

SCHOOLS THAT WORK:  
WHAT WE CAN LEARN  
FROM GOOD JEWISH  
SUPPLEMENTARY SCHOOLS

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## LETTER FROM AVI CHAI'S EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR — NORTH AMERICA

Since its founding over two decades ago, The AVI CHAI Foundation has focused on Jewish education, primarily, in the past dozen years, to enhance day schools and summer camping. While we view day school as the most effective form of Jewish education, we recognize that supplementary schools continue to educate the majority of Jewish children. The Foundation therefore, hopes to contribute to this Jewish educational sector by providing what we have termed *thought leadership* in the forms of research, re-conceptualization, assessment and advocacy.

In 2007 the Foundation commissioned Dr. Jack Wertheimer to conduct an examination of recent trends in the field of supplementary Jewish education. That initial report was then followed by a Census of Supplementary Schools, which was prepared by Dr. Wertheimer to provide hard data that would both facilitate and stimulate new thinking and action to enhance the Jewish educational experience of the 230,000 or so Jewish children in supplementary schools each year. Both reports can be found in the publications section at [www.avichai.org](http://www.avichai.org).

Dr. Wertheimer's work has continued and we are pleased to share with you this report based on his team's study of ten different schools. Together, Dr. Wertheimer and his team have explored and assessed the factors that lead to "good" supplementary school programs.

As is clear from the research done thus far, the supplementary school field is in a process of evolution that is not yet well understood. Change provides both opportunities and challenges. We hope that this report, its insights and recommendations, will stimulate conversation and consideration among practitioners and lay leaders and help in the process of realizing the opportunities and overcoming the challenges.

We very much appreciate Dr. Jack Wertheimer's commitment to Jewish education and leadership of this ambitious research project.



Yossi Prager  
Executive Director — North America



## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The field of Jewish supplementary education has come under increased scrutiny in recent years. Once the overwhelmingly dominant form of Jewish education in the United States,<sup>1</sup> it suffered from severe criticism in the last quarter of the twentieth century for its lack of focus, mediocre programs, and failure to educate and positively engage the large number of students enrolled in its schools. More recently the field has attracted new interest for a variety of reasons. For one, it is evident that supplementary schools continue to enroll the majority of children receiving a Jewish education; it would be irresponsible and a lost opportunity not to help strengthen these schools. Moreover, supplementary schools are a major bridge for reaching Jewish families whose contact with synagogues and other Jewish institutions may be episodic, at best, but who can be reached through their children's schooling. This fundamental reality, in turn, has required schools to expand their purview in order to reach the parents of children they enroll; hence the growth of family and adult education programming associated with supplementary schools. Finally, and not incidentally, supplementary schools have drawn new attention because a new can-do spirit has inspired experiments to re-think and improve programs.<sup>2</sup>

In an effort to learn about the range and quality of programs, a team of ten researchers—five academics and five experienced educators with backgrounds in school administration—observed ten Jewish supplementary schools reputed to be effective, *as defined by the quality of formal study and positive Jewish experiences they provide, the clarity and thoughtfulness of school objectives, the development of a community of practice to translate learning into Jewish living, and the coordination of key personnel in the pursuit of those goals.* The research team examined factors that go into the making of these reasonably good supplementary programs—their professional and lay leadership, teaching staff, curriculum, experiential programs, and offerings for parents and family education. Each school was studied by a matched partnership of one academic and one seasoned educator with the expectation that a binocular view would improve our understanding of what makes these schools tick.

The schools observed varied in size, region, denominational affiliation and approach. Three are under Reform auspices, two

are Conservative congregational schools, one is Reconstructionist and one a Chabad school; two are community high schools and one is a non-denominational, independent school. One school has under 50 students and another two have under 140 students; the rest have anywhere from 150 to 400 or more students. Four schools are located in Middle Atlantic states, two in New England, three in the West and one in the Midwest.

<sup>1</sup> Student enrollments in supplementary schools still exceed those of Jewish day schools by approximately 230,000 to 172,000 in grades K-12, but that margin has narrowed considerably over the past 50 years.

<sup>2</sup> I have examined these developments in *Recent Trends in Supplementary Jewish Education*. NY: AVI CHAI Foundation, 2007.

While observing these schools, the researchers considered a number of questions:

1. How does the school define its main objectives and how does it seek to achieve them?
2. What is distinctive about the school's approach to Jewish supplementary education?
3. How does the school bring together its major components—mission, curriculum, personnel, professional and lay leadership—to create a coherent and effective educational program?
4. What kinds of resources does the school marshal and from where are they drawn?
5. In what ways are the school's key players self-reflective and how well do they work together?
6. To what extent does the school hold itself and its staff accountable for delivering an effective Jewish education?
7. What can others seeking to improve their own programs learn from this school?

A word is in order about what the project did not do. It did not devise clear measures of student learning and track students over the course of a year, let alone over several years, to determine what students absorbed and how well they retained information. It did not apply a single metric to evaluate a school's performance and it did not aspire to draw any larger conclusions about the relative success of supplementary education as compared to day schools or any other types of Jewish education. Instead, by observing schools carefully, attending classes and interviewing the key participants, the research team determined how schools put together the various components of their program, worked to improve their delivery of Jewish education, introduced creative new programs and sought to shape their students as Jews.

This report builds upon the cumulative findings of the ten schools studied to draw larger conclusions about the traits of good schools, the enabling factors necessary for them to succeed and the continuing challenges they face. Its intended audience consists primarily of educators, synagogue professionals and lay leaders involved in the field of supplementary education. And its purpose is to help them think about ways to strengthen their own programs.

In order to avoid overwhelming readers with sketches of all ten schools, this report highlights six disparate ones, while briefly noting in an appendix some key findings from the four other schools. The complete portraits of all ten schools will appear in a volume entitled, *Learning and Community: Jewish Supplementary Education in the 21st Century*, scheduled to be published by Brandeis University Press in the spring of 2009.

The research team concluded that strong supplementary schools vary in size and orientation but still share a number of characteristics. By listing these common traits in simplified fashion for the purposes of this Executive Summary, we run the risk of divorcing these points from the lived reality of schools. What may appear as simple truisms when presented in the abstract, come alive only in the doing. Readers are urged therefore to read the complete report so as to perceive how these traits manifest themselves in the actual experiences of educators and students.

