Table 2. Current Jewish and Israel-Themed Cultural Activities

	Participate in/use at least once or twice a month		
	Overall	Attended Jewish ECE	Attended Other ECE
<i>Please indicate how often your family took part in the following aspects of Jewish or Israel-themed culture in the last 12 months...</i>			
Use Yiddish, Hebrew, or Jewish words	81%	82%	80%
Jewish books	76%	85%**	75%
Jewish food	57%	67%**	48%
Use Jewish media (e.g., websites)	55%	66%**	42%
Jewish music	43%	58%**	32%
Wear Jewish clothing	41%	52%**	30%

Note. N= 692-1,016. Chi-square analyses were conducted to determine differences between Jewish ECE And Other ECE.

* $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$

Table 3. Current Child-Centered Jewish Materials in the Home

	Use at least once or twice a month		
	Overall	Attended Jewish ECE	Attended Other ECE
<i>Please indicate how often you use the following Jewish materials in your home...</i>			
Jewish children’s books	96%	97%	98%

⁹ PJ Library is a program of the Harold Grinspoon Foundation which sends Jewish books and CDs monthly to families with children age six months through age 8.

Jewish toys	63%	76%**	61%
Jewish children's music	62%	75%**	56%
Hebrew letter toys	39%	51%**	35%
Jewish puzzles	24%	37%**	19%
Jewish board games	10%	16%**	7%
Jewish card games	14%	17%	14%

Note. N= 687-989. Chi-square analyses were conducted to determine differences between Jewish ECE And Other ECE.

* $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$

Families in the sample overall had strong relational engagement, as measured by doing Jewish things with their Jewish friends, having a Jewish professional with whom they could speak, and having support for their family's Jewish life from their extended family (Table 4). In general, Jewish ECE families have stronger relational engagement than other ECE families.

Table 4. Current Relational Engagement

	Overall	Attended Jewish ECE	Attended Other ECE
<i>Please indicate whether...</i>			
There is a Jewish professional I am comfortable speaking with	70%	79%**	64%
I get together with my Jewish friends to do something Jewish	70%	76%**	63%
Most or all of my friends are Jewish	41%	57%**	29%
<i>My extended family supports my family's Jewish life in the following ways ...</i>			
Hosts holiday celebrations	82%	85%	80%
Initiates Jewish activities	36%	42%**	30%
Does not support my family's Jewish life	5%	3%	5%

Note. N = 570-983. Chi-square analyses were conducted to determine differences between Jewish ECE And Other ECE.

* $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$

Based on this analysis of survey items capturing different aspects of current Jewish engagement (i.e., the feeling or meaning of Judaism; holiday observance; religious activities; *Shabbat* activities; Jewish and Israel-themed cultural activities; child-centered home practice; and relational engagement), it appears that families that send their children to Jewish ECE are more likely than families that send their children to other forms of ECE to participate in these engagement activities. In addition, regardless of the number of Jewish friends the respondent has, we see reports of greater engagement with Jewish friends at the time of the survey than at the time prior to the birth of the first child.

Parents' reflections on the role of Jewish ECE on Jewish Engagement

The CASJE ECE parent survey asked parents how strongly they agreed or disagreed when asked whether enrolling their child in a Jewish ECE changed their engagement in Jewish life in various ways. As Table 5 shows, Jewish ECE families said they felt more engaged as a result of enrolling their child in Jewish ECE. Comparable questions were not asked of parents whose children attended another type of ECE.

- The most commonly reported increases in Jewish engagement for respondents with a child in Jewish ECE were in feeling more a part of the Jewish community (both generally and locally) and having made friends who are Jewish.
- Responses were somewhat consistent across communities, although there were a few differences:
 - Compared with other communities, respondents who did not live in one of the three target communities reported experiencing a larger benefit with respect to Jewish engagement from enrolling their child in a Jewish ECE.
 - Compared with other communities, fewer respondents from Chicago were interested in learning about Jewish heritage, traditions, and values; had started a new Jewish tradition at home; or had joined another Jewish organization as a result of enrolling their child in Jewish ECE.
 - Compared with other communities, fewer respondents from Washington, D.C. felt pride in being Jewish and felt part of the global Jewish community as a result of enrolling their child in Jewish ECE.
 - Compared with other communities, fewer respondents from Seattle reported no changes in home-based Jewish traditions as a result of enrolling their child in Jewish ECE.

