

**Report of the
Task Force on
Congregational
and Communal
Jewish Education**



A VISION FOR EXCELLENCE

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Table of Contents

Members of the Task Force	1
Introduction	3
A Call to Action	5
What We Have Learned	7
The Task Force and Its Work	13
Seven Challenges, Seven Strategies: Transforming Congregational and Communal Jewish Education	15
1. Developing a Clear Vision	16
2. Building Systemic Linkages for Strengthening Jewish Education	17
3. Building Broad Community-Wide Support	18
4. Creating Effective, Coordinated Educational Support System	19
5. Developing New Models for Effective Education	20
6. Strengthening the Systems for Sharing Knowledge and Experience	21
7. Identifying and Preparing High-Quality Personnel	22
Supporting Community Through the National System	23
Career Preparation and the Development of Senior Professionals	25
Recruitment of Young Adults for Careers in Jewish Education	29
Research and Evaluation	31
Conclusion	33
Appendices	
A. Mission Statement	34
B. Work Group Recommendations	
Building a Collaborative Infrastructure for Support	35
Recruitment, Training and Status of Teachers and Educational Leaders	36
Program, Content and Structure — Organization of the Educational Process	38
Advocacy, Funding and Resource Development	40
C. Innovative Program Models	42
Congregational-Based Programs:	
1. ✡EXPLORATIONS... — Temple Sholom, New Milford, CT	43
2. Shabbat-Based Synagogue Community — Congregation Beth Am Israel, Penn Valley, PA	44
3. Center for Jewish Learning and Living — Westchester Reform Temple, Syracuse, NY	45
4. Project Mishpacha — Beth El Congregation, Baltimore, MD	46
Community-Wide Programs:	
5. Mashkon — Board of Jewish Education of Greater Washington, DC	47
6. Designated School Project — Auerbach Central Agency for Jewish Education, Philadelphia, PA	49
7. Bet Limmud — Jewish Education Center of Cleveland, OH	50
8. School Accreditation Process — Bureau of Jewish Education of Greater Los Angeles, CA	52
9. Renaissance Educator Project — Bureau of Jewish Education of Greater Boston, MA	54
10. Teacher/Mentor Program — Community Foundation for Jewish Education, Chicago, IL	56
11. Atudatenu — Minneapolis, MN	57
12. Keshet — Cambridge, MA	58



Task Force on Congregational and Communal Jewish Education

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Introduction

The Task Force on Congregational and Communal Jewish Education was convened by JESNA to respond to the increasing concern about the quality and effectiveness of part-time Jewish education programs throughout the North American Jewish community. With more than 60% of Jewish children enrolled in such programs, both within congregations and under communal auspices, the time was ripe for a formal examination of the “supplementary school” system that served the North American Jewish community for the better part of the 20th century.

Many factors contribute to our sense that Jewish education, along with the entire Jewish communal structure, is in a transitional period. During the last half-century the Jewish community has changed dramatically. Jews have become a predominantly suburban, rather than urban, population. Extended families are dispersed across the continent. The synagogue, which has been the center of Jewish life in the community, is searching for new ways to reach and engage members. And Jewish day schools are attracting ever larger numbers of Jewish children. All these changes make a thorough re-examination of the system of part-time, formal Jewish education timely. JESNA convened this Task Force to seek new directions that will strengthen congregational and communal education, ensuring its ability to provide important venues for high-quality Jewish education for our children and their families.

The Task Force built its work on the creativity and energies of many who had the foresight to address the challenges facing congregational and communal part-time Jewish education. On a national level, Hebrew Union College — Jewish Institute of Religion in Los Angeles initiated the Experiment in Congregational Education, which involved 14 congregations in



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an extensive program of examination, experimentation, and reflection designed to encourage congregations to become learning communities. The Reconstructionist movement developed its Network of Cooperating Schools. The Jewish Theological Seminary revitalized its Melton Center for Jewish Education and forged a partnership with the United Synagogue to strengthen Conservative congregational schools. Finally, Synagogue 2000, a trans-denominational initiative for synagogue transformation, created a framework for congregations to work with and encourage its membership to become more deeply involved in the Jewish experience by building upon their personal quests to find meaning in the 21st century.

These national projects have been complemented by local initiatives across the continent that were motivated by many of the same concerns. From a small congregation in Connecticut to community-wide projects in Los Angeles, Boston, Cleveland, Washington, DC, and Philadelphia, Jewish communal leaders recognized that the system of educating our youth needs an infusion of new ideas, new resources, and a revitalized sense of what we can accomplish when we set our minds to creating high-quality Jewish educational experiences. We hope that the recommendations of the JESNA Task Force, by building on the work already begun, will become an additional catalyst for significant change in educating the Jewish community of the future.

A Call to Action

Since the publication of the *National Jewish Population Study* in 1990, the North American Jewish community has increasingly focused attention on strengthening its institutional framework in Jewish education. Jewish Continuity initiatives became the symbol of the 1990s, with special funding being devoted to experimental pilot projects in small and large communities across the continent. Because of a greater interest in and funding for evaluation procedures, many of these initiatives were evaluated for quality and impact. As a result, we now know more about how to bring about effective change in the quality of the educational program than at any time in the past.

The Task Force on Congregational and Communal Jewish Education hopes that its work will be another significant component in the ever expanding dialogue addressing the quality issues of the part-time educational system in North America. By studying each of the new initiatives, the Task Force developed a clearer understanding of the positive impact that quality congregational and communal education programs can and should have on students, their families, and the institutional communities that sponsor the programs. The Task Force's work was designed to contribute to and expand the new interest in creating higher-quality Jewish education for our children and youth.

In issuing this report, the Task Force calls upon the communal systems — national education agencies and organizations, federations, and central agencies — to expand their role in providing for and promoting new initiatives that will bring about change and growth in an educational system that touches the lives of the majority of Jewish families in North America. Through our combined efforts, the quality of the edu-



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cational programs will reflect the values of the Jewish people and prepare a new generation of leaders for the future.

What We Have Learned

Congregational and Communal Jewish Education as we know it today is a relatively recent phenomenon, having found its roots near the beginning of the 20th century in North America. Its history has been documented in several studies that date to the 1930s when the predominant form of Jewish education for children was in the community-based Talmud Torah, which met five times a week, and attendance at Junior congregation on Shabbat. Through the years there has been a shift to the congregational setting, where most part-time Jewish education now takes place. There has also been a reduction in the number of sessions and hours attended during the week, with the current trend being two or three sessions each week for a total of between five and six hours of contact time. Each of these changes has been influenced by the shifting environment of the North American Jewish community and has had a dramatic impact on the nature and quality of Jewish life as practiced by the majority of the community.

Despite these changes in the environment, there has been relative stability in several of the primary factors at the foundation of the system. Throughout the 20th century, and following a similar pattern as earlier generations, the responsibility for educating our children was assumed by the community. However, this has gradually shifted from the full community to that of the individual congregation, with support for the school coming from a combination of fees from the family and budgetary allocations from the congregation. As the congregation became the primary sponsor of the educational programs, the school took on a more significant role in attracting new members to the congregation, causing identification with the institution, the religious ideology,



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and the professional staff to take on greater importance.

In the 21st century, many of the important influences on the educational programs appear to be shifting once again as the environment continues to change both in North America and within the Jewish community. The Task Force found several consistent patterns as it explored the current status of the congregational and communal school system:

- the family as the primary influence on the educational growth of the children;
- the growing need to expand the quality and quantity of activities for children and their families outside of the formal educational program; and,
- the recognition that most of the school programs are heavily weighted toward the elementary years, with a dramatic decline in contact and involvement beginning in the years after the age of Bar and Bat Mitzvah.

(The need to expand our programming for the post- Bar and Bat Mitzvah years was addressed by the Task Force on Jewish Youth Initiatives in its report *The Teen Connection: Linking Jewish Youth in the 21st Century*, JESNA, March 1998.)

The Task Force's recommendations were guided by three critical issues that emerged from their research:

- the changing environment
- developing new systems
- building an institutional vision

These became central themes in a number of experimental initiatives tested over the past few years. As the Task Force moved from the research and analysis stages of its work, these themes took on a greater level of importance and influenced the specific recommendations that each of the Work Groups developed. In translating these recommendations into the "Seven Challenges and Recommended Strategies," the Task Force recognized that the system of Jewish education in North America is going through a significant change, just as it did both at the beginning and in the middle of the last century. A brief exploration of the three critical issues will place the recommended strategies into a proper context.

The Changing Environment

Jewish life in North America has changed dramatically in the last half-century as the Jewish people have fully integrated into the fabric of American life. The barriers that often separated Jews from their non-Jewish neighbors have nearly disappeared. In their place is a community that is secure in its beliefs and practices. Public events involving Jewish traditional activities are common and receive positive press from the major media throughout the continent. Jews are actively involved in all aspects of public life, from the entertainment world to the political. Being Jewish is no longer a barrier to being elected to public office, as is demonstrated by the “minyan” in the United States Senate. The acceptance of the Jewish people into mainstream North American society was the dream of the early immigrants, who embraced the public schools as a symbol of their becoming Americanized. As we enter the 21st century, nearly every goal established by the immigrants at the start of the 20th century has been achieved.

This acceptance is only the beginning of our understanding of the changing environment in which the Jewish people find themselves. Becoming a part of the larger society means that the changes enveloping the entire society also have tremendous impact on the way Jews live their lives, both as a community and as individuals. As the population shifted from inner-city neighborhoods to the suburbs and as technology advanced from the radio and automobile to the extensive use of computers and air travel, the lifestyle of every member of the community has taken on a new orientation. No longer do we live in neighborhoods where the ethnic and religious identification of most of the neighbors is the same. Rather, we live in a multicultural society where the most common element among people is their identification with the values of the American people. In such a society where the binding nature of deep religious and ethnic roots and the extended family are missing, the predominant form of identification has shifted to the individual. Each person now is in a position to make choices about how and where to live, about the people to interact with on both a professional and personal level, and about the values that guide life's complex choices.