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#### NOTEWORTHY CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SCHOOLS:

1. Good schools intentionally work to *develop a community* among their students, staff and parents. Beginning with the assumption that learning cannot be separated from context, and that to a large extent the school's most important message is embedded in the culture and relationships it fosters, these schools devote much time to building a community that attends to the needs of individual children; embraces them in an environment where their classmates become their good, often their best, friends; and connects them to the larger congregational body, if the school is housed in a synagogue, or to another Jewish sub-community, if it is not. No less important, the community fostered by the school not only is warm and hospitable, but also establishes norms explicitly identified as distinctly Jewish.
2. Good schools place an emphasis on *taking Jewish study seriously*. Admittedly, some schools are far stronger at engaging students in discussions about Jewish values and holidays than with intensive study of texts. But regardless of the emphasis, good schools have developed a sophisticated curriculum that goes beyond rote learning, examining Jewish content so that it "sticks." To do so, schools work at engaging the minds of their students, getting them to mull over texts and issues. Through class discussions and



informal experiences, schools challenge students to analyze, evaluate and compare texts, ideas and ethical dilemmas and encourage them to develop a personal relationship to religious questions.

3. Moreover, good schools create opportunities for students to engage in *experiential Jewish education*. By participating in actual prayer, leading religious services, attending Shabbat retreats, engaging in activities to help the poor and needy, participating in programs celebrating Israel, students are exposed to Jewish experiences that they may long remember and may stimulate them to explore questions of personal meaning. This experiential component, in tandem with formal learning, is vital, as it provides students with the opportunity to live their Judaism and not only to learn about it.
4. Good schools understand the need to *align all their efforts with school goals*. School directors, clergy and lay leaders often play a critical role in clarifying the school's goals and working with teaching staff to align what goes on in the classroom with the broader objectives of the school. Beyond the classroom, budgets, governance, leadership and other facets of the school also are directed to attain goals.
5. Good schools *value themselves and their students*. In most of the schools under study, discipline was achieved primarily by attending closely to the needs of individual children and engaging them with compelling materials. Not surprisingly, students respond positively when they feel valued.
6. Good schools regard *families as allies and also clients*. Involved parents can become important models for their children and will encourage children to take maximal advantage of their Jewish educational experiences. Moreover, under optimal conditions, parents create a home context for reinforcing the school's teachings. In turn, when children are stimulated by their Jewish learning and experiences, parents are likely to seek out more Jewish education for *themselves*. In this sense, schools have a mission to engage parents and not only children.

The work of building an effective supplementary school is not only to actualize each of these aspirations so that they become real, but also to hold them in balance. No single one alone will insure a strong program. *It is the combination of traits that forges a strong school.*

In order for schools to attend to these issues, a number of enabling factors must be in place. These include:

1. Effective schools *define a vision* of their ideal graduate *and* the means they will develop to produce such students. Such a vision surely encompasses learning goals for students, but it also includes developing an ambience that will nurture students by giving them opportunities to enact their Jewish commitments and engage in Jewish activities.
2. The better schools strive to *create a culture of collaboration and self-reflection*. They tend to avoid relying too heavily on a single individual. Instead, they forge collaborations, harnessing the talents of a variety of players in a common effort. It is striking too how good schools experiment in order to come closer to their aspirations, regularly evaluating how they conduct themselves and recalibrating their programs based on a critical examination of what is working and what is not.
3. Even as they are autonomous institutions, schools do not operate in isolation. A school's congregational or communal base of support is critical to its success, and certainly to its finances. Schools have to consider potential *internal and external resources and then plan to make maximal use of such resources*. In this regard, size is not necessarily the key point. Both large and small schools have to be clear about their circumstances and act wisely to benefit from their environment and the resources available to them.
4. One of the truisms of school change projects that have been tried in Jewish supplementary settings is that it is vital to *involve lay leaders*—board members and others—in the life of the school, and to work cooperatively with them to refine the objectives of the school. A number of the schools in our study act upon this assumption, creating partnerships between educators, synagogue personnel (if the school is sponsored by a congregation) and lay leaders. The best educators understood how best to deploy lay leaders to help the school become more effective.

A number of intractable challenges are endemic to the field, and even better schools are not immune to their impact.

- There is a scarcity of teachers well-versed in Hebrew and Judaica who have the skill to transmit their knowledge to students. All the curricular initiatives, school revitalization

efforts and other initiatives to ratchet up school quality depend upon people who can serve as knowledgeable and pedagogically adept educators. The field of Jewish education generally and the sub-field of supplementary Jewish education especially struggle continually to find gifted personnel to staff schools due to the part-time nature of most jobs.

- While ample curricular materials are available to schools through the denominational education arms, central agencies for Jewish education and commercial firms, the real challenge lies in implementing them properly in the classroom. Some schools are forced to rely upon teachers who lack content knowledge and/or pedagogical skills. More commonly, schools lack the support for teachers in the form of curriculum coordinators to help them translate curriculum into teaching plans.
- Directing a school is a demanding job, which can lead to burn-out. Too often schools rely on the director to be a superman or more commonly superwoman who handles everything. Most schools have a shallow bench so that pinch hitters do not come to the aid of directors. In contrast, a number of schools in our study have as many as seven full-time professionals, and additional personnel with substantial part-time assignments. Such levels of staffing make a considerable difference.
- With the large majority of students attending school for a handful of hours each week, whether once or twice a week, schools are severely constrained. In response, some schools have focused very sharply on achieving goals that are attainable. Remaining mindful of the time constraints under which they operate, they do not promise more than they can deliver. The question is whether this hard-headed approach to time, results in too low a set of expectations. Some schools we studied augmented school time by offering Shabbat programs, weekend retreats and other activities scheduled during non-school hours to complement the severely constrained school days.
- Because many schools meet for fewer hours than was the case in the past and hold sessions after children have already put in a day in school, supplementary programs find themselves in a heightened time-bind, creating a dilemma about what to emphasize and what to omit. Schools must make trade-offs between subject matter—e.g. Hebrew language vs. Jewish history, teaching about

holidays or Israel, building prayer skills vs. talking about God—and also between content knowledge and community-building or other affective activities. Schools have to make hard-headed decisions as to their preferred balance between imparting knowledge and engaging children in meaningful Jewish experiences.

