

Project *Kavod*: Improving the Employment Culture for Jewish Early Childhood Education

Let the honor of your students be as dear to you as your own, the honor of your colleagues as the reverence for your teacher, and the reverence for your teacher as the reverence for Heaven.

Rabbi Elazar ben Shauma in Pirke Avot

**by Patricia Bidel Padva,
Michelle Rapchik-Levin,
and Eli Schaap**

CAJE's Advocacy Commission, with grant funding from the Covenant Foundation, launched a three-year pilot project to improve the culture of employment in Jewish education in Miami-Dade County, Florida. Called "Project *Kavod*" to reflect the honor and respect of education in Jewish culture, the project is now in its third and final year.

Project *Kavod*'s partners are working together to improve the quality of Jewish early childhood (JEC) education by creating a community consensus that increases the recruitment and retention of teachers working in early childhood Jewish education (JECE) and to improve the culture of employment in JEC schools. Early childhood educators were selected as the target population because it is being seen as the gateway to strengthen both the children's and families' Jewish affiliations and to enhance their Jewish identities. JECE educators are also the least compensated full-time employees in Jewish education.

Project *Kavod* community partners include the Coalition for the Advancement of Jewish Education (CAJE), the Miami-Dade's Center for the Advancement of Jewish Education (CAJE-M), the Greater Miami Jewish Federation (GMJF), the Dave and Mary Alper Jewish Community Center's Early Childhood Center, Bet Shira Congregation's Early Childhood Center, Rabbi Alexander S. Gross Hebrew Academy's Early Childhood Center, and Temple Beth Shalom's Early Childhood Center.

The Project is being staffed by Eli Schaap, the Assistant Executive Director of CAJE; Margie Zeskind, Early Childhood Director at CAJE-Miami; and Pat Bidel Padva, Ph.D., Project Change Consultant.

This article is an introduction to the project's goals, what has been accomplished during the first two years, and next steps toward achievement of the project's goals.

Project *Kavod* Goals

Project *Kavod*'s professional staff, advisory committees and policy leaders are addressing the project outcomes that will benefit both Jewish educators and the Jewish community. These goals include determining how to:

- Increase the recruitment and retention of Miami-Dade Jewish early childhood educators, elevate the issues of recruitment and retention of Jewish educators to a priority level.
- Raise the consciousness of professional staff, lay leaders, and educators regarding the issues of employment practices, fair compensation, and appropriate benefit opportunities.
- Recruit and train four institutional teams of lay leaders and educators to focus on the project goals for their JECE site.
- Include full-time early childhood educators in community-wide benefit programs currently serving day school educators.
- Develop and teach a text-based curriculum on Jewish values related to employment of educators and directors.
- Develop a community change manual that can be used by communities to create customized approaches to improve the culture of employment in Jewish education.
- Develop web-based information resources on issues relevant to improving the culture of employment.
- Educate gatherings of Jewish educators on the culture of employment at community and national levels.
- Share findings with other national partners of CAJE.

Project *Kavod*'s Approach, and What Has Been Accomplished

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CAJE and its Project *Kavod* partners are working together to improve the quality of Jewish early childhood education by creating a community consensus that increases the recruitment and retention of teachers working in early childhood Jewish education. They are also working to improve the culture of employment in Jewish early childhood schools. Using a "collaborative" approach to include the viewpoints and expertise of all involved parties, they are working to create a change strategy to successfully transform Jewish early childhood education in Miami-Dade counties in Florida.

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orative" approach to include the viewpoints and expertise of all involved parties to create a change strategy to successfully transform Jewish early childhood education in Miami-Dade. This collaborative approach includes the following eight activities or phases:

- ♦ Create a foundation of consensus or agreement for decision-making among partners.
- ♦ Continuously enhance the vision, commitment, and change capacity of the partners.
- ♦ Assess the current Miami-Dade's JECE culture of employment.
- ♦ Design a potential change strategy to improve the JECE culture of employment.
- ♦ Analyze the impact of the potential change strategy.
- ♦ Plan and implement the change strategy.
- ♦ Recognize and celebrate progress toward transforming the JECE culture of employment.
- ♦ Monitor and refine, as needed, the transformed JECE culture of employment.