The Jewish people, as they have been throughout history, are often at the center of these changes. The tremendous economic and political success of the Jewish people within the North American society has significantly altered the nature of how Jewish life is practiced and observed. Social and political acceptance within the larger community is of primary importance to most American Jews, and so educational success is now measured by the quality of university and graduate school, not by the level of Jewish learning and knowledge. On the other hand, an increasing number of Jewish families are choosing more-intensive forms of Jewish education for their children out of a deeper commitment to the values that have guided our community for nearly three millennia. Jewish day school



enrollments are at an all-time high; Jewish summer camps are at or near capacity; and congregational and communal Jewish education is experiencing a renewed interest from both parents and communal leaders seeking a quality educational experience for every child. Adult Jewish learning is also experiencing phenomenal growth.

However, while the numbers and intensity increases in day schools, camps, youth programs, and adult education, we continually see a decrease in the number of hours and the quality of the congregational and communal education programs. In the past 50 years, the average number of hours that a child spends in a congregational or communal school in the years prior to b'nai mitzvah has dropped from ten or more per week to between four and six. This has had a dramatic impact on the quality of faculty as well. With fewer hours, there are fewer full-time positions, and it has become more challenging to attract high-quality trained teachers and educational leaders.

All of this is the result of the “new” American culture, which emphasizes the importance of the individual and places greater value on her or his search for personal meaning. But with the increase in formal study and the deepening personal commitment to Jewish values, the Jewish community is participating in the same renewed interest in religious commitment that has captured large segments of the North American society in which we live. We are clearly a part of a larger community where we share similar concerns and approaches. To expand our impact on the children and their families, leadership needs to be aware of the changing nature of American society and how it impacts individual lives.

Developing New Systems

Jewish education has long been compartmentalized. From the earliest days in America, just like in the “old country,” children were sent to a “melamed” for Hebrew instruction while they learned key components of living a Jewish life from their parents, aunts and uncles, and grandparents. When schools were established, first as Talmud Torahs and then within congregations, children remained separate from the main activities of the adult community. Parents and lay leaders rapidly became less interested in the childrens’ Jewish education and, as time passed, became less able to participate or become role models. With this declining interest, support for the system suffered, resulting in a decrease in the overall quality of learning. The institutions that assumed responsibility for the educational programs had little concern for the relationship between the formal programs and the impact that the system had on raising Jewish children to participate fully in the Jewish community.

The school became a semi-autonomous entity within a larger, dynamic institution. It served the needs of the Jewish community for many years: children were receiving an education and were able to demonstrate their knowledge at the appropriate public ceremonies. However, as the community continued to change, the systems remained much the same. The educational programs became more isolated from the daily activities of the congregations while the families became less and less involved in Jewish life. With pressures continuing to increase for the school to fulfill the entire responsibility for educating the children, the system began to break down.

Shortly after the publication of two significant documents in the early 1990s, *A Time to Act* and the *1990 National Jewish Population Study*, several new initiatives were funded that began to explore new models for organizing Jewish education within the synagogue framework. In each case, the driving principle was that effective Jewish education within a congregational setting required a systemic change for the entire institution. The function of educating children could no longer be separated from the overall goals of the congregation. The leadership, both volunteer and professional, needed to be actively involved in promoting the educational needs of the entire community, from the youngest children to the senior adults. An educated leadership was required to set a positive role model of learning adults for the entire community and, especially, for the parents of the students in the school. By involving every element of the community as a unified whole, the congregational or communal school would become a partner in advancing the values of the Jewish people.

Building an Institutional Vision

The ability of an educational program to have the desired impact on the lives of the learners is connected to the ability of the institution to present a common front with a singular purpose and vision. According to Pekarsky (*Journal of Jewish Education*, Vol. 63, 1&2, 1997), vision is that “image or conception of the kind of human being and/or community that the educational process is to bring into being.” This “existential vision” might “consist of a thick, ordered constellation of attitudes, skills, understandings, and dispositions; or it might be limited to a particular attitude or way of approaching the world.” It should be distinguished from the “institutional vision,” which is an “image or conception of what an educational institution at its best should look like.” The distinction is that the existential vision is the anchor upon which the institutional vision is grounded, the values and *raison d’être* upon which we build the educational program.

The formal educational system that is known as the congregational or communal school



has rarely benefited from having a leadership team that has clearly thought through its purpose or vision. Too often the educational leader, whether principal or educational director, sets the vision and direction of the school program. The school or education committee may assist in developing this vision but rarely spends significant time or resources exploring the underlying issues that frame a meaningful direction for the school. Furthermore, their work, as important as it is to the school, is not seen as a component of a larger process of vision-making for the institution as a whole. Such discontinuity within the institution between the school leadership and the institutional leadership, both professional and volunteer, will be unable to create a single, unified vision for every element of the educational program.

Jewish education in such an environment is generally doomed to failure. It is often characterized as “the left hand does not know what the right hand is doing.” Few, if any, volunteer and professional leaders within the congregation or communal system have much understanding of the possibilities that a Jewish education program can or should have on the lives of the learners and their families. Decisions are based upon information that rarely has relevance to the purposes and goals of a Jewish education program. Without an integrated approach to Jewish learning and living that permeates the entire institution and is understood and subscribed to by all levels of leadership, the educational program will have little significance in the overall life of the congregation or community system.

High-quality Jewish education requires a unified approach by the professional and volunteer leaders within the congregation or communal school system. For Jewish education to be effective, the leadership team must struggle to create a clear vision for Jewish education and how to achieve it within the framework of the larger institution. Building a leadership model with a shared common vision must be the goal of every educational program. In Jewish education, where the part-time school model has separated formal education from all other aspects of Jewish life, the need to bring the institutional leadership and school staff together to develop a clear approach to Jewish living and learning is a prerequisite for achieving success.

The Task Force and Its Work

The Task Force was convened by JESNA as part of its ongoing examination of the critical issues facing the Jewish community in North America. A broad cross-section of professional and lay leadership were invited to join with members of the JESNA Board to explore the field and develop an approach that would serve as a catalyst for institutional and communal change. Included were the heads of schools, central agencies for Jewish education, and the departments of education of the national religious movements, the United Synagogue for Conservative Judaism, the Union of American Hebrew Congregations, and the Jewish Reconstructionist Federation. The Task Force developed a Mission Statement to guide its work (see Appendix A) over the ensuing eighteen months. It collected extensive data and information on new program initiatives, consulted with educators who are involved in creative educational programming, and developed a series of recommendations for addressing the challenges facing the Jewish community. To facilitate its work, the Task Force was divided into four Work Groups:

- Building a Collaborative Infrastructure for Support;
- Recruitment, Training, and Status of Teachers and Educational Leaders;
- Program, Content and Structure — Organization of the Educational Process; and
- Advocacy, Funding, and Resource Development.

The Task Force conducted a selected review of the literature on congregational and communal Jewish education and related items from the general and religious education fields. Each



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Work Group analyzed and summarized the literature and data collected and developed a series of specific recommendations (see Appendix B) for both local and national agencies. These recommendations were synthesized into seven challenges and recommended strategies, which form the substantive component of the final report of the Task Force. In moving from the specific recommendations to the more generalized strategies, the Task Force is cognizant that Jewish communities are comprised of diverse institutions and agencies whose agendas vary across a wide spectrum. By working together in a collaborative and cooperative system, each of the institutions will be in a better position to address the qualitative issues of Jewish education for its constituents. The Task Force found the expanded experimentation of the past decade to be a very positive factor as it specifically encourages new efforts in those areas where the combination of multiple strategies will be applied. Careful evaluation and reporting is essential in each new initiative. By the infusion of new initiatives that engage the entire institution and the development of partnerships between institutions, we hope to revitalize the congregational and communal Jewish educational system.

Seven Challenges, Seven Strategies:

Transforming Congregational and Communal Jewish Education

In formulating its recommendations, the Task Force gave consideration both to the systemic issues impacting part-time Jewish education and to specific concerns that are repeatedly encountered in examining the status and work of our congregational and communal schools today. The four Work Groups each developed a set of recommendations in their respective areas, which offer a wide variety of highly specific directions to pursue over the next several years. (These recommendations may be found in Appendix B.)

The Task Force developed seven broad systemic strategies that will set the agenda for the future. Piecemeal approaches addressing individual problem areas will not result in significant change. Underlying our systemic recommendations is the belief that education for children and youth must be carried out as part of a larger familial, institutional, and communal commitment to quality Jewish learning. Creating effective part-time educational programs requires a clear and consistent vision of Jewish education for both the young people who participate and their families, and it requires the full involvement of the professional and volunteer leadership of the community or institution within whose context these programs take place. These principles form the foundation for the recommendations that follow.

The seven strategies address the particular issues contained in each of the Work Group reports. Each strategy focuses on a dimension of the entire system and should not be viewed as an independent or self-sufficient response to the challenges confronting part-time Jewish education. Rather, they should be viewed as mutually complementary, constituting as a whole a transformational approach to congregational and communal Jewish education.



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part-time educational
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CHALLENGE ONE: Developing a Clear Vision

Effective education is grounded in a community's vision of the values, knowledge, and skills that it seeks to transmit from generation to generation. In many Jewish schools today, the stated vision and goals of the school are neither linked directly to an institution-wide vision — enabling the school to be effective in its role as an agent for cultural transmission — nor to the vision or goals of the national movement. Nor do school goals visibly inform the practical approaches being implemented in the classroom.

Recommended Strategy:

Develop a clear vision for each educational program that is anchored in a larger institution-wide vision for Jewish education.

The program, content, and structure of the school should integrate the core values of the congregation or community. The various components need to be interlinked into a systematic whole involving all levels of leadership as well as the faculty and staff of the school.

Recommended Activities:

- Assist congregational leadership to develop a vision that integrates all educational programs into each congregation's overall vision and program.
- Encourage congregations with a clear educational vision to share with and guide others who wish to create their own vision.
- Develop a set of materials for distribution to congregations or communal schools, so they can create their own institutional vision.
- Establish a community-based leadership development program focusing on various approaches for creating an educational vision.

CHALLENGE TWO: Building Systemic Linkages for Strengthening Jewish Education

Jewish learning needs to be anchored in real experiences of Jewish living, not isolated within classrooms, in order to be maximally effective. As Jewish life has become fully integrated into the life of the American populace, Jewish schools have increasingly been challenged to maintain a high level of interest in Jewish life and learning among their students and families. Part-time Jewish education rarely draws upon the full set of strengths and resources embodied in its institutions and communities in order to give life to what is taught.