- A particularly difficult curricular choice relates to Hebrew language instruction. Many schools are unclear about what to teach and toward what end: Is the purpose of Hebrew language study to be able to participate in synagogue services or to converse? To read Biblical, rabbinic or modern Hebrew? To read or to speak? Schools seem confounded by these hard questions, and commercial publishers have muddied the waters by producing textbooks that purport to meet all of these goals. But learning a foreign language is difficult, and without utmost clarity about goals and whether specific goals are attainable, schools will surely not succeed.
- There is little doubt that many parents and children regard the end goal of supplementary school to be the bar/bat mitzvah. The fact that over one-third of students in supplementary school drop out the year after they reach this milestone and 55 percent leave within two years offers powerful evidence of their priorities. Effective schools, by contrast, tend to set very different goals for themselves. Many explicitly downplay their role in preparing children, and most try to retain students well beyond 7th grade. How to manage this disparity in expectations and stem the post-bar/bat mitzvah attrition is a central challenge facing schools. In fact, many of the schools in our sample judge their success in part by rising rates of retention.
- With a range of other activities beckoning to children, supplementary schools must compete for the attention of families. Between sports programs, music and play rehearsals, social action programs and additional after-school activities, children are over-programmed and their parents must choose between a catalogue of options. Jewish education, then, is merely one of many supplementary programs. Compared to the recent past, Jewish education now must compete with far more options—and often loses out.

These circumstances encumber all supplementary schools. They are built into the current structure.

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## POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Based upon this particular project and the ten schools we observed, here are the key recommendations we offer to policy-makers interested in improving supplementary Jewish schools.

1. The field would benefit greatly if schools would devote more time to clarifying their own objectives and reflecting on how well these objectives are being met. Even some of the better schools in our study have made only limited progress in thinking through what they hope to accomplish, what their ideal graduate will have mastered and experienced, and how they define their short-term and long-range goals for their students. By their own admission, many schools are most interested in giving students positive Jewish experiences, but they also devote time to teaching skills and content without a clear sense of the ends they wish to achieve.

Though no agency can dictate to schools what they ought to be doing, we can hope to stimulate conversation about the objectives they wish to set for themselves and the means they use to engage in self-evaluation to determine how well those objectives are being met. This does not mean that schools should rely upon standardized testing or externally imposed criteria for success. It does mean that supplementary schools, like all educational efforts, would do better if they were clear about their goals and honest with themselves about how well they are succeeding in attaining their stated goals. As matters currently stand, standards of judging success are subjective at best. Educators and the lay leaders and clergy who support their work may feel much better about the enterprise if they are clear about their objectives and measures of success. Certainly, students are likely to benefit from stronger formal and informal Jewish education offered by supplementary schools. Philanthropists and parent bodies can prod schools to pay far more attention to outcomes and thereby enhance the credibility of supplementary Jewish education.

2. Funders can work in partnership with central agencies for Jewish education and denominational bodies to develop sustained programs assisting educators in making informed curricular decisions. Due to the highly decentralized nature of the field, each school shapes its own curriculum. With the possible exception of the Reform movement, which claims its curriculum is used by more than 50 percent of its schools, the existing national bodies do not currently reach into most schools; and local central agencies only have limited impact, particularly at a time when many lack the budgets and

authority to provide direct services by their local Federations. As a consequence, schools more than ever are forced to rely upon their own efforts—and often waste a great deal of time in reinventing the proverbial wheel when they develop their own curricula.

3. This, in turn, highlights the absence of sufficient champions for the field of Jewish supplementary education. It is easy to blame the national educational and denominational organizations or the central agencies for the anarchic state of affairs, but upon closer inspection it is evident that these institutions lack the capacity, the personnel and authority to help schools. Funders will have to assume responsibility as partners with educators for developing the field, as they have in other arenas of Jewish education.
4. Who will help the small schools? With 60 percent of Jewish supplementary schools enrolling fewer than 100 students, it would be wise not to overlook this niche. The Institute for Southern Jewish Life and the regional offices of the Union for Reform Judaism offer models of how small schools may be served. It is possible to conceive of a section in the denominational offices or other national agencies dedicated to small schools, or even inter-denominational efforts. Here too philanthropists can make a major difference if they are prepared to attend to the needs of small schools.
5. The field of supplementary Jewish education needs a clearing house for good ideas. Some of the national organizations such as CAJE, the Coalition for Advancing Jewish Education, try to play this role. But here too budgetary constraints limit the impact of what is tried. Moreover, it is not enough to make available ideas for programming. Schools need guidance in how to adapt curricula, programs, and initiatives from other settings. Absent the infrastructure, communal support, and trained personnel, the models we have described above may not fit in other schools. It is not only ideas, then, that must be exchanged but also clear thinking about *how* to utilize them.
6. Change must be understood as multi-levered and directed toward the school's defined goals. Too many schools focus on a single area, believing that by improving curriculum or intensifying professional development or forging a strong bond between the synagogue and the school they can redirect the entire school enterprise. Each of these is important. But schools are complex institutions and require *a series of interventions* to turn them around. Clergy, lay leaders and educators must work together patiently and deliberately to introduce a range of changes, rather than rely upon a single silver bullet.



## PREFACE

The title of this report has a double meaning. In conceiving of this project, my colleagues and I intentionally sought out schools reputed to offer an effective supplementary program, as defined by

- the quality of formal study and positive Jewish experiences offered,
- the clarity of school objectives,
- the development of a community of practice to translate learning into Jewish living,
- the coordination of key educational and lay personnel in the pursuit of those goals.<sup>3</sup>

Rather than examine failure or mediocrity, we hoped to learn from a range of schools that seem to be doing a good job. It did not take us long to discover that the better schools work hard at aligning their programs, curricula and personnel in a cohesive fashion. Hence the second connotation of the title. Despite—or perhaps because of—the paucity of time they have with students, the more effective schools approach their work with a heightened sense of urgency to make maximal use of their limited resources; they strive self-consciously to make every hour, every teaching moment, every member of the school team, every student count. This takes deliberate and focused attention to a consciously articulated set of goals. It takes hard work.

The purpose of this report is to convey what we have learned from ten schools<sup>4</sup> about how Jewish supplementary schools can improve their educational systems and the range of factors that even small schools must consider as they constantly strive to improve. The report is, thus, primarily directed to an audience of educators, synagogue professionals and lay leaders involved in the field of supplementary education to help them think about ways to strengthen their own programs. A concluding section of policy recommendations is directed primarily to potential funders and lay leaders.

By focusing on schools that work, this report offers no judgment about the condition of supplementary Jewish education overall. Currently, there is no basis on which to

evaluate the sprawling network of Jewish supplementary programs in the United States.<sup>5</sup> Indeed, even finding ten effective schools proved complex because no central clearing-house of information on supplementary schools exists. The project team relied upon the informed judgment of observers around the country to identify schools worthy of study—and even then it rejected schools of high repute that were undergoing a leadership transition or seemed to have stagnated. Thus, this is emphatically *not* a report on the state of the field.

<sup>3</sup> Our selection of these criteria of necessity was based upon a set of assumptions with which we began based upon the many years of experience team members had with supplementary schools coupled with what we observed as we visited schools. It would be a useful exercise for school committees and educators to engage in conversations about their own criteria for assessing the effectiveness of their school.