Table 5. Jewish Engagement as a Result of Enrolling Child in Jewish ECE

	Overall	D.C.	Chicago	Seattle	Other Community
<i>As a result of enrolling my child in their Jewish ECE program, I agree or strongly agree that I...</i>					
Feel more a part of the Jewish community	79%	83%	75%	80%	83%
Feel more a part of the local Jewish community	77%	81%	72%	76%	83%
Have made friends who are Jewish	76%	79%	73%	74%	80%
Built upon a Jewish tradition in my home/family	71%	66%	67%	76%	84%*
Can see greater relevance of Judaism to my own life	63%	62%	59%	54%	80%**
Am interested in learning about Jewish heritage, traditions, values, and/or culture	62%	63%	55%*	63%	78%**
Feel greater pride in being Jewish	59%	46%**	63%	52%	76%**
Started a new Jewish tradition in my home/family	51%	47%	43%*	60%	65%*
Feel more a part of the global Jewish community	48%	37%*	50%	43%	58%
Know more about different ways of being Jewish	46%	43%	41%	37%	69%**
Have not changed any Jewish traditions in my home/family	36%	35%	33%	20%*	60%**
Have joined a Jewish organization (e.g., JCC, synagogue)	37%	41%	25%**	33%	65%**

Note. N= 312-324. Chi-square analyses were conducted to determine differences between communities (DC, Chicago, Seattle, and "Other").

* $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$

We also examined whether “dosage” of Jewish ECE (measured both in the months that the child has attended ECE and in the hours per week they attend) had an influence on whether parents reported a change in Jewish engagement as a result of enrolling their child in Jewish ECE. We found that the number of hours per week children attend ECE was not significantly related to any measure of Jewish engagement for children in Jewish ECE. However, the number of months that child attended Jewish ECE was significantly related to several aspects of Jewish engagement, but not always in expected ways:

- Families with children in Jewish ECE for six months to one year felt greater pride in being Jewish and were more likely to join a Jewish organization than families who had children in Jewish ECE for less than six months or for over one year.
- Families with children in Jewish ECE for longer than 6 months were significantly more likely to start a Jewish tradition at home as a result of Jewish ECE.
- Families with children in Jewish ECE for at least two years felt less pride in being Jewish as a result of Jewish ECE than families whose children were in Jewish ECE for less than two years.
 - The “sweet spot” for making families feel connected Jewishly as a result of being in Jewish ECE may be between 6-12 months.

The curious finding that families with children enrolled in Jewish ECE between 6 and 12 months have more positive attitudes and join Jewish organizations more often than families with children enrolled in Jewish ECE for over one year could be an artifact of a common practice of offering free or reduced synagogue membership to new ECE families of synagogue-affiliated programs. Perhaps once parents become involved with a synagogue community, the ECE program may no longer be the primary focus for engagement. This hypothesis merits further investigation.

Based on a subset of items, four distinct profiles of Jewish engagement were identified among a sample of families with young, Jewish children surveyed across three communities

Survey respondents were asked to respond to a subset of Jewish engagement items with reference to two points in time: 1) during the year before their first child was born (retrospective report) and 2) at the time of the survey (concurrent report). This subset of items is associated with more traditional measures of Jewish engagement. Specifically, respondents were asked about the following beliefs and activities retrospectively (pre-birth) and currently (at the time of the survey):

- how many of the respondents’ friends are Jewish;
- how often they participate in Jewish activities;
- how important being Jewish is to them;
- whether they are a member of a synagogue;
- how often they attend services;
- whether they celebrate the High Holidays;
- whether they celebrate *Chanukah*;
- whether they celebrate Passover;
- and, where they celebrate each of these holidays.

Responses to this subset of survey questions were used to develop “profiles” of engagement that could be compared over these two timepoints using a statistical technique called latent transition analysis (LTA).¹⁰ Findings suggested that families can be categorized into one of **four distinct profiles**:

¹⁰ Latent transition analysis (LTA) is used to test patterns of responses across several variables and then group respondents into distinct “profiles” based on their patterns of response. In this study, patterns in family Jewish engagement were analyzed, and families were grouped based on their Jewish engagement profiles at both timepoints. LTA further permits researchers to determine if profile membership shifts over time, for example