Recommended Strategy:

Pursue systemic collaborations through multiple partnerships, both internally and externally, to promote the mission and values of the educational institution.

Schools have manifold opportunities to extend their reach and impact through creating stronger linkages to the congregations, Jewish communities, and general communities of which they are a part. Schools should look beyond themselves to involve their students in the life of the institutions, and should seek ways to involve a broad spectrum of volunteers and professionals from the congregation and community in the life of the school.

Recommended Activities:

- Convene a community-wide task force to explore issues relating to congregational and communal Jewish education.
- Encourage the principals council (or similar forum) to develop a collaborative process for enhancing the educational programs within each institution.
- Develop collaborative programs linking the congregational and communal schools with other community agencies such as the JCC, Jewish Family Service, Hillel, and Federation.
- Encourage the development of Tikkun Olam and Tzedakah projects, which cross institutional lines.

CHALLENGE THREE: Building Broad Community-Wide Support

Despite the progress of the past decade, including increased interest and funding from federations for congregational education, a serious gap remains between the resource needs of congregational and communal schools and the willingness and ability of synagogues, communal structures, and private philanthropists to provide those resources necessary for dramatically improving educational programs.

Recommended Strategy:

Promote greater investment and involvement by central agencies, federations, and private philanthropists in the educational programs of congregational and communal schools.

Financial support for congregational and communal Jewish education has generally been the responsibility of the synagogues themselves, with some community-wide support, which is often channeled through central agencies for Jewish education. Expanded resources must be made available from all potential sources, including federations and other funders, if schools are to be able to make the changes needed to move toward a vision of excellence for congregational and communal education.

Recommended Activities:

- Encourage the federation to establish Jewish education as the number-one communal priority.
- Create a community endowment to support congregational and communal Jewish education.
- Engage a grant writer to prepare grant proposals for both communal educational institutions and individual congregations or communal schools, and to train educators to write proposals.
- Encourage the federation's endowment department to develop a systemic approach for individuals to provide long-term support for Jewish education through estate planning, trusts, and endowments.
- Create special programs within individual schools and on a community wide basis to introduce communal leadership and potential funders (grandparents) to the value of a high-quality educational program.
- Develop a marketing plan to raise the profile of congregational and communal Jewish education.
- Provide a forum for educators to meet with potential funders to match the goals of those seeking grants and the specific interests of the funders.

CHALLENGE FOUR: Creating Effective, Coordinated Educational Support Systems

Congregational and community educational programs need high-quality educational support and assistance if they are to grow toward excellence. The support systems available to these programs today are frequently fragmented and insufficiently funded to provide the consistency and quality of guidance and help that congregational and communal programs need.

Recommended Strategy:

Develop an integrated and well-funded system of Jewish educational support involving institutions at both the communal and national levels.

Efforts must be made to further strengthen the educational support systems for congregational and communal education embodied in central agencies for Jewish education and in the religious movements. Also, these bodies need to expand cooperation among themselves and with other institutions, both within and beyond the Jewish community, in order to develop more integrated and comprehensive support structures for individual schools and congregations that utilize the resources of multiple institutions in a coordinated fashion.

Recommended Activities:

- Provide support for a strong, well-funded central agency for Jewish education.
- Provide the latest technologies for use in the classrooms and for professional development of all educational personnel.
- Build networks of professional and lay leaders that address issues of common concern across institutional and denominational lines.
- Work closely with the departments of education of the religious streams to provide leadership and direction for the local congregational and communal schools.



CHALLENGE FIVE: Developing New Models for Effective Education

Throughout the Jewish community, schools are seeking new avenues for improving their level of success with both students and their families. Existing models for congregational and communal education hardly exhaust the potential for delivering quality educational programming, and may in some instances be dysfunctional. Innovative initiatives are needed to revitalize and enhance the quality of Jewish education.

Recommended Strategy:

Foster innovation of new models and structures in program design and content, and evaluate and disseminate those that are successful.

Innovation and experimentation should become the guiding words for communal action in transforming the congregational and communal Jewish educational system. New program models should be derived from research in Jewish and general education and in Jewish demography. Furthermore, these programs should have built-in evaluation systems to determine success and replicability. As new approaches prove successful, a carefully thought-out dissemination process should be developed to encourage further development of the conceptual frameworks and models that flow from them.

Recommended Activities:

- Establish a community endowment fund to support innovative models of congregational and communal Jewish education.
- Provide a community-wide system of awards for educators and/or schools that develop successful new models for Jewish educational excellence.
- Develop a training program to provide educators with the background and skills for effective program evaluation.
- Create a training program and manual for preparing educators to experiment with new models for effective education.

CHALLENGE SIX: Strengthening the Systems for Sharing Knowledge and Experience

Jewish education is a highly localized system. Each school and educational program is independent. Teachers and educational leaders rarely connect with others in the community on a regular basis. Volunteer leaders in one school have little, if any, contact with their counterparts in other schools. In a system where the level of communication is so low, it is nearly impossible for individuals to learn about successful programs taking place in other institutions.

Recommended Strategy:

Create effective systems for educators and volunteer leaders to share their innovations and learn from each other. Encourage their active engagement with counterparts in a variety of support organizations and networks on the local, regional, and national levels, and across both Jewish and general educational lines.

Jewish educators possess a high level of creative energy, which needs to be nurtured and valued. Encouragement should be provided through the use of new technologies and personal contact for educators to develop their ideas among like-minded people from both the Jewish and general education communities. Similar opportunities need to be provided for volunteer leaders to expand their own understanding of the nature of quality education.

Recommended Activities:

- Establish a community-wide forum for educators to demonstrate effective new models for their colleagues and interested lay and professional leaders from the community.
- Provide an easily accessible educational resource center with an extensive collection of materials and a staff prepared to work with both full-time and part-time teachers and educators.
- Develop a dynamic web site, with a full array of resources for use by teachers and educators, that is also open to lay leaders involved in Jewish education.
- Provide opportunities for teachers to visit other schools to share information with and learn from their colleagues.
- Create opportunities for educators to work collaboratively across institutional lines on innovative approaches and models for strengthening Jewish education.

CHALLENGE SEVEN: Identifying and Preparing High-Quality Personnel

Jewish education is one of the most labor intensive activities in the Jewish community. Both the professionals and the volunteers are required to perform a wide range of tasks in order to create a successful educational program. At every level of the system, those who guide, administer, and implement educational programs require high-quality preparation. However, we have rarely pursued a systematic approach for inspiring people to assume these important roles, to prepare them for successful performance once they have accepted the responsibility, or to provide the necessary incentives to retain them once a commitment has been made. This is as true for the volunteer leaders who serve on education committees as it is for the professionals who enter the classrooms or assume leadership roles in our educational institutions.

Recommended Strategy:

Substantially increase support for a systemic approach for recruiting, preparing, retaining, and nurturing full-time and part-time educators and volunteers for Jewish education.

For Jewish education to grow and flourish in the next decade, community leadership must invest in the people who make the system work, with appropriate financial incentives. Beginning with our high-school and university students, programs should be designed to attract and prepare teachers for the educational system. Providing opportunities for learning and growth at every career stage, as well as for volunteer leadership, is critical for the educational system to achieve success. Communities must develop and fund a wide range of professional and leadership development activities focused on the needs and expectations of the field.

Recommended Activities:

- Establish a community-wide recruitment initiative to encourage more people to become involved professionally in Jewish education.
- Develop a community-based induction program for all new teachers.
- Create an extensive system of mentoring and peer coaching for new and veteran teachers.
- Provide financial incentives for teachers to further their learning at institutes and with seminars and university courses.
- Establish regional and national programs for educational leadership development, particularly for those new to this important role.
- Develop a community-wide lay leadership development program focusing on the roles of school-board chair and board members.
- Convene a community-wide forum for all school-board chairs to learn from and share with each other.

Supporting Community Through the National System

Although the Task Force focuses its recommendations on local community initiatives, it is cognizant of the broader network of institutions and agencies with a significant interest in providing high-quality Jewish education for every child. These agencies have developed an interlocking network bringing together top volunteer and professional leaders who share a strong interest in providing leadership and direction to the schools and organizations directly responsible for the Jewish education of our youth. In every aspect of Jewish communal life, Jewish education is viewed as a key component to building a strong and vibrant Jewish life in North America. Whether the educational program is in a Jewish day school, informal activities for teens and families, or in the area of part-time congregational and communal programming, a high-quality Jewish learning experience is sought.

For the congregational and communal Jewish educational system to achieve the high level of success that the Jewish community strives for, each of the institutions and agencies must take a greater leadership role in promoting the vision and values that form the nexus of its existence. These visions must be translated into recognizable programmatic initiatives that have an appeal to their local affiliates. Building a strong system within the various elements of the North American Jewish community will require a concerted effort by every network component. Primarily, these components exist within the religious streams of the Conservative, Reconstructionist, and Reform communities. However, the communal system of schools and central agencies, of which JESNA is a central component, also has a significant role in shaping this agenda. By working together the religious streams and the communal



In every aspect of Jewish communal life, Jewish education is viewed as a key component to building a strong and vibrant Jewish life in North America.



agencies will be in a better position to develop a coordinated and concentrated approach to improving the quality of Jewish education for the congregational and communal system.

Therefore, the Task Force recommends that these agencies and institutions forge a strong partnership to provide support for local community initiatives and engage in collaborative activities where the larger national community is best positioned to address the specific needs. ■

Career Preparation and the Development of Senior Professionals

The quality of every Jewish educational program is tied directly to the women and men who provide the leadership. For much of the 20th century, the people chosen to head educational programs in congregational and communal schools were drawn from the ranks of public-school educators, whose training in education was based upon the models that were then current in the general education community. Most of these individuals also had strong commitments to the Jewish people and a depth of knowledge of Jewish sources that they had developed in their youth. However, with the changing nature of the Jewish community in the past 25 years and the lack of appropriate financial incentives, the availability of qualified educators with a background in education and Judaica declined tremendously. The result is an ever deepening shortage of educational leaders prepared to assume the complicated duties of heading independent Jewish educational programs designed for children, youth, and the adult community of parents and lay leaders.