<sup>4</sup> The field of supplementary Jewish education suffers from an inadequacy of precise language. To some, the term supplementary is offensive because it downgrades Jewish education to secondary status. But the term preferred by some today, complementary education, confuses more than clarifies. Older terms such as congregational education misses the mark because some programs are independent of synagogues; religious school is inadequate to cover schools that do not teach Judaism; and Hebrew school hardly does justice to programs that predominantly teach subjects other than language. Moreover, the use of the word school may also do a disservice in setting up expectations of formal study that cannot be met by part-time supplementary Jewish education. We should note, however, that all of the programs included in this study refer to themselves as schools.

<sup>5</sup> I have examined these schools from a quantitative perspective in *A Census of Jewish Supplementary Schools in the United States, 2006-2007*. NY: AVI CHAI Foundation, May 2008.

This report also makes only limited claims about the effectiveness of the schools that were studied. Members of the research team observed classes, interviewed students, teachers, school directors, lay leaders and Jewish professionals associated with the schools. They paid special attention to the ways schools configure their programs and the ways in which they utilize resources within their communities. The researchers also formed some judgments about how well the students in the schools they observed seemed to absorb the material presented to them—whether they seemed engaged or distracted; whether they participated actively or indifferently; whether they drew upon information they had learned previously. What the researchers could not do was measure student knowledge at set points over a school year to gauge the impact of learning, and certainly could not judge how well knowledge and skills are retained by students over several years. Many of the schools also place a premium on the experiential, but we have no systematic way to measure the short-term, let alone long-term impact of informal Jewish experiences on students. (We shall, however, present some anecdotal evidence about the affective side of schooling.)

Finally, this report does not draw any conclusions about the relative merits of supplementary schools as compared to other forms of Jewish education. Its point of departure is the supplementary school, which faces its own set of constraints—limited time with students; a part-time, sometimes volunteer teaching staff; school directors who are mainly part-timers; high turnover of personnel; a paucity of opportunities for teachers to engage in continuing learning; and limited resources of budget and communal support. What we found compelling was how the schools we studied found ways to address these challenges, sometimes in novel ways, in other cases in more conventional ones but with impressive energy, thoughtfulness and concern for the learners. This report aims to disseminate information about those efforts and in the process to shed light on what can be accomplished in supplementary schools under the best of circumstances.



## TAKING A FRESH LOOK AT SUPPLEMENTARY SCHOOLS

The field of supplementary Jewish education is comprised of over 2,000 schools of various affiliations scattered in every state of the United States, which collectively enroll some 230,000 students. Supplementary programs thus constitute the largest “network” operating in the arena of Jewish education. Yet supplementary schools have benefited from far less communal attention and philanthropic support than other sectors. Symptomatically, philanthropists first established national organizations to support Jewish day schools, summer camps, early childhood programs, and teen programs before creating a national agency, PELIE, the Partnership for Effective Learning and Innovative Education, to support the efforts of supplementary schools. Their hesitation is understandable given the diffuse nature of the supplementary field. Still, if only for the sheer numbers of students they enroll and the importance of the education they can potentially deliver, part-time Jewish lower and high schools cannot be permitted to languish as a weak link.

If they are to win more support, there is much about these schools we still need to learn. Gaining such knowledge is hampered by the absence of comprehensive and public data about Jewish supplementary education. Although a small percentage of these programs function as communal institutions, bringing together students from a number of synagogues or from a cross-section of the community, the vast majority are congregationally-based, highly independent units, free from scrutiny by outsiders and beholden to no one other than their sponsoring synagogues or boards. This autonomy often translates into self-devised objectives and curricula. In theory, it also liberates the schools to experiment with their own ways of delivering a Jewish education. But it also leaves the work of these schools shrouded in mystery.

It appears that most supplementary schools in fact operate according to a single model, offering only one track of classes for all students, regardless of their abilities or the time constraints of their families; most try to create a school-like atmosphere by situating teaching in classrooms with blackboards, chalk and other familiar schoolroom paraphernalia; most divide students into grades; most have

teachers who stand in front of the class; most array students around desks or tables; some administer tests.

Upon closer examination, schools differ considerably in the ways they approach their tasks. School affiliation is one factor in determining curricular emphases. A recent report on the field demonstrates that schools of one denomination tend to emphasize the acquisition of synagogue skills, whereas those affiliated differently place greater priority on providing positive Jewish experiences or teaching interpersonal skills.<sup>6</sup> Schools also differ in how they bring together the various components of their programs—their overall goals, curriculum, educational leadership, and coordination of their teaching staff and lay leaders. This is especially evident in how they utilize the classroom and other settings, how they think of the role of the teacher, and the way they regard the learner. They also differ in the quality of leadership exhibited by educators, clergy, and lay boards. And not the least, they differ in their determination to fulfill a vital Jewish mission.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 22.

Given these differences, this research project deliberately observed ten schools of disparate sizes, affiliations, and regions to learn more about how a range of stronger<sup>7</sup> schools put together the components of their programs. The final roster of schools under study consists of three under Reform auspices, two Conservative congregational schools, one Reconstructionist and one Chabad school, two Community high schools, and one non-denominational, independent school. One school has under 50 students and another two have under 140 students; the rest have anywhere from 150 to 400 or more students. Four schools are located in Middle Atlantic states, two in New England, three in the West and one in the Midwest. (The overall research design and method of selecting schools are discussed toward the end of this report.)

Based on our study of ten schools, the research team was able to identify key qualities of more effective schools and some of the important building blocks they put in place to develop their programs. To illustrate this analysis in a manageable fashion, this report will highlight *six* of the schools. (A separate section will briefly discuss some of the outstanding features of the other four schools.) Narrative descriptions of schools set off in italics are drawn directly from reports produced by members of the team.

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## CHARACTERISTICS OF SCHOOLS THAT WORK

### 1. Cultivating a Nurturing Jewish Community

The best schools *intentionally* develop a community among their students, staff and parents. They begin with the assumption that learning cannot be separated from context, and that to a large extent the school's most important message is embedded in the culture and relationships it fosters. Hence, they devote much time to building a community that: attends to the needs of individual children; embraces them in an environment where their classmates become their good, often their best, friends; and connects them to the larger congregational body, if the school is housed in a synagogue, or to another Jewish sub-community, if it is not. No less important, the community fostered by the school not only is warm and hospitable, but also establishes norms explicitly identified as distinctly Jewish. Community then embodies the Jewish values the school seeks to impart. Needless to say, denominational orientation affects what these norms are, but across the spectrum good schools focus

particularly on the interpersonal, teaching young people through example and open discussion how to treat one another and others. Put in more traditional Jewish idiom, they stress *mitzvot bein adam lehavero*—i.e. proper behavior toward others. Some of the schools also seek to foster a religious posture in students, helping them develop a relationship with God through prayer and observance—i.e. *mitzvot bein adam lamakom*. The goal, then, is not only to create an inviting communal atmosphere in which youngsters feel comfortable, but also one that puts into practice the values and religious orientation that are taught.