- A profile we labeled “**Baseline**” engagement, representing families that are not *highly* engaged in any domain of engagement examined. It is important to note that the “Baseline” profile does not represent families that are not Jewishly engaged. Rather, it represents families that do not have high levels of engagement within the domains of Jewish engagement we examined in this analysis. For example, when asked about holiday celebrations, families associated with the “Baseline” profile tended to report celebrating one or two Jewish holidays per year rather than all three.¹¹ These families may also do Jewish things, but less than once a month.
- A profile we labeled “**Holiday-based**” engagement, representing families that celebrate at least three major Jewish holidays, often with family or friends, but are not *highly* engaged in other domains.
- A profile we labeled “**Connected,**” representing families that are *highly* engaged in the following domains: Judaism is very important, they are frequently (at least monthly) doing Jewish things, they celebrate Jewish holidays, and celebrate the holidays with family and friends. Families represented by this profile are not *highly* engaged in synagogue membership or attending religious services, and do not endorse the statement that most or all of their friends are Jewish.
- A profile we labeled “**Connected and Affiliated,**” representing families that are *highly* engaged across the domains of Jewish engagement characterized by the “Connected” profile as well as *highly* engaged for the remaining engagement indicators examined in this analysis, namely synagogue membership, attending religious services, and endorsing the statement that most or all of their friends are Jewish.

Demographic and parent background characteristics distinguished the four Jewish engagement profiles

Table 6 shows each Jewish engagement profile’s demographic and family characteristics. Some key findings include:

- Parents represented by the “Connected and Affiliated” profile are significantly **younger** than parents represented by other engagement profiles. While the age difference of two years, on average, between profile groups (32 years versus 34 years) was found to be statistically significant, this difference is not practically important.

changing from one profile type at Time 1 to another profile type at Time 2, or whether profile membership stays stable over time. Because we were interested to see if shifted their Jewish engagement profiles over time based on whether they sent their children to Jewish ECE or another type of ECE, we conducted the LTA on a sample that was matched on background characteristics (through a technique called propensity score matching) to try to equalize the subgroups of families who enrolled their child in Jewish and “other” ECE and thus isolate the effect of Jewish ECE on profile membership.

¹¹ Because at least 85 percent of respondents said they celebrated each holiday, we combined holiday celebrations into one variable indicating respondents participated in all three holidays. An indicator of whether they celebrated all three holidays provides more variability in this construct of engagement.

- Parents represented by the “Connected” profile pre-birth are more likely than those represented by the “Baseline” and “Connected and Affiliated” profiles to have **grown up in the same community where they currently live**. Parents represented by the “Holiday-based” profile pre-birth are also more likely than those represented by the “Baseline” profile to have grown up in the same community where they currently live.
- Mothers represented by the “Connected” and “Connected and Affiliated” profiles are more likely to have **attended Jewish day school** than mothers represented by “Baseline” or “Holiday-based” profiles.
- Fathers represented by the “Baseline” profile pre-birth are less likely than fathers represented by “Connected” or “Connected and Affiliated” profiles to have **attended Jewish day school**. Fathers represented by the “Connected and Affiliated” profile currently are more likely than fathers represented by all other profiles to have attended Jewish day school.
 - Consistent with some preliminary analyses,¹² Jewish day school appears to be an important factor not only in a family’s choice of ECE, but also in their overall Jewish engagement.
- Families represented by the “Connected and Affiliated” profile (pre-birth) are more likely to identify as **Orthodox** compared to other groups. One-quarter of families represented by the “Connected and Affiliated” profile identify as **Reform**, although this is a smaller proportion than in other profile groups. Families represented by the “Holiday-based” profile are most likely to identify as Reform and families represented by the “Baseline” profile are most likely to identify as secular, compared to other groups.
- Parents represented by the “Baseline” and “Holiday-based” profiles pre-birth are more likely to have an **interfaith marriage** than parents represented by the “Connected” or “Connected and Affiliated” profiles. Parents currently represented by the “Connected” profile are also more likely to have an interfaith marriage than parents represented by the “Connected and Affiliated” profile, but less likely than parents represented by the “Baseline” and “Holiday-based” profiles.
 - These demographic findings are consistent with our expectations given the extant literature about the characteristics of Jewish families that are more engaged on traditional measures of engagement.¹³

¹² We conducted propensity score matching (PSM) to ensure that our samples of Jewish ECE and “other” ECE enrolled families initially matched on a set of background characteristics, including parents’ own enrollment in Jewish education as children.

¹³ See Cohen (2005) as an example.