The responsibility for addressing this lack of trained professionals should be shared by a wide variety of institutions both in North America and in Israel. The academic institutions that prepare people for the field are well positioned to expand their enrollments. Within their particular communities they are also well positioned to engage mature students interested in a new career or in moving to a higher position. Earning a graduate degree in Jewish education is the single most important vehicle for expanding the ranks of qualified leaders. In recent years, several new programs have been initiated. Of great significance is the new master's degree program offered through



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the Hebrew University's Rothberg International School, which will open in the Fall 2000 semester and includes a joint venture with the Pardes Institute for Jewish Studies in Jerusalem. Several North American universities are also expanding their programs to include opportunities for students to combine their interest in Judaica with a degree in education.

These formal training programs, which are primarily designed for students interested in pursuing a graduate degree on a full-time basis, need to be supplemented by alternatives that provide short-term and part-time educational opportunities for those wishing to make Jewish education a career. Several academic institutions already offer part-time degree programs for teachers and educators who reside in their community. By taking formal courses, these educators are able to prepare themselves for increased responsibility leading to a position in educational leadership. Unfortunately, only a limited number of communities currently offer this option, although several more are in the early stages of developing locally based programs. Of particular note are three new initiatives in California, South Florida, and Minneapolis/St. Paul that will combine significant local Jewish resources with university programs to provide advanced educational opportunities for Jewish educators in their communities.

New models need to be developed through a consortium of academic institutions and national agencies. As more people assume positions of leadership prior to receiving professional training, it is incumbent upon the Jewish community to develop training modules for in-service professional development. These need to be scheduled at times when educators will be able to travel or in a manner that will allow them to both fulfill the tasks and responsibilities of their jobs and pursue the learning program. Both distance-learning modules utilizing the new technologies and specially designed seminars that bring the educators together for intensive learning will meet these needs. In order to meet the needs of educators at different points in their careers, separate sessions will be required that focus on such disparate groups as the teacher who moves into a principalship and the individual in mid-career who accepts a professional leadership role within a school after many years in another field.

An alternative strategy for developing the next generation of Jewish educational leaders is to create a program to recruit educators from secular teaching ranks and from other educational venues who demonstrate potential for leadership, and to engage them in a serious program to prepare for future roles in Jewish education. By combining learning modules with a system of mentoring and on-the-job experiences, this new generation of educational leaders will be ready to assume their roles as new positions become available.

Professional development, either for the young adult just beginning a career or for the mature individual who is seeking a higher level of involvement in Jewish life, involves a serious commitment of time and energy. Simply attending a conference or a week-long seminar once a year will have little impact on the professional growth of the educator. Research suggests that an intensive program of study spread over significant periods of time and focused on the learning needs of the professional will have the greatest impact on the quality of the work performed. Jewish communal leadership is in a unique position to provide the resources and encouragement for a rapid expansion of quality professional development opportunities for Jewish educators at every level of their careers. By combining resources with our colleagues in Israel, opportunities can be provided for educational leaders to set an example for their faculties and the community at large. 



Recruitment of Young Adults for Careers in Jewish Education

During the past decade, a major shift has taken place in the Jewish community. As the issues of Jewish continuity and Jewish renaissance have captured the minds and hearts of communal leadership, significant numbers of our youth in their late teens and early twenties have chosen to devote their professional lives to serving the Jewish people. Some are making decisions to join the ranks of Jewish educators and Jewish communal-service workers. They are recognizing that working in the Jewish community provides them with an opportunity to combine their professional and personal lives into an integrated whole. But their numbers remain small. For the Jewish community to succeed in raising a new generation of actively involved and committed Jews, a major recruitment effort must be launched throughout North America. Teachers and leaders are required in every community and at every level of the field. To attract a new generation of Jewish education personnel, we must encourage increased numbers of our youth to join the ranks on both a full-time and a part-time basis as teachers and educational leaders.

In response to the challenge, several new recruitment initiatives have been designed to reach out to our young-adult and university-student populations to encourage them to think seriously about becoming Jewish educators. One of these efforts, created by JESNA, has recruited more than 300 young adults to take the initial steps along the path. The Lainer Interns for Jewish Education, initiated in 1992 for students studying at Hebrew University's Rothberg International School and expanded to Tel Aviv University in 1995, encourages a natural transition from



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being an actively involved Jewish youth to becoming a professional Jewish educator. The Lainer Interns is the first project funded jointly by the Jewish community in Israel and North America that specifically addresses the needs of potential professionals. It grew out of an increasing need to provide staff for the religious schools in our university communities, many of which relied heavily on students. Prior to the initiation of the Lainer Interns program, there were few organized efforts to either encourage students to become teachers or to provide them with a minimal training program.

Other programs sponsored by central agencies for Jewish education, Hillel, and CAJE are reaching university students in ever increasing numbers to engage them in service to the Jewish people. The goal of each program is to encourage a career choice while providing young adults with an initial point of entry and added support from the local community and the national system. Each organization has recognized that one of the primary motivating factors for students to join their program is the incentive to gain employment. Many of the graduates of these programs have chosen to pursue an advanced degree and are now entering Jewish communal life as professionals.

These new recruitment programs emphasize the importance of providing a proper induction process for new recruits. It is now generally accepted in the field of education, just as in other professions, that beginning professionals require special attention in the form of mentoring and other induction activities if they are to achieve success and continue in the field. The most common approach is through the assignment of a mentor teacher who has special training for the role and the establishment of seminars designed for new professionals to learn and grow in a supportive atmosphere with their colleagues. These models are being expanded to include veteran teachers and educators who are also in need of significant professional growth and a supportive environment. By linking the recruitment initiatives to properly designed induction and retention programs, Jewish educators will achieve greater success and remain in the field for longer periods, thus freeing our resources for more-extensive professional development activities.

None of these initiatives would have found success if it were not for the growing interest among our actively involved youth in building a strong and vibrant Jewish community for the 21st century. By encouraging our most active youth through a highly structured program of incentives and enticements, the Jewish community has embarked on the long, slow path of addressing the shortage of trained and experienced educators. The future of Jewish education is directly linked to our ability to draw these young adults into careers in the Jewish community that allow them to live quality Jewish lives while remaining financially comfortable. ■

Research and Evaluation

The quantity and quality of research that has been conducted in the congregational and communal educational system is very limited. Only a handful of researchers, such as Barry Holtz, Isa Aron, and Joseph Reimer have chosen to explore one or another component of the system over the past 30 years. Although the small number of existing studies report similar results, the lack of a significant body of serious research limits the ability of the organized Jewish community to make appropriate judgements about the overall quality of the product. If Jewish communal leaders are seriously interested in addressing the multitude of issues that are constantly raised about the effectiveness of part-time educational programs, then support for research and evaluation must become a priority.

There are a variety of assumptions about factors influencing the effectiveness of congregational and communal Jewish education. These are grounded in the belief that there are direct links between part-time Jewish education in a formal setting and the home environment in which the student is raised, attendance at a Jewish summer camp during the elementary school years, and active involvement in informal Jewish activities (camp, youth movement, and Israel experience) during the high-school years.

Although all of these linkages may be significant, there is little definitive research to support them. Such research requires a commitment that includes longitudinal studies and in-depth examinations of population groups to determine the factors that have the most lasting impact on children and youth.

Often proponents of various programs will claim that their pro-



Support for research and evaluation must become a priority.



gram is the answer and, therefore, all of our energies should be devoted to that particular program. The Task Force concluded that the approach that will best serve the Jewish community of the 21st century is to build an integrated system in which the formal school is only one component of the educational experience. More studies are needed to verify this approach and to encourage the leadership of the Jewish community to address these issues in a holistic manner. The Jewish communal leadership recognizes, more than ever, the importance of quality Jewish education and is willing to spend the dollars necessary to support it. However, it also wishes to support programs that have a track record of success. We are in a position to determine what works and why. The congregational and communal school system provides the Jewish community with a substantive laboratory for conducting serious research. We are able to analyze the impact of various options and their links to each other. What we must create is the willingness and commitment within the Jewish communal leadership to invest in quality research and evaluation that will encourage the changes that are so crucial as we build inspirational Jewish education for the 21st century.

Conclusion

The Task Force, in its commitment to improve the quality of Jewish education in congregational and communal schools, focused on those components that have direct impact on the overall quality of the educational programs. It was guided by the overarching principle that the success or failure of a congregational or communal education program is connected directly to the creation of a systemic approach to the educational process. Meaningful change in the quality of education will not take place by focusing on one or two of the critical issues; rather, the entire system must become the focus of our attention.

The seven challenges and seven strategies reflect this belief by addressing the larger issues of vision, financial resources, institutional commitment, and personnel. For the Jewish community of North America to have an impact on the development of today's youth, every aspect of the Jewish educational system, both formal and informal, must reflect the serious commitment of the entire community. The Task Force calls upon Jewish communities across the continent to join with the national agencies as full partners to ensure that the youth in our congregational and communal schools will receive the very best educational programs. In so doing, we will be creating and sustaining a strong Jewish community for the 21st century.



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Appendix A:

Mission Statement

More Jewish children in North America are enrolled in a part-time, supplementary educational program during their elementary years than in any other form of Jewish education, formal or informal. The schools that have been developed to serve this population over the past century are being seriously questioned by parents, lay leaders, and professionals throughout the Jewish community. It appears that the schools and their ancillary programs are not able to provide the quality educational experience that is desired. This results in a high degree of student dissatisfaction and disenchantment leading toward an early departure from any form of formal Jewish education around the time of the Bar/Bat Mitzvah.

The North American Jewish community remains heavily invested in the system of part-time Jewish education through both the synagogue (congregational) structure and the communal funding systems of the federations and central agencies for Jewish education. JESNA is convening this Task Force on Congregational and Communal Jewish Education to provide guidance to the agency in defining its role in addressing these issues over the next decade.

The Task Force will:

1. focus attention on the congregational and communal Jewish education system in conjunction with the schools and agencies that provide Jewish education for the North American Jewish community;
2. identify key leverage points for creating broad-

based changes in the methods of delivery of formal and informal education for those families and institutions that continue to select a part-time educational program, including issues of structure and format, lay and professional leadership development, and funding sources;

3. identify exemplary programmatic models and new initiatives for engaging Jewish children and their families in positive educational experiences on a part-time basis;
4. recommend to the JESNA Board appropriate initiatives in the areas of congregational and communal Jewish education; and,
5. foster collaboration among those institutions actively engaged in congregational and communal Jewish education in creating new initiatives designed to address the issues raised by the Task Force.