### 2. Engaging with Judaism at a High Level

Good schools place an emphasis on taking Jewish study seriously. Admittedly, some schools are far stronger at engaging students in discussions about Jewish values and issues than with intensive study of texts. But regardless of the emphasis, good schools have developed a sophisticated curriculum that goes beyond rote learning, examining instead Jewish content so that it “sticks.” To do so, schools work at engaging the minds of their students, getting them to mull over texts and issues. Class discussions press students to analyze, evaluate and compare texts, ideas, and ethical dilemmas.

### 3. Exposing Students to Powerful Jewish Experiences

Simultaneously, good schools nurture the affective component by providing a range of Jewish experiences. These may include special Shabbat programs and retreats, *hesed* programs which enable young Jews to give of themselves to the Jewish elderly or the local soup kitchen or the cleanup of a Jewish cemetery, dance and musical activities to engage students in forms of Jewish artistic expression, fairs and parades highlighting a connection to Israel, and deliberate efforts to cultivate Jewish prayer and other opportunities for children to explore matters of the spirit. This experiential component, in tandem with formal learning, is vital, as it provides students with the opportunity to live their Judaism and not only to learn about it.

<sup>7</sup> In describing these schools, this report intentionally avoids the use of superlatives. It is hard to document from this type of study whether a school is excellent. Every school we studied exhibited blemishes. But the overall impression we had of the ten schools in this sample was of effectiveness in at least some areas; some were particularly impressive exemplars of what can be achieved, others, though weaker, still seemed to work well.



#### 4. Aligning the School with Its Stated Goals

Good schools strive to align all their components with their stated goals. This means that curriculum and teaching, governance and budget, educators and lay leaders all are aligned. Needless to say, a great deal of self-conscious planning and communication must go into such a process of alignment, let alone into a sustained effort to monitor how well the school's parts are aligned.

Given the shortage of personnel, many schools feel constrained about letting teachers go. They also may feel that they can retrain teachers by investing time in professional development. Here the school director plays a critical role in clarifying the school's goals and working with teaching staff to align what goes on in the classroom with the broader objectives of the school.

#### 5. Valuing the School, Valuing Students

In most of the schools under study, good class management was achieved primarily by attending closely to the needs of individual children and engaging them in challenging classes. Not surprisingly, students respond positively when they feel valued. Just as important, they develop positive associations to being Jewish and are eager participants in the community the school strives to create.

#### 6. Engaging Families in the Educational Process

When properly enlisted, parents can serve as the school's allies; and conversely, when schools fail to engage students, parents will give up on the school. At most, if not all of the schools we observed, some parents became more engaged with Jewish living as a result of their children's exposure to experiences in supplementary schools. In addition, parents served as partners with the school. Moreover, as they engaged with the schools and participated in serious family education programs or other Jewish educational activities, parents were transformed. They attest to how the school and their children's experiences in the school changed their own relationship to Judaism. The school thus became an agent for change in the parent population, a new mission now assumed by some of the more effective schools.

#### 7. Recognizing the Complex Interaction of *All* These Factors

The real work of building an effective supplementary school is not only to actualize each of these aspirations so that they become real, but also to hold them in balance. No single one alone will insure a strong program. It is the combination of traits that forges a strong school.

TABLE 1: THE SCHOOLS AT A GLANCE

School	Enrollments	Affiliation	Options +	Primary Change Agent/s
Adath Shalom*	380	Conservative	yes	school director and rabbi
Beit Knesset Hazon	630	Reform	yes	educators, clergy and lay leaders
Chabad Hebrew School	140	Chabad	no	school director and rabbi
East Coast Community H.S.*	270	Community	all electives	school directors
Kehilla	100	Independent	yes	school director and teachers
Reconstructionist Synagogue	195	Reconstructionist	yes	clergy, school director and lay leaders
Temple Reyim*	450	Reform	yes	school director
Temple Shalom*	500	Reform	yes	lay-led collaboration
Tikvah Synagogue	53	Conservative	yes	rabbi
Western Hebrew High School	375	Community	yes	school director and central agency for Jewish education

\*Discussed in Appendix I. All school names are pseudonyms.

+ The Options column refers to alternative school schedules from which students can choose.



## PORTRAITS OF SIX SCHOOLS

In order to concretize these abstract qualities, we now take a look at how six of the schools put them into action. Admittedly, not every school succeeded at incorporating all of these qualities, and clearly there were variations in the intensity and care with which each was embraced. Still, with varying degrees of self-consciousness, most of the schools embodied these traits.

### BEIT KNESSET HAZON<sup>8</sup>

Beit Kneset Hazon (BKH) is a Reform synagogue that has undergone a radical transformation, followed by rapid growth, going from 350 member units in 2000 to 900 member units and a total of 630 students (enrolled in grades 1-12) seven years later. The transformation was led by a group of lay leaders, whose involvement in high-level adult learning led to the realization that their religious school was woefully inadequate. The resources of the local Federation and the proximity of two nearby universities that serve as recruiting grounds for teachers have enabled the synagogue to hire seven full-time professional educators and to engage in a continual cycle of innovation and assessment.

The power and coherence of BKH's educational program lies in the high degree of consensus about its overarching goals. The professional staff, teachers, parents, and even high school students describe the school's aims in similar terms: to create a strong sense of community; to make Judaism an integral part of people's lives; and to make Jewish learning a life-long endeavor. In its effort to achieve these goals, the congregation's educational program includes both formal and experiential learning. Following John Dewey's dictum that experience is the basis of all true education, the school attempts to add an experiential component to all of its educational offerings. This principle is most evident in the high school program, which is termed "Havaya," the Hebrew word for experience. In this program students choose among an array of havurot that combine an activity such as acting, cooking, or wilderness exploration with high-level text study; they also attend retreats that teach Jewish history through films, simulations and informal activities. Experiential learning

in the 6th and 7th grades centers on an 18-month program of service learning, called "Ma'asim Tovim," (good deeds). Students in grades K-5 are encouraged to participate in a wide range of informal options, which include youth groups (which begin in Kindergarten), shul-ins, choirs for every age, the drama chug (club), and family-based social action projects. An experimental alternative to the religious school, "Chug Hasefer," (book club) focuses on books with Jewish themes that parents and children read and discuss together.