Table 6. Demographic Characteristics of Each Jewish Engagement Profile

	Baseline		Holiday-Based		Connected		Connected and Affiliated	
	Pre-birth	Current	Pre-birth	Current	Pre-birth	Current	Pre-birth	Current
Age								
Respondent Mean (SD)	34.0(.44)	34.7(.71)	34.4(.42)	33.8(.51)	33.3(.46)	34.0(.33)	31.8(.42)	31.9(.44)
Oldest child Mean (SD)	3.3(.13)	3.5(.19)	3.2(.13)	3.1(.15)	3.1(.14)	3.2(.10)	3.3(.14)	3.3(.14)
Parent Characteristics								
Modal Income ⁺	150-250	100-150	150-250	150-250	150-250	150-250	100-150	150-250
Grew up and live in same community	20%	28%	36%	37%	47%	38%	27%	26%
Mother attended Jewish day school	14%	18%	14%	6%	29%	26%	44%	39%
Father attended Jewish day school	7%	7%	12%	12%	25%	18%	40%	37%
Interfaith marriage	42%	57%	35%	57%	8%	23%	8%	4%
Judaism "Branch"								
Orthodox	0%	0%	1%	0%	1%	2%	34%	29%
Reform	41%	31%	72%	68%	45%	51%	23%	26%
Secular	35%	44%	6%	16%	5%	6%	6%	4%

Note. ⁺ Indicates in thousands. Income is measured categorically, and the modal category is reported. Select significant differences discussed in text ($p < .05$).

From the parent survey findings, we see that families' engagement profiles before the birth of their first child and at the time of the survey are associated with whether they decide to enroll their child in Jewish versus another type of ECE. **Parents represented by the "Connected" and "Connected and Affiliated" engagement profiles before the birth of their first child were statistically more likely to send their children to Jewish ECE than parents represented by the "Baseline" or "Holiday-Based" profiles. Families with a child in Jewish ECE were also more likely to be currently characterized by the "Connected" and "Connected and Affiliated" engagement profiles than the other engagement profiles.**

Next, we tested whether there was change over time (between the year before the birth of the first child and the time of the survey) in families' Jewish engagement profiles. We found no statistically significant change between Jewish engagement profiles from pre-birth to the time of the survey.

Data from the qualitative case study as well as the quantitative parent survey suggest that Jewish ECE can increase Jewish engagement among some families –at least over the course of their participation in the Jewish ECE program

As noted above, most families characterized by a Jewish engagement profile “stay” in that profile from the time before the birth of their first child to the time of the survey. This speaks to how difficult it may be to change how families are Jewishly engaged. However, latent transition analyses¹⁴ of the parent survey data revealed that **families with children enrolled in Jewish ECE were more likely than families 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 suggests an effect of Jewish ECE over other types of ECE in changing how families are Jewishly engaged – at least among those who are initially “connected” to Jewish life. In addition, the fact that families characterized by initially lower levels of Jewish engagement (represented by the “Baseline” and “Holiday-based” profiles) are not likely to change profile membership when enrolled in Jewish ECE suggests that **Jewish ECE influences Jewish engagement if baseline levels of engagement are already at a certain threshold**. It should be kept in mind that these profile analyses are based on a small set of indicators of engagement and do not represent the full spectrum of Jewish engagement constructs identified in earlier stages of this study; different findings might be revealed if a larger set of engagement indicators were included in these profile analyses.

Information from the case studies in the three communities that were part of this CASJE ECE Project also addressed the effects of Jewish ECE on Jewish engagement of participating families. Although this information is anecdotal, it is still relevant and provides a more nuanced understanding of the role of Jewish ECE in supporting and enhancing Jewish engagement among families with young children.

Virtually all Jewish ECE directors within one community spoke about changes in families’ Jewish engagement that resulted from program attendance. Directors reported anecdotal evidence that families who were not at all or less engaged in Jewish life at program entry increased their level of engagement while their children attended Jewish ECE program. Specifically, directors at five of six Jewish ECE programs in this community reported that families celebrated *Shabbat* more frequently and in a more comprehensive way than they did prior to enrollment. Examples of increased *Shabbat* practice among ECE families included attending *Tot Shabbat* programs, lighting candles, saying *Shabbat* blessings, and saying *Havdalah* at home. Additional, less frequently discussed indicators of increased home practice included building a *sukkah* and saying the *shema* prayer before going to bed.