Task Force membership includes members of the JESNA Board, lay leaders from national and local agencies and organizations concerned with congregational and communal Jewish education, and professionals from academic training institutions, central agencies, the religious movements, professional educator organizations, and other national agencies that recognize the serious need for creating new initiatives in formal part-time education in North America. The Task Force will begin its formal work in September 1998 and is expected to present its findings and recommendations to the JESNA Board in the fall of 1999. It is anticipated that during this period the Task Force will hold at least two day-and-a-half meetings, as well as a number of conference calls. A final report with the findings and recommendations of the Task Force will be published and circulated to the field and to local communities. 

Appendix B:

Work Group

Recommendations

Work Group on

BUILDING A COLLABORATIVE INFRASTRUCTURE FOR SUPPORT

Rabbi Phil Warmflash, *Chair*

Members of the Work Group: Douglas Alpert, Rabbi Marim Charry, Richard Spiegel, Joan Kaye, Dr. Robert Abramson, Beverly Stein, and Rabbi Eric Bram.

1. Jewish education should become the major focus for the entire synagogue community, involving the rabbi, educators and other professional staff to set the vision and actively work toward it. Lay leadership should actively engage in this discussion. Such a vision should cover a wide range of issues, including the Jewish education of the children, youth, and adult populations.
2. Cross-congregational programming creates a larger sense of community for the membership and encourages a deeper sense of Jewish identity. Within a community, the congregations that are members of one national movement should join forces to develop new and exciting programs for their members. In communities where congregations from different religious streams are located within a geographical region, joint programmatic initiatives will enhance the quality of Jewish education for the children and their families.
3. The Jewish community, in large cities and small, is a combination of diverse groups, including the congregations. An effective Jewish educational program should include joint activities across a wide range of institutions, both within the Jewish world and stretching into the secular life of the city. Beginning with the Jewish Federation and including other communal organizations (JCC, JFCS, Jewish Foundation), the congregational education program should tap into a variety of resources to deepen the educational experience of the students and their families.
4. By reaching beyond the Jewish community, congregational and communal schools will be in a position to enrich the Jewish lives of the students and their families by engaging them in the wider culture as active Jews. Educational and social-service organizations from the broader secular community, including the public schools, university departments of education, and various United Way agencies, have expertise that will enhance the quality of the learning experience. By becoming formally involved in joint programs with these institutions, the schools will create a stronger foundation for the students.

Work Group on

RECRUITMENT, TRAINING, AND STATUS OF TEACHERS AND EDUCATIONAL LEADERS

Dr. Steven Baruch, *Chair*

Members of the Work Group: Herb Rosenfield, Helene Z. Tigay, Dr. Eyal Bor, Rabbi Jan Katzew, Susan Werk, Jo Kay, Ilene Gross, Esther Newman, Serene Victor, Robin Eisenberg, and Lois Fox.

Recruitment

1. The development of an intensive system for recruiting young people to the field that includes attractive salaries and benefits, a mentoring system for novice teachers, carefully prepared job descriptions, and the development of appropriate full-time positions incorporating the multiple roles within the Jewish educational community.
2. The creation of entry points for university students designed to engage those who have expressed an interest in Jewish activities on campus and in the surrounding community through:
 - teaching
 - youth-group advisement
 - the study of Judaica
 - participation in an Israel experience
 - involvement in Hillel
 - encouragement to pursue a graduate degree or study in Israel with financial incentives

Similar outreach activities should be developed for young adults in their post-university years who are participating in programs with extensive Jewish activity in Israel, the former Soviet Union, and North America.

3. New initiatives should be developed to engage high-school youth who are beginning to explore career options through active personal involvement in a number of Jewish educational activities, such as:

- participation in Madrichim (Assistant Teacher) programs in their congregations' religious schools
- summer programs at CAJE
- staff positions at camps
- work with their youth groups

Educators, rabbis, and other Jewish professionals should be encouraged to engage high-school youth in discussions about their next steps as active members of the Jewish community. High-school youth should also be encouraged to become involved in Jewish education activities through new programs developed within the congregational setting designed to place Jewish education on the radar screen of the youth as a career possibility.

4. Research on the impact of various leadership-recruitment programs, whether at the high-school or college level, should be funded to determine their influence on the future career choices of the participants. Examples of these programs are:
 - the CAJE Teen Experience and College programs
 - the HUC Institute for Religious School Teaching Assistants (IRSTA)
 - various Madrichim programs
 - programs designed to introduce university students to the teaching profession in local congregations with a training component
 - the JESNA Lainer Interns for Jewish Education program

-
5. Linkages should be created leading to partnerships between university schools of education, university departments of Judaic studies, and local congregational or communal schools, and including involvement with local central agencies for Jewish education where they exist. Such a linkage may take the form of a lab school with formal connections to the university, which will include appropriate pre-service and professional training for the educational staff.

Mentoring

6. The establishment of a formal mentoring system for beginning their career and/or moving to a new level in Jewish education. The mentoring system will utilize senior educators who receive special training for the new role and receive appropriate compensation.

Professional Development

7. The establishment of formal professional development programs for educators at all levels (from the novice teacher to the educational leaders), with appropriate financial incentives based on the best models from the Jewish world, secular education, and the business world and grounded on the theories of adult learning. Financial incentives should include but not be limited to: salary increments, compensation for attendance, and reimbursement for out-of-pocket expenses.

Role and Status

8. Develop a full system leading to the transformation of the congregation into an educational community, which would encourage the redefinition of the role and status of the educational leader; and provide appropriate professional development opportunities for the educator and other related professional staff, e.g., the rabbis and cantors, as well as lay

leadership development opportunities for the congregational board and school committee. The redefinition should acknowledge, illuminate, and expand the role of the educational leader as a key leader in the process of creating a learning community.





Work Group on

**PROGRAM, CONTENT, AND STRUCTURE —
ORGANIZATION OF THE EDUCATIONAL PROCESS**

Rabbi Amy Small, *Chair*

Members of the Work Group: Brandon Roger, Carol Berman, Peter Wang, Jonathan Levin, Harley Gross, Carol Auerbach, Barbara Shuman, Terry Bloomberg, Dr. Daniel Margolis, and Dr. Joseph Reimer.

CRITERIA FOR SUCCESSFUL EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS

Program

1. Institutional and Family Support: the sponsoring organization views the educational program as integral to its mission, and families support the mission of the educational program.
2. Vision: a document clearly states a Jewish ideology consistent and congruent with the ideology of the movement with which the sponsoring organization identifies, and sets forth a clear philosophy of education.
3. Leadership consensus: volunteer and professional leadership of the educational program and the sponsoring organization articulate and fully support the vision of the educational program.
4. Measurable outcomes: the expected outcomes of the educational program for all learners are clearly stated in terms that can be evaluated.
5. Continuous reflection and assessment: all stakeholders in the educational program engage in ongoing processes to review the educational program and assess the extent to which stated desired outcomes are being achieved.

6. Commitment to improvement: volunteer and professional leaders of the educational program and sponsoring organization develop new desired outcomes as the program evolves.

Content

1. Clear content focus: a document clearly outlines the content and topics that compose the curriculum of the educational program.
2. Connection to Jewish texts: the content of the educational program reflects the values of the Jewish people as contained in its historical and sacred literature.
3. Authenticity of Jewish tradition: the content of the educational program clearly reflects and promotes continuity with the history and experience of the Jewish people and its expression in a living community.
4. Integrity with sponsoring movement: the content and standards of the educational program are consistent and congruous with the standards of the movement with which the sponsoring organization identifies.

Structure

5. Sufficient time: the educational program is organized to provide enough time for the achievement of the desired outcomes.
6. Integrated lifelong learning: the educational program includes multiple learning opportunities for all ages and promotes lifelong Jewish learning.
7. Intergenerational learning: the educational program includes opportunities for learners of different ages to participate together in learning activities.

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8. Holistic approach to learning: the educational program recognizes that learners are participants in both American and Jewish culture and belong to families and communities.
 9. Developmental appropriateness: activities and experiences provided by the educational program are appropriate to the developmental stage of the individual learner.
 10. Empowerment: the educational program encourages questioning and enhances and protects the comfort and self-esteem of learners and teachers. 



Work Group on

ADVOCACY, FUNDING, AND RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT

Gail Weinstein, *Chair*

Members of Work Group: Keith Libman, Sue Stevens, Dr. Chaim Botwinick, Lisa Newmark, Judith Shankman, and Larry Sherman.

Infrastructure

1. Create a continental body to implement the recommendations of the Task Force and its various subcommittees. Activities for such an overall body that relate specifically to the recommendations of this subcommittee include:

- serving as an advocate in an overall way
- developing financial guidelines and funding policies
- identifying potential revenue sources such as individuals, foundations, and organizations, soliciting funds
- creating a vehicle for networking and sharing of information
- facilitating the development of similar local bodies by training professional and lay advisory groups as advocates who will keep the issues visible
- publicizing the need to take action and recruit, retain, and develop Jewish educators and strengthen those in the field

2. Create a public-relations group to work with JESNA staff to develop a comprehensive promotional program with time parameters for activities, mailing lists, and a variety of promotional materials, starting with a major press release.

3. Create a liaison group to promote linkages with central agencies, the national religious movements, and other relevant organizations to share information and encourage collaboration.

4. Engage individual communities, especially their lay leadership, in a reflective process that will help them identify their need and capacity for change, and become part of the improvement initiative. (Develop criteria regarding which communities to engage.)

5. Engagement should be holistic and explore school change within the context of broader communal and organizational change initiatives.

6. Help communities organize in a manner that can garner greater financial and human resources, possibly through a local planning body linked to JESNA.

7. Assist in the strengthening of lay leadership within the synagogues and enable them to improve governance, policy setting, and program evaluation.

8. Train professional and lay advisory groups as advocates for the cause. Have them keep the issue highly visible.

Financial

1. Identify and seek funding for research and evaluation.

2. Identify and seek resources at the local level.

3. Identify and seek resources at the national level.

4. Explore the creation of a national endowment to support the directions recommended by this Task Force.

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5. Identify, gather, and disseminate information (i.e., a program menu) about successful financial resource development models.