The activities or phases may not be implemented in the order listed above. The project partners have done significant work on the first four activities. Their major achievements are described below.

1. Creating a Foundation of Consensus for Project Partners

To recognize and honor the needs of all partners as they design a strategy for a positive JECE culture of employment, a consensus-based approach is being used. The inclusive network of partners included local site, community, and continental partners.

A Project Kavod Local Site Ad Hoc Group was created for each of the four project sites. The site groups' members include professional staff and lay leaders. The site group members gathered site-level fiscal and educator survey data to create a case for change for their local site. This data was used only at the local site level and was not shared with the other partners.

A Project Kavod CAJE/GMJF Community Committee included lay leaders representing GMJF, CAJE, and the four project sites who oversee the project's Miami-Dade efforts. They fully supported the collection of qualitative and quantitative data regarding the

current state of the JECE culture of employment. Professionals from any of the project's partners attend committee meetings. The committee, chaired by Joanne Papir, has three sub-committees:

- ♦ Employment Practices and Values: Compensation and Benefits.
- ♦ Early Childhood Educator Awareness and Issue Forums.
- ♦ Publicity.

The Community Committee created a Miami-Dade Task Force on the Culture of JECE Employment to identify actions to improve the conditions identified in the JECE Culture of Employment Survey. The Task Force, chaired by Judge Steven Robinson, included members of the Community Committee, representatives of JEC sites, and other communities' JEC educators and lay leaders. After the Task Force assessed the JEC Educators' Survey data and other employment data, they created strategic options regarding the provision of fair compensation and appropriate non-fiscal and fiscal benefit opportunities for Miami-Dade Jewish early childhood educators. The Task Force's recommendations were submitted to the Project Kavod Community Committee.

The Miami-Dade Jewish Council of Early Childhood Directors also participated as active partners. They helped create the Miami-Dade JECE Educators' Survey, they took the survey, and they participated in the Task Force.

The Project Kavod Continental Steering Committee provides oversight for all of the project's work. The committee members include lay leaders, education professionals, and researchers. The committee is chaired by Lorraine Sandler.

The CAJE's Board's Advocacy Commission identified the need for Project Kavod and was instrumental in the creation of the project proposal's goals. The commission has continued to actively support the project. Michelle Rapchik-Levin, Director of Teacher Professional Development and Resource Center at the Orloff Central Agency for Jewish Education of Broward County, is the Committee Chair.

2. Enhancing Vision, Commitment, and Change Capacity of Partners

The project partners have been working with a vision statement that was initially developed by the Miami-Dade lay leaders who attended the 2004 CAJE Conference. The following vision

has been shared with the project sites and the Miami-Dade Task Force:

Miami-Dade's organized Jewish community, parents, and the general community will create a vision and the passion to enhance the quality of Jewish early childhood education and improve the culture of employment for JECE educators.

For the partners to be able to work together to achieve the project's task goals, they needed to individually and collectively acquire mastery of the mindset, behaviors, data, and skills needed to collaboratively achieve the project's task goals. They also needed to create jointly wise options for JECE that will affect the total community and individual JECE sites.

The first planning step was the creation of project communication and decision-making protocols, jointly developed by CAJE, CAJE-M, and GMJF partners. The first training session for project lay leaders included a presentation on how to create a change strategy and the creation of potential project visions and action steps.

3. Assessing the Current JECE Culture of Employment

To assess the current JECE culture of employment, qualitative and quantitative data about the current state of Miami-Dade educators and the culture of employment was collected. The data was used by the Task Force to create proposed action recommendations that it submitted to the Community Committee. The data gathered for Project *Kavod* includes a comprehensive survey of JECE educators, JECE fiscal data for each of the project sites, and national JECE survey studies and other studies.