The synagogue has also invested considerable energy into transforming Yesod, its program of formal learning for K-5, doing everything it can to accommodate a range of learning styles and special needs. Two special education consultants observe classes and work with students and teachers to assure that students are appropriately engaged and that teachers receive the assistance they require; the specialists also lead a support group for parents of children with special needs.

**Community:** *Members of Beit Kneset Hazon are drawn from over 30 different townships, each with its own public school system. It is not uncommon for BKH's children to be among the very few (sometimes the only) Jewish children in their public school classes. For this reason, the primary goal, mentioned by nearly everyone we spoke to, is the creation of a Kehilla Kedosha, a sense of sacred community. The rabbi emphasized this goal from the outset: "As soon as I... [assumed my position], I went into the school and I said, 'If your kids know the alef-bet before everyone's name in the class, everyone gets an F. Don't even open the book the first class.'" The school director explains: "We work hard to help faculty understand that it's not all about the content. The content is important, but the community-building is also really critically important. ... If we're going to have a feeling of warmth and welcoming and family we have to dedicate some serious time to helping kids know each other."*

*The consensus among the parents and children we interviewed is that this goal is, to a large extent, achieved. One parent we interviewed noted that "the sense of community is super-strong here." Another parent said: "It's been amazing.... BKH has given my kids that home where they know that there are other people like them around and that they can establish relationships accordingly."*

<sup>8</sup> All names of schools are pseudonyms, as are references to personnel in the schools.

The 10th and 11th graders we interviewed also agreed that “you really can’t find a community like this anywhere else.” Said another: “All the people I know who are part of their church youth groups ... it’s not the same. Everyone I know it’s, like, ‘I’m so jealous of the kind of community [you have]. I wish I was Jewish.’ And my temple friends and I will talk about retreats, about temple, about how much fun we have. And my secular friends are usually like ‘wow that sounds really fun. I kind of wish I was Jewish so I could go to your temple and have that much fun.’”

One student invited a Jewish friend from public school to a BKH youth group activity. The friend liked it so much she persuaded her parents to join the congregation. “She joined the temple because it was awesome.”

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**Religious Experience:** More impressive than even the best of the classes at Beit Knesset Hazon were the t’fillot, half-hour Mincha services that are held each Tuesday or Wednesday afternoon. The service is held in the main sanctuary and is led by the synagogue rabbi together with a teacher who happens to be an enthusiastic young musician. Together they instill a sense of kavanna (intentionality) with a very light touch.

Because the team’s visits came so early in the school year, it observed what the staff called a “practice t’filla,” in which the expectations for appropriate behavior were made explicit. At the edge of the bima was a large screen onto which were projected the words of every song and prayer used during the t’filla.

The educational leader guided students into the proper mood for prayer. For example, he began the service with a song he had written, that they had all sung before:

*Am I awake?  
Am I prepared?  
Are you listening to my prayer?*

He then said:

*I want you to pretend that you are really asking yourself these questions. It would be great if you really, really meant it, even without acting.*

He mouthed the words silently, so that the voices of the students filled the room. He encouraged them to cover their eyes during the Sh’m’a, and to lower their voices for the second line, and then led them in an English song which served as an introduction to the Sh’m’a:

*Open up our eyes  
Teach us how to live  
So we will know that you are One.*

Hearing some giggling, he said very softly:

*I was trying really hard to do my own prayer. But it was hard to concentrate with the giggling. We don’t usually do this again, but we’re going to do it again today, and I want you to hear your own prayer.*

When they sang the V’havta, he asked: “Do you think I have this prayer memorized?”

The students nodded “yes.”

*But if you noticed, when I say it I usually turn my back to you, and I look up at the screen. Even though I have it memorized, I really like to look up at the screen. Each time you pray, you should read the prayer as if it’s the first time you do it.*

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...it appeared that all were concentrating on the words. It was quite a sight – preadolescents, in a school setting, engaged in t’filla.

Later the same day, we had the opportunity to observe t’filla for the sixth and seventh graders. At an age where students can be quite cynical about praying, especially in a public setting, the level of participation and apparent kavanna were impressive. One never knows really what is in the heart of another, but all of the students had their eyes covered at the transition to Sh’m’a, and it appeared that all were concentrating on the words. It was quite a sight – preadolescents, in a school setting, engaged in t’filla.

**Aligning the school's parts:** *In the fall of 2005, the school hired a new director, an Israeli-born educator with a Ph.D. in teaching and curriculum. In retrospect, she notes, with a wry smile, "It was a good thing I did not know the disarray that the program was in." The curriculum was outdated, the teaching was mostly frontal and formal; not surprisingly, there were serious problems with classroom management." As one mother recalls:*

*When my now 3rd grader was in kindergarten, I was horrified. This is slightly overstating it, but the things that she brought home—the stupidest worksheets. They were so boring. ... But it has gotten better every year since then, as the teachers get more training.*

*The high school students we interviewed had similar observations:*

*When we were in elementary school and middle school it was kind of boring. We all hated it. But the religious education program got a major overhaul, and ... the Temple was starting to do all sorts of great new things and I was jealous. I wanted to be a part of that because all of a sudden I saw kids that were liking Sunday school.*

*I can totally see the change with the kids' attitude. Not everyone loves to come but I definitely don't see as much reluctance as I did when I was little. ... I hated Hebrew school. ... And kids are learning. In fact I'm TA-ing [serving as teaching assistant] for a grade they're learning the stuff that I never got to learn about then.*

*To achieve these changes, the new head increased the number of Fall orientation staff development hours from 16 to 20, and devoted all of this time to modeling and practicing new modes of teaching. She worked intensely with the teachers, and did not rebire those who were resistant to the new teaching modalities. Working with the senior educator and assistant rabbi, she began revising the curriculum. She instituted a requirement that teachers send her lesson plans three or four days ahead of time, and still spends considerable time emailing back and forth, refining the plans that need work.*

**Valuing students:** *One teacher at Beit Knesset Hazon, described a student in her 5th grade class who began the year with a terrible attitude. Having "decided that she hated Hebrew school, she was a black hole of despair. ... She sat through two hours of Hebrew school with her arms crossed and... a sulk on her face." By the third session, the teacher reported, "she giggled twice in class." "She has moved in the right direction, but I can't say that it's me. It's the special-needs staff who have given me great clues. The youth director took her and*