Marketing, Promoting, and Advertising

1. Advocacy must begin at once to inform the local and continental communities with increased intensity once the new vision is articulated. Contacts should include lay leadership at federations, synagogues, and schools, as well as parents.
2. Research and utilize, as appropriate, effective advocacy and promotional materials used in the past (e.g., New York BJE Jewish education advertising campaign).
3. Initial steps must coincide with current continent-wide initiatives with Jewish renaissance, new directions in local communities involving federation/synagogue collaboration, and the new United Jewish Communities focus.
4. Advocacy steps must be designed in a grid-type format articulating an action plan corresponding to the findings, with a diverse set of tasks carried out at various levels. JESNA should work at the national level, utilizing a variety of partners. Central agencies for Jewish education should work at the local level, utilizing the best local lay and professional leadership.
5. Tactics should include news items in the general and Jewish press, and synagogue, bureau, and federation publications.
6. Publicize the need to take action to recruit, retain, and develop Jewish educators, and strengthen those already in the field.
7. Promote communal/congregational high schools.
8. Identify and disseminate information about successful models.
9. Develop pilot projects and disseminate information about their effectiveness.
10. Develop a "road show" approach to utilize in communities continent-wide, as appropriate. 

Appendix C: Innovative Program Models

Congregational-Based Programs:

1. ✧EXPLORATIONS... —
Temple Sholom, New Milford, CT
2. Shabbat-Based Synagogue Community —
Congregation Beth Am Israel, Penn Valley, PA
3. Center for Jewish Learning and Living —
Westchester Reform Temple, Scarsdale, NY
4. Project Mishpacha —
Beth El Congregation, Baltimore, MD

Community-Wide Programs:

5. Mashkon —
Board of Jewish Education of Greater
Washington, DC
6. Designated School Project —
Auerbach Central Agency for Jewish
Education, Philadelphia, PA
7. Bet Limmud —
Jewish Education Center of Cleveland, OH
8. School Accreditation Process —
Bureau of Jewish Education of Greater
Los Angeles, CA
9. Renaissance Educator Project —
Bureau of Jewish Education of Greater
Boston, MA
10. Teacher/Mentor Program —
Community Foundation for Jewish Education,
Chicago, IL
11. Atudatenu —
Minneapolis, MN
12. Keshet —
Cambridge, MA

1. ✨EXPLORATIONS...

Temple Sholom, New Milford, CT

The way it was: Prior to 1995, Temple Sholom in New Milford, CT, ran a traditional supplemental religious school whose sequential curriculum corresponded to particular grades. Mirrored in the wider world of Jewish education, the goal of this model was for each student to amass information and develop skills in order to become a knowledgeable, practicing Jew.

The catalyst for change: Temple Sholom felt that the graded school model was not the most productive way to cultivate Jews with strong identity, comfortable with their practice and secure in their knowledge. Experimentation and the excitement of piloting a new approach sparked enthusiasm for Jewish learning within their community of children and adults. Temple Sholom was ready to close the doors on their traditional religious school and go forward with a dynamic new approach to Jewish education.

The way it is now: ✨EXPLORATIONS..., created by Sandra Barsky Daniels and Sue Ringler Pet, is an all-age inclusive Jewish education program, adopted in 1995 by Temple Sholom in place of their religious school. Each new ✨EXPLORATION... begins with an adult learning workshop during which the co-directors:

- outline the content, goals, and structure of the new ✨EXPLORATION... which lasts from two to eight weeks
- model innovative strategies, offer project ideas, and facilitate the creation of workshop-style lessons to be directed by teaching teams comprised of parents and other adults and young adults in the community
- invite Temple Sholom's Rabbi Norman Koch and other experts to speak on the current topic

During each ✨EXPLORATION...:

- participants are immersed in a particular aspect of Judaism, interacting with uniquely crafted materials that bring the topic alive through texts, stories, discussions, projects, and The Arts
- blocks of study with titles such as “✨EXPLORATION... The Living Hagaddah,” “✨EXPLORATION... The Siddur Spectacular,” “✨EXPLORATION... Moon Magic,” and “✨EXPLORATION... Bar/Bat Mitzvah” target virtually all the traditional curricular topics of Judaism, over time

Community expectations:

- an adult from each family is required to participate in one ✨EXPLORATION... during the year, which results in a full staff signed up by September
- community input is solicited informally throughout the year and formally at recurrent “two-cents” Town Hall-style meetings that further shape the program

What has emerged at Temple Sholom is a “family of learners” where the community’s adults and children alike are actively and excitedly participating in Jewish learning and exploration.

Challenges incorporated: #1,2,4,5,6,7

For further information contact:

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Creators/Directors of ✨EXPLORATIONS...

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2. Shabbat-Based Synagogue Community

Congregation Beth Am Israel, Penn Valley, PA

The way it was: Beth Am Israel, a Conservative congregation in Philadelphia, was similar to many American congregations: membership was declining, with most new members joining only for the sake of their children's Bar/Bat Mitzvah. In the early 1980s, the congregation initiated new forms of adult Jewish learning in workplace settings as well as a new component within the Shabbat service. Subsequently, the congregation adopted a Sunday family-education program based on a model developed by congregation B'nei Keshet of Montclair, NJ. These innovations increased interest among congregants and began to attract new members.

The catalyst for change: Success with family education and Shabbat-morning Torah study revealed that good programs were not enough to make a significant difference in the commitment of individuals to Judaism. More than a program was needed; a community of practice was needed the center of which was the rhythm of Jewish life.

The way it is now: Congregation Beth Am Israel has emerged as a Shabbat-centered community where congregants of all ages learn, pray, socialize, and take part in social action. This has resulted from:

- a clear mission statement, which states "we are building a community, a religious, moral, learning, and socially responsible community. We are a community that asks for and expects engagement. The center of that engagement is Shabbat."
- developing the synagogue's "distinctive Torah," which is taught consistently throughout the synagogue to foster a common language for learning and living Jewishly
- full partnership between the rabbi, the educational

director, and lay leadership to work as a team with the same mission

Beth Am Israel's dedication to making Jewish education a priority is demonstrated by:

- adult and intergenerational learning offered each Shabbat morning prior to services
- in-service teacher learning, consisting of a beginning-of-the-year learning shabbaton followed by bi-monthly study sessions that are run simultaneously while students are in minyan
- initiating a Shabbat-morning Beit Midrash program that sets both children's and parents' Jewish education within the communal context of Shabbat, creating the expectation of engagement while allowing families the freedom to choose their connection to Shabbat via adult classes, family minyanim, special joint-learning events, and worship
- receiving a two-year \$50,000 "Continuity Grant" from the Jewish Federation of Greater Philadelphia for its DESIGN (Designing an Educational System for Inter-Generational Neshamot) Project

By changing the role of "teacher" to "builders of Jewish identity," a community has been created at Congregation Beth Am Israel that offers multiple gateways for connection — learning, prayer, and social action — and centers them around the weekly celebration of Shabbat.

Challenges incorporated: #1,2,3,5,6,7

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3. Center for Jewish Learning and Living

Westchester Reform Temple, Scarsdale, NY

The way it was: The Westchester Reform Temple (WRT) places a high value on its youth. Students have long been encouraged to become involved in temple life. There were two paths to youth involvement, formal (the high-school program) and informal (the youth group). The congregation became aware of the need to develop a comprehensive youth program, creating new avenues for youth involvement.

The catalyst for change: Building on WRT's success in youth programming, Sarah Lee, the director of HUC — JIR's Rhea Hirsch School of Education invited WRT to participate in its Experiment in Congregational Education (ECE) program. ECE is committed to the process of guiding communities that are dedicated to congregational education. ECE was established to develop a pilot project for congregational transformation based upon building a community of learners. With the aide of an HUC faculty advisor, the congregation began a long process of creating a new approach to its educational programs. An educational task force with forty congregants met for a year in a self-reflection process to dream about the future of the congregation. With the full support of the rabbis and board of trustees, the task force initiated a change process for the congregation that resulted in the establishment of the Center for Jewish Living and Learning.

The way it is now: The trustees of WRT created a congregational mission statement which provides direction for an exciting array of programs. The statement laid out five pillars for the temple's sacred work:

- Talmud Torah: lifelong and life-enhancing Jewish learning
- Avodah: personal and communal religious practices,

including worship, that add spiritual depth to our lives

- Chavurah: a welcoming, inclusive, and sacred community that embraces each of us with support, care and wisdom
- Tikkun Olam: ongoing involvement in bringing healing and justice to the brokenness in our world
- Klal Yisrael: strengthening our bonds to Israel and the Jewish people in all lands and building commonality among the various streams of Judaism

As a result of the ECE process, WRT expanded its activities for educational and spiritual growth with four new initiatives in the areas of shabbat, youth, adult education, and outreach.

In the area of youth the congregation was awarded a three-year grant from the UJA Federation of New York's Continuity Commission to develop a comprehensive youth program including:

- Leadership Development for Teens
- Cross-Denominational Learning
- Spiritual Development for Teens
- Visiting Scholars and Artists
- Political and Social Action

To facilitate this new agenda, the congregation created a central address for formal and informal youth activities under the leadership of a new "youth rabbi" who nurtures the educational, spiritual, social and emotional needs of the teen community.

Challenges incorporated: #1,2,3,5

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4. Project Mishpacha

Beth El Congregation, Baltimore, MD

The way it was: Beth El Congregation’s Religious School in Baltimore, MD, ran a successful supplementary program — complete with all the usual grievances associated with after-school Jewish education. Despite the high enrollment and retention numbers, there was a lack of family involvement, which led to little motivation on the part of many of the children.

The catalyst for change: In 1990, Eyal Bor joined the staff as the Director of Education, bringing with him new dynamic faculty members. In 1992, a connection was made between the school and the Pearlstone Coalition for Jewish Family Education, which began Beth El’s plan to create a comprehensive family education program.