Community Report on Survey of Early Childhood Jewish Educators

A comprehensive survey was given to early childhood Jewish educators in Miami Dade and Broward Counties during the 2004/2005 school year. These educators consist of three groups:

- ♦ Directors -- including directors, assistant directors, and director/teachers.
- ♦ Teachers -- including head teachers and teachers.
- ♦ Teacher Assistants -- including teacher assistants and aides.

The survey examined the areas related to the culture of educators' employment, including background, general and Jewish education, recruitment, career paths, work conditions, salaries and benefits, income, and retention.

The survey was developed in English and translated into Spanish. The survey was field-tested and disseminated to all JEC programs in Miami-Dade and Broward Counties that are part of congregations (Conservative, Reform, and Reconstructionist), JCCs (Jewish Community Centers), and day schools (movement-based and communal). Thirty-one of 42 JEC programs in Miami-Dade and Broward Counties responded, representing a program response rate of 74%. The data presented are from 526 out of 887 educators (total number of directors, teachers, and assistant teachers in Dade and Broward counties), representing a return rate of 59% of all educators and 71% of those from the schools that responded. The respondents are 5% directors, 56% teachers, and 39% aides.

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Key Survey Findings

The survey study resulted in four key findings about JEC educators that have significant implications for improving the culture of their employment.

- ♦ Salary is a significant part of the JEC educator's income. It is a significant source of income for 90% of the educators. For 28%, it is the main source of income and for 62% it is an important source of income. Thirty-nine percent of educators state that their annual family income is below \$45,000.
- ♦ If you want to keep a new generation of JEC educators, then you must have decent salaries and benefits. Sixty percent of JEC educators have considered leaving the field. Of those who have considered leaving or left the field of Jewish education for a period of time, the main reasons they indicated are the need for more money (75%) and the need to receive benefits (43%).
- ♦ Jews are pursuing general and Jewish educational credentials in order to enter the field. Jewish people not only want to become early childhood Jewish educators, they also prepare to do so. A cadre of first-career educators exists whose Jewish and general educational credentials prepare them for the field of early childhood education. However, this cadre of first-career educators makes up only about a third of the total workforce. The credentials of first-career educators contrast strongly with those of educators who chose JEC education as a second career.
- ♦ A majority of the current early childhood Jewish educators do not have adequate general and Judaic credentials, and this impacts the quality of Jewish education. Twenty-three percent of JEC educators are not Jewish. Of those who are Jewish, only two-thirds have any Jewish education, as either a child or adult. Twenty-nine percent of the directors have no Jewish education as either a child or adult. Five percent of the JEC educators in Miami-Dade and Broward counties hold college degree level credentials in both education and Judaic studies. Another 5% have earned education and Judaic studies degrees lower than a bachelor's degree (associate's degree or degree from a teacher's seminary). This percentage is significantly lower when compared to the one national study done of Jewish educators in the mid-1990s by the Council for Initiatives in Jewish Education (CIJE). That study showed that 19% of Jewish teachers in day schools, supplementary schools, and early childhood schools hold at least bachelor level credentials in education and Judaic studies. Overall, only 43% of the educators have earned at least a bachelor's degree.

The Finances of Early Childhood Programs Instrument

Data was collected regarding a JEC center's income, expenses, and what happens to any of the JEC profits. Each of the four project sites used the data to assess the fiscal reality of their

JECE site in relation to the fiscal reality of the organization that hosts them. Since it is important to maintain both individual and organizational confidentiality, a project site's educator and fiscal data was only shared with Eli Schaap and Pat Bidol Padva. The sites used this data to create actions to improve their site's JECE's culture of employment.