*gave her a great time at Rak Shabbat (a team-oriented Shabbat program) this past Friday. And we've been able to bring her to a place where she could open up and say, hey, this is fun."*

*At the opening session of the same school's retreat, one 8th grader seemed unable to sit still and pay attention. As he began to distract the boys sitting next to him, the youth director stepped in to calm him down. Later the director explained that this boy had ADHD and a number of other learning disabilities, and that he (the youth director) had been cultivating a relationship with him. Rather than excluding this boy from the program, he was determined to help him make it through the weekend, having participated appropriately, without causing undue interruptions. And that is, indeed, how it turned out.*

**Inspiring parents to serve as partners:** Here is how two parents reflect upon their growth as a result of adult education:

*The adult learning that a lot of us were engaged in put the pressure on the religious school, because suddenly we had an experience that was positive and phenomenal. ... We realized that what our kids were getting was so old-school, ... and that there was another way to go about this.*

As another graduate of a Federation-sponsored program notes:

*[It] gives you this really deep understanding of Torah and history, and then you see that your kids are coloring apples for Rosh Hashanah.*

Both parents became advocates for higher standards in their children's school.

## CHABAD HEBREW SCHOOL

Located on a strip mall on the West Coast, Chabad Hebrew School serves as the "anchor" of a Jewish Center run by an extended Chabad family. At the time it was studied, the school enrolled 118 students in grades 1-7 and also ran a small high school class. Students were expected to attend classes only once a week, generally on Sunday mornings, but the school staff also strongly encouraged participation in a broad array of other programs, Shabbat dinners and extracurricular activities offered by the center.

Aside from representing the fastest growing sector of the supplementary school field, the Chabad school is noteworthy for its deliberate effort to maximize every moment with students,



moving them rapidly from a morning prayer service to Aleph Champ Hebrew drilling to classes on values and practices, and to study of key Jewish texts. The school serves as a model of a one day a week program that strives to compress into short, well-designed classes a maximum of teaching and also positive Jewish experiences.

The Chabad school is also unusual in the way it merges an unmistakably mission-driven approach with an unabashed entrepreneurial edge. All of the school's full-time teachers serve as *sbluchim* and *sbluchos*, emissaries sent by the late Lubavitcher Rebbe and their outreach-oriented movement, in the hinterlands of American Jewish society. Their self-described mission is to create an outpost of Jewish life, a center to win Jews back to authentic Judaism, a goal, they believe, *no one else* other than Chabad can do properly. (Students in this program are drawn from homes that had once been affiliated with Conservative or Reform synagogues or that were unaffiliated.) At the same time, the school's educators continually experiment with new curricula, teaching approaches, subject matter, and extra-curricular activities for the express purpose of winning the hearts and minds of children, who in turn will lead their parents to engage with the Center. As long as innovations do not trespass in areas forbidden by their understanding of Jewish law, the schools educators feel free to experiment with new ways to deliver a Jewish education and attract students to participate in the life of the Center.

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**The Chabad school is also unusual in the way it merges an unmistakably mission-driven approach with an unabashed entrepreneurial edge.**

**Community:** *The open architectural design of the Chabad Hebrew School matches the tone set by the rabbi and his wife, the school director. Immediately upon entering the building, students and parents must pass the school director's desk, festooned with photographs of smiling member families at a Purim celebration, strategically placed just a few feet from the only doors leading into the building. There they are warmly greeted by the director, unfailingly with a personal message of welcome (each child is recognized by name), usually also with a gentle physical touch, a high five, a hug, a handshake. Students are never reprimanded for coming late or leaving early to attend a sports or family event that overlaps with school hours. Instead, the*

*school invites children to attend classes for an hour or two before they go off to another program, such as soccer. The overt message is one of informal welcome, and "I'm glad you came even for part of the time." Both at the beginning and the end of school hours, parents tend to congregate in the entryway, and also are greeted with warmth and smiles by the Chabad rabbi and his wife.*

*The school deliberately cultivates a mood of friendliness and encouragement, repeatedly rewarding children with words of praise and small trinkets. The school director greets arriving children with positive reinforcement: "So happy to see you." When children correctly answer questions, staff members make a point of figuratively patting them on the back. Teachers publicly commend students who remembered an assignment. Here is a small sampling of random remarks by teachers commending students: "Thank you so much; you're helping each other;" "I'm so proud of you;" "Aubrey did a mitzvah; he helped a friend. Hooray!" "What you said is good;" "Excellent. I'm very proud of you;" "couldn't have said it better myself." No one is more effusive in praising the children than the school director; but every teacher overtly offers praise and positive messages.*

**Combining formal and experiential education:** *The Chabad school immerses its 4th graders in a course on The Jewish Home. Over the school year, students move from room to room of a figurative house to explore the Jewish qualities of each setting. The school even has hired a carpenter to build a mock-up of several rooms so that students can physically make their way through the house. Clearly, the kitchen with its opportunities to teach about Jewish dietary laws is a rich environment, but the class also spends time learning about mezuzot that are affixed in each room, and about the proper blessing after using the toilet or the recitation of the Sh'ma at bedtime. The educator who teaches this class describes how she works for hours each year, re-thinking the class. "It's not something you can do automatically. What do you do in each room? . . . When I do the mezuzah, I made a whole bunch of doors, so when the kids do this, they learn how to affix. Get a tape measure and learn exactly how to measure it. You're the carpenter right now. You're good at math. Let's figure this out. Give the kids a feather: you're a scribe, see if you can write the Sh'ma. It's not so easy to be a Sofer. It's unique. We learn the laws about the mezuzah. It's not so simple."*

**Valuing the school and students:** *The Chabad rabbi relates that he once taught a class full of students with Asperger Syndrome and ADHD. Every night he went home with a headache because the students wouldn't stop talking. His wife suggested that he stop to listen to the children. One day he paused to listen to their conversation*

*and discovered they were talking about the lesson. He realized that these children learn differently, but that they were learning because the chatting and talk going on during the lessons was about the lessons themselves. By his own reckoning, that was how the rabbi learned to teach differently for these children, using the din of the class as one of his teaching tools. And he stopped getting headaches from that class.*

**Aligning the school:** *At the Chabad school, the principal reviews curricular goals with each teacher and observes classes whenever the school is in session. She is not bashful about calling attention to the fact that she has fired teachers because they could not rise to her expectations and properly achieve the objectives the school had set for itself.*

**The role of parents:** *Observers of the Chabad Hebrew School heard numerous parents recount how trying it had been when their children had attended other supplementary schools and every Sunday morning they had to drag their children to school. By contrast, this school had won the children over; they no longer resisted coming to the religious school. Not surprisingly, the parents were deeply appreciative. Parents also described how they were then drawn into the Chabad Center by their children, whose enthusiasm for programs was infectious and a welcome change from their previous unhappiness at other schools.*