The way it is now: After consulting with outside experts, a vision for Beth El’s religious school was agreed upon, splitting the program into two tracks: one retaining the existing three-day-a-week program, and the other creating a new family education model. The latter program, Project Mishpacha, entails:

- a two-day-a-week religious school program, grade levels aleph through vav
- family programs designed both to integrate with the school’s level-specific curriculum as well as to reflect Jewish calendar, traditions, and history
- Shabbat family services providing age appropriate prayer and inviting all members of the family to participate on many levels in Friday night, Saturday morning and Havdalah services
- Adult education courses that afford parents the opportunity to increase their knowledge of Judaism, enabling them to bring Judaism home to

reenforce their children’s education

- Tikkun Olam family projects stressing the importance of doing mitzvot and grounding volunteerism within a Judaic framework

Project Mishpacha is an innovative program for children and their parents with formal requirements for participation and involvement. The high level of activity contributes to the overall impact of the program. (For those families that remain interested in a more traditional approach to educating the children, Beth El continues to offer a three day religious-school program.) By mixing together formal and informal Jewish education, Project Mishpacha achieves its overall goal by creating an environment where families are able to grow together Jewishly, and where school, home, and synagogue are all seen as extensions of each other.

Challenges incorporated: #1,2,5

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5. Mashkon

Board of Jewish Education of Greater Washington, DC

The way it was: In response to endless critiques of “supplementary” Jewish education in North America, the Greater Washington community decided to challenge the idea that this form of Jewish education is a failure. Although these programs currently have shortcomings, the reality remains that the overwhelming majority of all Jewish children receiving formal Jewish education are enrolled in such programs.

The catalyst for change: In 1996, a group of concerned parents began to examine the reasons behind the problems of congregational-school education, causing them to ask the following question: “Can we make a significant difference in the spiritual lives of thousands of Jewish children if the religious-school classroom provides the elements of wonder, faith, and the search for meaning that will inspire students to regard their Jewish heritage as a valuable and indispensable part of their lives?”

The way it is now: In answer to the above question, new partnerships were developed between the Board of Jewish Education, the Jewish Federation of Greater Washington, congregational schools, educators, and communal agencies, resulting in the creation of “Mashkon: A Blueprint for the Transformation of Jewish Education.” Mashkon is an education reform program designed to improve the quality of Jewish education by providing teachers with greater skills and knowledge to connect to the populations with whom they interact in the classroom. To this end, the following programs are being successfully implemented in the Greater Washington community:

- Morasha — Florence Melton Mini-School for Teachers: an intensive two-year program for new teachers combining professional development with content learning
- Shalom Kitah: on-the-job teacher training to provide the techniques needed to successfully integrate students with learning differences in the regular classroom
- Teacher Center Web Site: an electronic resource center that provides teachers with the most updated multimedia teaching aides
- Jewish Teen Institute: aimed at keeping students in grades 10 through 12 involved in congregational-school education by integrating highly stimulating and interdisciplinary mini-courses such as “Faith and Science,” “Civics,” and “Career Choices” into the school’s ongoing program; instructors for this program are required to attend three training sessions: two on curriculum content and one on presentation
- To Create a Context of Meaning: A Curriculum and Teacher-Training Module: a course in which principals explore in depth their own feelings on difficult topics such as God and faith, to learn how to bring these issues to their faculties and ultimately to classroom discussions; by creating an open, non-judgmental atmosphere for self-reflection on critical issues, both the principals and the teachers will be in a better position to create a context of meaning for the students
- Early Childhood Jewish Family Life Education Spiral Holiday Curriculum and Curriculum Guide (Gesher L’Keshet): a religious school education program for parents of children in pre-school through second grade, focusing on Jewish values and the appropriate parenting tools linked to those values
- Principals Bet Midrash and Year-End Retreat: a program to raise the morale of the community’s edu-



ational leaders through periodic professional development programs and an overnight retreat that features a prominent scholar-in-residence

- **Master Teacher Corps:** a community-wide program in which master teachers are trained as mentors and are available twice a month to observe classes and provide constructive feedback; Master Teachers, in consultation with the principal, are also available to present two staff-development programs per year to the entire faculty

The Mashkon program continues to grow as its vision — or blueprint — is implemented throughout the Greater Washington community in all areas of congregational Jewish education: professional development, curriculum renewal, teen issues, technological advancements, and family education.

Challenges incorporated: #1,2,3,4,5,6,7

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6. Designated School Project

Auerbach Central Agency For Jewish Education,
Philadelphia, PA

The way it was: The Auerbach Central Agency for Jewish Education (ACAJE) was built on a foundation of service to the congregational schools that focused primarily on teacher training and professional leadership development. Schools and their sponsoring synagogues rarely turned to the ACAJE for advice and guidance on the macro issues of Jewish education, especially in creating a consistent vision for Jewish education for the congregational community.

The catalyst for change: The ACAJE Committee recognized that the success of their programs was dependent upon an integrated environment within the congregation where the students, their parents, and the entire congregational community developed a clear and agreed upon vision for Jewish education. A new committee was established to highlight the need for a “synagogue-as-system” approach to Jewish education. By putting the focus on the organizational structure, lay and professional leaders could work collaboratively to plan and implement educational programs. The result was an expansion of the agency’s mission to include that of serving the institutional community as an entire unit.

The way it is now: The Designated School Project (DSP) presents a new model in Jewish education designed by ACAJE to integrate the school into the life of the congregation. Building on the principle that education is a major component of lifelong Jewish living, the DSP concentrates its multi-focused initiatives within the school on raising the quality of Jewish learning for the entire community by:

- making the religious school a centerpiece of synagogue life
- fulfilling the educational mission through means of collaboration, shared decision-making and a successful process of communication between Jewish professionals and laypeople, parents, and teachers
- planning and implementing programs for both adults and children
- helping parents to function as primary and active builders of their children’s Jewish identity
- encouraging synagogue leaders to work cooperatively in planning, implementing, and evaluating programs

DSP, which has already been adopted by 10 communities, creates an environment within the congregation that promotes a clear vision and established goals for Jewish learning that are shaped by the entire community. By shifting the focus from the children alone to the family and the organization of the school and synagogue, the DSP creates a shared approach to Jewish education.

Challenges incorporated: #1,2,4,5,6

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7. Bet Limmud

Jewish Education Center of Cleveland, OH

The way it was: For almost 20 years Beth Torah Religious School served the students of three Cleveland Conservative congregations. After closing in the late 1990s, two of the synagogues, B'nai Jeshurun Congregation and Congregation Beth Am, combined their resources to create the Bet Limmud Religious School. This entity was challenged with creating a curriculum to meet the needs of the newly formed partnership. The leadership turned to the Jewish Education Center of Cleveland for assistance.

The catalyst for change: Project Curriculum Renewal (PCR) is a community initiative, coordinated by the Jewish Education Center of Cleveland's curriculum department, designed to encourage school improvement in congregational and communal schools. During an intensive three-year period, the institutional lay and professional leadership involved in PCR are required to explore and clarify their vision and philosophy for the education of the children. Support is continuously provided by the curriculum department to develop, implement, and evaluate a new detailed curriculum during the three years. One new school each year is accepted to PCR, with funding provided by the community's Fund for the Jewish Future. Bet Limmud applied and was selected for participation in PCR based on its need to create an integrated approach to Jewish education that was consistent with the two sponsoring congregations. Driving their desire to participate in PCR was the challenge of creating a curriculum that was developmentally appropriate and challenging and that succeeded in meeting the Jewish educational and spiritual needs of their students and families.

The way it is now: Since Fall 1998, a Problem-Based

Learning (PBL) curriculum was developed, allowing the teachers to create a program that is "thematic (based on themes, not specific subject areas), integrated (weaving together various disciplines), and constructivist (encouraging students to construct their own conclusions and meanings, rather than accepting a teacher's distilled version of that content)." Bet Limmud's program, which draws upon traditional Jewish text as its most important resource, now consists of:

- four school-wide themes: 1) *Derech Eretz* (appropriate behavior); 2) *K'dushah* (holiness); 3) *Im ain ani li mi li* (If I am not for myself, who will be for me?); and 4) *Tikkun Olam* (repairing the world)
- students' first introduction to PBL in third grade, when they are given a project-focused problem relating to their Torah unit
- fourth- through seventh-graders' encounter with integral Jewish values embedded in their daily routine by working on units with titles like "Shabbat Birthday," "Micah's Mexican Food," and "Respect for Substitute Teachers," which respectively invite students to plan a halachic Shabbat birthday party, understand the transgressions caused by serving treif at a kosher restaurant, and define elements of a successful classroom community by engaging Jewish texts
- a shift from teacher as "giver of information and full teaching authority in the classroom to that of learning coach"
- intensive professional development support for teachers in the form of seminars, monthly meetings, and mentoring

Bet Limmud's goal is not simply to tell students about a religion, but rather to help them learn about Judaism. In doing so, the students learn both how to form questions about their tradition and how to utilize the tools with which to answer them.

Challenges incorporated: #1,2,3,4,5,6,7

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8. School Accreditation Process

Bureau of Jewish Education of Greater Los Angeles, CA

The way it was: The Bureau of Jewish Education (BJE) of Greater Los Angeles serves as a primary resource for day schools and congregational and communal religious schools in the Los Angeles metropolitan area. A major part of this role is to enhance the quality of the Jewish education in each of the schools. However, there were no criteria for determining success, nor any system for verifying that each school had a clear vision or statement of goals that provided the foundation for their work.

The catalyst for change: In 1993, the BJE invited representatives of the schools, religious movements, and accrediting bodies to explore new approaches to improving the quality of Jewish education in the Los Angeles community. The result was the initiation of a school-accreditation process that would entail comprehensive self-assessment, on-site visitation, and review by the Commission on School Accreditation.

The way it is now: A team of professional educators and lay leaders representing the religious and educational diversity of the Los Angeles community developed a school-accreditation process, complete with a manual, to provide a system for enhancing the quality of the educational programs by means of:

- assessing educational programs in various settings
- fostering excellence in school programming
- mandating periodic self-assessment and encouraging strategic planning
- granting funds for program enhancements
- providing a public validation of the rationale and high achievements of Jewish schools

- accrediting schools for a maximum term of six years, at which point the institution must renew their accreditation by going through the process again
- setting standards and validating qualifications for annual financial subsidy by the BJE/Jewish Federation

The BJE's *1998 Accreditation Manual for Jewish Schools* (edited by Dr. Emil Jacoby) outlines the three phases of this process, giving special instructions for the five most common Jewish-school categories (early childhood centers, day schools, yeshivot, and Conservative and Reform religious schools):

- Self-study: individual assessments of school accomplishments to see where they are with regard to their stated missions and goals; evaluation of the school objectives by professional staff, lay boards, and parents to identify the strengths and weaknesses of the program and to determine the progress of the school in meeting objectives; and the preparation of a self-study report reflecting the findings in relationship to accreditation standards and desirable norms
- On-site visits to the schools: a visiting team of veteran educators observes classes and meets with lay committees, teachers, parents, and students to determine how the self-study report reflects the school's educational environment
- Review and decision by the accrediting commission: members of the visiting team discuss their findings with the school leadership and then present a written report to the BJE Accreditation Commission for Schools; the commission reviews the report and decides on a term of accreditation for each school; after being notified, the school establishes a follow-up committee to monitor the implementation of the recommendations

The BJE's *2000 School Accreditation Grants for Program Enhancement* (edited by Dr. Emil Jacoby) summarizes projects made possible by BJE/Federation grants. It lists 44 school communities in which educational initiatives anchored in a comprehensive accreditation process have been actualized. The Los Angeles School Accreditation Process can be easily adapted by other communities and has proven itself a highly effective way to institute and enhance excellence in Jewish education.