4. Designing a Potential Change Strategy

All of the project's partners are engaged in activities that support each other and contribute to the continental, Miami-Dade community, and local site-level achievement of project goals. The design will support the partners' ongoing learning, monitoring, and refining of their change strategy.

Miami-Dade Community-Level Potential Change Strategies

During the winter of 2006, the Miami-Dade partners are creating potential action strategies to enhance the JECE culture of employment, based on what has been learned thus far. Last spring, the *Project Kavod* Task Force reviewed studies and documents, listened to presentations, engaged in thoughtful dialogue, and developed consensus recommendations to improve the Miami-Dade culture of employment.

After reviewing the data-based case for change, the Task Force used a consensus decision-making approach before they selected recommendations to submit to the *Project Kavod* Community Committee. Their collaborative approach included the development of potential recommendations, time to individually ponder them between meetings, ranking the original list of 43 recommendations using four criteria (fiscal impact on the JECE site and/or GMJF/CAJE-Miami, fiscal impact on the individual educator, impact on educator morale and support for quality JECE education). The taskforce then discussed their ranked list before selecting the final list of action recommendations.

Project Kavod Task Force Action Recommendations

The final list of action recommendations are grouped in three categories:

- ♦ Create JECE Community and Site-Level Visions and Strategic Plans.
- ♦ Increase Community Understanding and Appreciation of JEC Education and Educators.
- ♦ Increase JECE Salaries and Benefits.

The first category included two action recommendations: (1) develop and implement a communal-level vision, strategic plan, and action goals that ensure the delivery of quality Jewish early childhood education and (2) require and assist in the development of a site-level vision, strategic plan, and action goals that ensure the delivery of quality Jewish early childhood education. The site options are to be considered by all of the sites.

The second category, "Increase Community Understanding and Appreciation of JEC Education and Educators," included five action recommendations: (1) develop a marketing plan that promotes the importance of Jewish early childhood education; (2) expand JECE collaborative community forums among JECE schools, JCCs, synagogues, and GMJF/CAJE; (3) create opportunities for JECE education to be included and visible in community-wide educational forums; (4) create a universal and meaning-

Project Kavod Action	Number of Sites
Discuss project goals and findings with site's education committees and/or Board of Directors	4
Discuss project goals at staff meetings	4
Participate in Community Committee and the Task Force	4
Increase "public" appreciation for JECE by lay leaders and parents	3
Provide a written list of available benefits to each educator	2
Raised salary of co-teachers	1
Include JECE teacher representative when appropriate when decisions are being made that affect JECE	1
Strengthen the relationship between the Board of Directors and JECE educators by creating opportunities to connect formally at BOD and/or JECE events	1
Director's express written appreciation for an educator's accomplishments	1

ful community-wide recognition program for JECE educators; and (5) create a Jewish-based code of ethics outlining the importance of JECE educators and that is supported by all JECE stakeholders.

The third category, "Increase JECE Salaries & Benefits," included three action recommendations: (1) examine current and starting JECE salaries and develop a plan to increase them under a uniform CAJE-Miami standard; (2) develop a community-wide list of health, pension, and disability benefits that can be combined into a package that meets the needs of individual educators, and develop a plan to enhance them; and (3) create a consortium of joint purchasing for items such as insurance to leverage fiscal resources.

The Community Committee is studying the Task Force recommendations and will decide what it will recommend to the CAJE-Miami Board of Directors. The *Project Kavod* consultant and the staff from GMJF/CAJE are providing data regarding the fiscal and educational impacts of the Task Force recommendations. They will work with the Community Committee and other selected parties to develop action options for committee.

Local Site-Level Potential Change Strategies

In addition to participating on the Community Committee and Task Force, the four local sites are creating options to enhance the culture of employment for each site's JECE. The project consultant is working with the professional and lay leaders at each of

the sites to help them continue enhancing the site's culture of employment. On the table of project site action items above, the number in the right-hand column shows how many of the four sites have taken this action.