Other aspects of increased Jewish engagement as a result of Jewish ECE attendance included changes in Jewish institutional attachment (e.g., becoming synagogue members and attending Jewish day camp) and connection/interaction (e.g., developing new Jewish friendships). A program director shared an anecdote that exemplifies the formation of friendships and how that relates to increased Jewish engagement:

¹⁴ For more detailed information about latent transition analysis methodology and results, see Karberg, E., Huz, I., Ciaravino, S., Paschall, K., Welti, K., Pina, G., . . . Cantrell, E. (2018.) *A Focus on Jewish Families: Results from the CASJE ECE Online Parent Survey*. Washington, DC: Consortium for Applied Studies in Jewish Education.

“We have a family who started a few years ago ... and really [did] not [have] much to do with Judaism. And they started hosting *Shabbat* dinners with other families. I ran into the husband at [kosher supermarket] and I’m like, ‘What are you doing here?’ He’s like, ‘look what you’ve done to us, now we have to buy kosher food. We’re having someone over for *Shabbat* dinner.’”

Another director reported that multiple families are interested in continuing to be involved in Judaism, stating that many parents have told them that “we weren’t thinking about going to Jewish day school for our children, that wasn’t really in our mind when we came, but we really wanna continue Judaism, because you’ve laid a really beautiful foundation and our children just love it.”

The director from one program discussed the role of the ECE center as forming a foundation of knowledge in Jewish practice, especially around *Shabbat*, for families with one non-Jewish spouse. Whether these families continued any of these practices after their child left the ECE center is unknown, but the parents were certainly more knowledgeable than they were before their child entered the program.

The anecdotes that directors shared during the interviews suggest powerful changes in families’ level of Jewish engagement, at least over the time of their participation in the Jewish ECE program. However, these anecdotes may represent a small subset of families with a child enrolled in the ECE program. It is unclear how representative these experiences are of all ECE program families. That is why we also conducted a parent survey to capture additional perspectives of families across the three communities.

Besides Jewish ECE, other levers of greater Jewish engagement among families with young children include the birth of a first child, participation in Jewish infant/toddler programming, and the parents’ own childhood experiences with Jewish education

Findings from both the Key Informant Interviews and the parent survey indicate that the birth of a first child is a pivotal event prompting greater engagement in Jewish life. However, findings from the parent survey suggest that the birth of a first child increases parents’ engagement *in domains in which they are already engaged* but does not necessarily lead parents to be more engaged in new domains. Thus, the birth of a first child is a lever of change in *degree* but not *type* of Jewish engagement among families.

The parent survey data reveals that mothers and fathers who send their children to Jewish ECE are more likely to have attended Jewish day school and are more likely to have participated in Jewish programming when their children are infants and toddlers. This analysis points to other levers that may explain the change in Jewish engagement we see among families with young children enrolled in Jewish ECE.

Summary: A Focus on Families with Young Jewish Children

In general, families choose ECE based on practical considerations such as cost, location, and hours of operation. However, parents who chose Jewish ECE were *less* likely to report location, cost, hours of operation, and quality of care as very important reasons for choosing an ECE program, and were *more* likely to report recommendations from friends, warmth of the staff, meeting other parents with young children, and giving their child a Jewish education as very important reasons for choosing an ECE program, compared to their peers who chose other types of ECE for their children.

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.

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 contemporary²⁹ 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.

²⁹ 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-reflected 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.**³⁰

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.**

³⁰ 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.

The Consortium for Applied Studies in Jewish Education (CASJE) is an evolving community of researchers, practitioners, and philanthropic leaders dedicated to improving the quality of knowledge that can be used to guide the work of Jewish education. CASJE supports research shaped by the wisdom of practice, practice guided by research, and philanthropy informed by a sound base of evidence.

George Washington University's Graduate School of Education and Human Development (GSEHD) advances knowledge through meaningful research that improves the policy and practice of education. Together, more than 1,600 faculty, researchers and graduate students make up the GSEHD community of scholars. Founded in 1909, GSEHD continues to take on the challenges of the 21st century, guided by the belief that education is the single greatest contributor to economic success and social progress.



Graduate School
of Education
& Human Development
THE GEORGE WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY

Suggested citation: Halle, T., Rosen, M., Karberg, E., Cook, M., Schwartz, H., Huz, I., Arkin, M., Rushovich, B., and Bamdad, T. (2020). *Exploring Associations Between Jewish Early Care, Education and Engagement*. Washington, DC: Consortium for Applied Studies in Jewish Education.