Challenges incorporated: #1,2,4,5

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9. Renaissance Educator Project

Bureau of Jewish Education of Greater Boston, MA

The way it was: Greater Boston, like most Jewish communities, faces a tremendous need for qualified, trained Jewish educators. With continuing school expansion and growing enrollment, the recruitment of new educators and retention of veterans have remained critical challenges to the community's Jewish educational institutions. With no career ladder or systematic route available for educators to grow professionally, the future of the field has been uncertain. Further, with many of the community's new initiatives in family, youth, special needs, technology education, and congregational change, educators with new and multiple areas of expertise are in increasing demand.

The catalyst for change: Growing concern about the need for more stability and permanence in Jewish education prompted Combined Jewish Philanthropies (CJP) and Boston's Bureau of Jewish Education (BJE) to develop new programs over the past 15 years aimed at creating full-time positions for congregational-school principals, family educators, and youth educators. Boston's vision of creating a Jewish community based on learning, caring, and social justice has now led to the Advancing Congregational Education (ACE) Initiative, a project developed by the BJE and Boston's Commission on Jewish Continuity (COJC) intended to assist synagogues in redesigning their entire educational program and integrating their many disparate elements. Recognizing early on that no whole-institution reform will succeed without new models of Jewish educational professionals, the BJE convened the Greater Boston Professional Development Collaborative — the BJE, COJC, Hebrew College, Brandeis University's Hornstein Program in Jewish Communal Service, and local synagogue movements — to help implement a community-wide professional development effort.

The way it is now: The Renaissance Educator Project is a program of the Greater Boston Professional Development Collaborative, administered by the BJE and overseen by the ACE committee. It is funded by COJC, with additional grants from the Covenant and Cummings Foundations to implement the program. Schools may apply for a three-year grant that provides funding for:

- full-time renaissance educators to work in multiple roles in their synagogue (such as teaching, youth work, or administration), often piecing together several part-time positions
- a mentor to meet regularly with the renaissance educator
- a professional development advisor to create, together with the renaissance educator, an Individualized Professional Development Plan (IPDP) of academic and practical experiences to provide the educator with additional knowledge and skills, which leads to advancing along a career ladder; course work at Brandeis, Hebrew College, and other local institutions (through collaborative-sponsored open-enrollment policy) will focus on Judaic and education knowledge, administration, and other appropriate skills
- on-the-job training and network meetings with other renaissance educators
- periodic meetings between the school agents (educator, rabbi, education director) and the BJE to monitor and evaluate the progress of the renaissance educator's IPDP

The Renaissance Educator Project serves as a vehicle for building a unified educational program within the synagogue structure. By providing the support and training for new full-time positions, renaissance educators become an integral component for fulfilling ACE's goal of integrating Jewish education into all aspects of the individual's life.

Challenges incorporated: #1,2,3,4,6,7

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10. Teacher/Mentor Program

Community Foundation for Jewish Education,
Chicago, IL

The way it was: The Community Foundation for Jewish Education’s (CFJE) Department of Professional Growth has as its mission the mandate to provide professional development of teachers in the Chicago Jewish schools. Many of their teachers lacked training in either Judaica or teaching. Although CFJE did offer one-shot workshops or six-week courses, serious study opportunities for Jewish teachers were becoming less available.

The catalyst for change: CFJE recognized that the lack of proper induction into teaching in their schools and the need for professional development for novice and veteran teachers were both serious issues. In the world of general education, new ideas were being introduced to help make teachers become more effective and to make teaching less of a “lonely profession.” The Chicago community already had a group of master teachers who had spent at least 75 hours learning Judaica and cutting edge-ideas about teaching and learning. With a Wexner grant, CFJE was able to provide a two-year training period for a group of master teachers to become teacher/mentors.

The way it is now: CFJE’s Teacher/Mentor Program is designed to provide mentors and ongoing professional development to three different audiences: university students, new teachers, and veteran educators. CFJE currently runs the following programs to provide support, resource, and guidance to these groups:

- College interns: a recruitment program that introduces interns to Jewish education and allows them to begin teaching with ongoing support and training
- New teachers: a mentoring program designed to help new teachers plan lessons, identify resources, solve problems, and become reflective about teaching
- Collegial partners: a program for veteran teachers geared

toward reinvigorating their own teaching by sharing ideas and classroom experiences as a teacher/mentor

Participants in these programs:

- take part in a year-long course (mandatory for college interns and open to new teachers) focusing on Judaic content and pedagogy
- are each assigned a trained master teacher (collegial partner) who serves as a personal teacher/mentor
- have weekly contact in person, by phone, or via e-mail with their teacher/mentor to receive guidance and training in the specific aspects of lesson planning, classroom management, problem solving, and resource development
- undergo class observations by the teacher/mentor in order for the teacher/mentor to gain a deeper understanding of the culture of the school and how the individual teacher engages with the students
- keep a weekly journal to reflect on teaching experience
- receive a stipend provided by the CFJE and/or the individual schools

As a result of regular meetings focusing on mentoring skills, the Teacher/Mentor Program has dedicated itself to the concept of “teachers talking with teachers.”

Challenges incorporated: #2,5,6,7

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11. Atudatenu

Minneapolis, MN

The way it was: Temple Israel, Bet Shalom Congregation, and the Talmud Torah of Minneapolis sponsored three separate Jewish-education programs on the high-school level. Both Temple Israel's and Bet Shalom's programs ended with Confirmation in the 10th grade, while the Talmud Torah's Beit Midrash met six hours a week through high-school graduation.

The catalyst for change: Rabbi Avraham Etedgui of the Talmud Torah joined with the directors of Temple Israel and Bet Shalom to create a community-based high-school program for 11th and 12th graders. The primary objective of the initiatives was to connect teens from various backgrounds, who otherwise might never meet, within an intellectually stimulating Jewish environment.

The way it is now: Atudatenu, the Jewish Teen Seminar, was established in 1996 as a joint program, drawing the majority of its participants from the three institutions. The Atudatenu program is comprised of:

- a Teen Advisory Committee with representatives from all three institutions that is responsible for selecting topics and speakers for the program and providing feedback to the institutional leadership
- a series of Sunday brunches rotating throughout the community where rabbis and scholars explore topics of high interest to teens, such as Kabbalah, medical ethics, and local Jewish history, in an informal environment
- informal opportunities to meet with Jewish professionals who are actively involved in Jewish learning and communal service
- a partnership with the St. Paul Jewish community since 1999

Atudatenu, the Jewish Teen Seminar, provides a place:

- for Jewish teens to interact with Jewish role models
- for participants to have a direct impact on their own Jewish education through program planning and evaluation
- to promote students' continued involvement in Jewish communal activities
- to provide socialization with other Jewish teenagers
- to enhance the teens' sense of Jewish community and Judaic knowledge

The Atudatenu program has been successful in providing an exciting and unique opportunity for teens in the Twin Cities to learn, connect, and grow as individuals within the context of the greater Jewish community.

Challenges incorporated: #2,3,4,5

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12. Keshet

Cambridge, MA

The way it was: The Greater Boston area offers numerous religious-school programs to families from a wide variety of backgrounds. For the most part, however, these programs follow the traditional format of childhood Jewish learning that takes place during set hours one to three days a week in a formal classroom setting.

The catalyst for change: Upon moving back to the United States, Marlene Booth wanted to find a way to perpetuate her own children's Israel experience. Booth wanted to be able to provide her children with the same everyday combination of Judaism and Hebrew that they encountered while living in Israel. Out of this desire Booth, together with Linda Echt, decided to create an environment where all the children would feel comfortable communicating in Hebrew and exploring Jewish topics.

The way it is now: Since 1992, Keshet has functioned as an independent, nonprofit Hebrew school – after school program, licensed by the Massachusetts Office of Child Care Services and unaffiliated with any religious movement, servicing children in grades K through 12. The advantage of Keshet lies in its flexible schedule and exciting, content-rich programs which include:

- meeting five times a week, Monday through Thursday from after school until 5:45 p.m., and on Friday as a special Shabbat program; a minimum attendance of twice a week is required
- operating as an institution where children are immersed in a warm atmosphere and feel loved and valued
- developing students' Jewish identity by creating community and by studying modern Hebrew, Jewish

history, cycles of the Jewish year, and Jewish ethics and values

- teens tutoring and mentoring as well as becoming role models and friends for younger children and doing administrative assignments

A special program is designed for Bar/Bat Mitzvah children in which:

- students study on Tuesdays from 4:00 to 6:30 p.m.
- participants discuss what it means to become a Bar/Bat Mitzvah
- students learn from a range of Jewish texts through discussions and interpretations
- students become more familiar with T'fillot, and with chanting Torah and Haftarat
- students and their parents meet several times during the year for shared learning time
- parents meet separately from their children several times during the year for personal learning and discussions about what it means for their children to become a Bar/Bat Mitzvah

Keshet strives to build a Jewish community where adult and family education are highly valued:

- Keshet families spend time together during holidays, Shabbatot, Havdalot, and many other special educational events: text study, Jewish book club, and lectures and discussions relating to Jewish issues of interest to the adult community.
- Keshet strengthens the connections between parents and children in the community, as children and parents are both engaged in the learning process; different interests and learning styles are accommodated

Keshet has existed for eight years, earning a reputation

as having a great atmosphere for children and adults to expand their Jewish education in a community centered around *kavod*, respect.

Challenges incorporated: #1,5

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