Continental-Level Potential Change Strategies

CAJE's Advocacy Commission and its Early Childhood Department have commissioned the creation of a text-based curriculum on Jewish values related to employment of teachers and directors. The first draft is being reviewed by project staff and other key parties. The Project *Kavod* Community Committee will convene community-wide training sessions using this curriculum for JEC educators and for the general community.

The CAJE Early Childhood Department has been actively engaged in collaborative efforts with other organizations advocating for the importance of excellent early childhood Jewish education, improved compensation and *kavod*, and better opportunities for professional development for the educators. In March 2005, CAJE, JTS, and HUC, with assistance from USCJ and URJ, co-sponsored an Early Childhood Synagogue Think-Tank to learn about synagogue/early childhood relationships. Four congregation teams (early childhood director, rabbi and lay leader), Synagogue 2000, STAR, CAJE and JECEI made presentations. Specific recommendations and future conversations are being planned (see related story on page 48).

CAJE, particularly Eli Schaap and Ilene Vogelstein, is continually discussing Project *Kavod* with key parties who can provide insights regarding how to achieve the project's goals. This outreach is done with key communal stakeholders such as USCJ, UAHC, UJA Federation of NY, American Jewish Committee, AVI CHAI, JERRI, UJC Renaissance and Renewal, Cummings Foundation, the newly-established informal network of EC staff at the national Jewish organizations, the new JECEI initiative, NAJECS (the council of EC specialists at the central agencies for Jewish education), and PEJE. CAJE has been reaching out to organizations that support women (NCJW, Hadassah, and the Jewish Childcare Association) regarding the nexus between inadequate compensation and *kavod* for early childhood Jewish educators and the fact that the educators are primarily female.

In addition, CAJE is providing consultation to several communities (e.g., Denver and Rhode Island) seeking to study their early childhood programs. In these consultations, CAJE is already utilizing the instruments developed for Project *Kavod* and the lessons learned from Project *Kavod*. While the work in this pilot project has been limited to JECE, the project is seeking to impact on all parts of Jewish education. The instruments designed for Project *Kavod* now have been adapted for use in examining recruitment and retention of congregation school educators in St. Louis.

Project *Kavod* Evaluation

Project *Kavod*'s evaluation approaches include the assessment of the short and long-term outcomes of the project's task goals (improving the culture of employment for JEC education)

and implementation goals (creating an effective network of project partners). Dr. Roberta Goodman, the Project Evaluator, developed the project's Evaluation Plan. A draft survey that will be administered to all Project *Kavod* participants has been developed. The survey will gather data on the partners' knowledge about JECE, their commitment to improving the culture of employment for JEC educators, and the probability that potential actions will improve the culture of employment.

Next Steps for Project *Kavod* Partners

After the project partners collaboratively create a change strategy, they will create actions that complete the following phases of their collaborative approach: analyze the impact of the potential change strategy, plan and implement the change strategy, celebrate the transformed JECE culture of employment and monitor and refine the transformed JECE culture of employment.

Project Kavod's partners are working together to enhance their collaborative endeavors by addressing their current challenges and opportunities. They are working together to create tangible improvements in the Jewish early childhood culture of employment for all Jewish early childhood education sites in Miami-Dade.

Project *Kavod*'s partners are working together to enhance their collaborative endeavors by addressing their current challenges and opportunities. They are working together to create tangible improvements in the JEC culture of employment for all JECE sites in Miami-Dade. They are planning Project *Kavod* community events to create a community awareness of the current state of Miami-Dade's JECE culture of employment, to create a community vision for a viable JECE culture of employment and to build agreement that meaningful action goals must be created and implemented. This includes creating an understanding that it is a community responsibility to provide funding for JEC education. On the continental level, Project *Kavod* is starting to explore the lessons learned about the culture of employment in Jewish education beyond JECE in other communities and in a variety of settings. ❁

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