## KEHILLA

Kehilla is perhaps unique, in that it is a community-based independent Jewish supplementary school. Located on the East Coast, it has two sites, each with approximately 100 students, each separately incorporated, though they share a common curriculum. (The school offers lower and high school level classes.) Kehilla is different from other supplementary schools, in that it combines after-school child-care and Jewish education. Children attend at least twice a week, though some come for as many as four days, from 2:00 to 5:45 pm. Roughly half of this time is spent on informal activities, such as playing, singing, and having snack; the school sees this unstructured time as equal in importance to the time allotted to more formal instruction. This informal time, during which teachers are fully present, enables students to form close relationships with one another and with the teachers, meeting one of the school's primary goals—the creation of a strong community. In keeping with this goal, all of Kehilla's teachers work at least 25 hours a week, and are supervised and mentored much more closely than in most supplementary schools. Teachers are paid not only for their presence at the formal

and informal portion of the day, but also for learning the material at their own level and writing lesson plans.

Kehilla's overall atmosphere is both serious and playful—serious, in that the material is taught at a high intellectual level; playful, in that the activities are experiential and engaging. A key value in the schools is kavod (respect), and many activities are geared towards assuring that everyone treats both the people and the subjects with deep respect. There are two formal teaching blocs, one devoted to Yahadut (Judaica), the other to Ivrit (Hebrew). Kehilla's approach is unusual in that it focuses primarily on Modern Hebrew, utilizing what language educators call a “proficiency approach.” A carefully articulated curriculum, developed together with an expert in Hebrew language instruction, delineates the skills to be attained in reading, writing, speaking, and listening, at seven different levels. For this portion of the day, students are divided into very small groups, according to proficiency, rather than age. While incidental Hebrew is used throughout the day, in the period devoted to formal Hebrew instruction 85% of the teachers' talk is in Hebrew, with an intentionally limited vocabulary. This creates a cloistered Hebrew environment, limited to a small number of subjects, so that the students can feel successful. This method is not easy for teachers. American-born teachers find it difficult to speak in Hebrew most of the time; Israeli-born teachers find it difficult to pare their native language down to a limited number of patterns. But all of the teachers understand the rationale for teaching this way, and are committed to trying. Students are held accountable for their learning. Several times a year the teacher sends home an “assessment rubric,” highlighting the degree of proficiency the student has achieved in each of the goals for that level. Those who do not master the basic goals and objectives of a level repeat that level the following year.

**Community:** Kavod is central to the type of community Kehilla seeks to foster and the values it imparts, a concern announced on its website:

*We emphasize community building through the practice of kavod, respect, in all aspects of our lives—respect for oneself, for others, and for the environment and space that we share and in which we live and learn. The children are recognized and acknowledged by their teachers and their peers for acts of kavod. Kavod is a cornerstone at Kehilla from which all the curriculum is built.*

The school's director elaborates on this value, emphasizing the distinctiveness the school cultivates. "To think of Kehilla as only a Hebrew school/after-school misses the essence of what makes [us special]. Though Hebrew school and after-school are still at the core of what Kehilla does, since its beginning, Kehilla has become a community." As one teacher puts it: Kehilla's assumption is that "serious Jewish learning always happens in the community, so by carefully creating community we create a viable environment for learning."

Each class devotes time at the beginning of the school year to create a class brit, covenant. One teacher explained what her class did: "The first week we talked about the 3 different kinds of kavod (respect): kavod le'atzmi (respect for oneself), kavod le'aherim (respect for others), and kavod la-sviva (respect for the environment). We took these categories and tried to decide what was important to the students. We did this in various ways. For example, we had everyone write down on a sheet some of the rules and boundaries. We also used a text from the Rambam as a springboard. It took a while to figure exactly how to phrase [our brit], to see that it was rooted in a text."

It is not often that a school can tangibly measure its impact on the behavior of its students, but in the case of Kehilla, the following story appeared in the local newspaper:

*During lunchtime at a local public school, a child was rebuffed by his classmates, who tauntingly said, "you can't sit here; your parents are gay." Upon hearing this, another child, who attends Kehilla, invited this child to sit with him. When asked why he did this, the child replied, "I go to Kehilla, and kavod is what we do there."*

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...When asked why he did this, the child replied, "I go to Kehilla, and kavod is what we do there."

**Jewish experiential learning:** The "teaching day" at Kehilla begins when the children arrive. A teacher describes the school's approach to students: "Teaching here isn't just teaching Yehדות [Judaism], just teaching Ivrit [Hebrew]. We talk about this all the time that teaching begins from the moment the kids get off the bus or the moment they are dropped off from their car pool. From the moment you are asking them *ma nishma* (how are things going?),

*your teaching has begun."* A colleague adds: "These are all things that I didn't have in my prior religious school teaching experience: Really taking the time to talk about kids, what their needs are, who their friends are, who is more sociable, who needs a different kind of help. We try to really focus on not just the outstanding and most troublesome kids but also the kids who could, in other systems, kind of fall through the cracks." At this school, a teacher was having difficulty with a student and was assigned to watch that student during breaks and free time, so she could understand him better.

**Setting high standards:** Despite the fact that students at Kehilla are relatively young, the school believes in stretching them to their fullest potential. Here is how a teacher explains the school's goals: "In order to accommodate the developmental level of your students, it doesn't mean making a complex thing simple. It makes a complex thing apprehensible. But if you do that by stripping out all of the sophistication, all of the complexity, the kids will be left feeling that this is a simple thing that they have mastered and there's nothing else there. ... That's one of the most difficult tightropes that we walk here, and sometimes we over reach."

Student accountability can be addressed in a number of ways. At Kehilla, teachers send home an "assessment rubric," highlighting the degree of proficiency the student has achieved in each of the goals for that level. Those children who do not master the basic goals and objectives of their grade repeat that level the following year; one student spent three years at the same level. The staff speaks of this in matter-of-fact terms. Rather than placing the blame on either the child or themselves as teachers, they acknowledge that some have a harder time with languages, and some have a learning style that doesn't fully mesh with the Kehilla program. Repeating a level is often harder for the parents, who see it as failure, than for their children, who seem to understand that there is a range of abilities in language learning. In the words of a ten-year-old girl: "We have different levels, so if you're better in reading, you work on speaking. If better on speaking, work on reading. We work on our weaknesses and get them stronger."

**Valuing the Students:** At Tichon, the high school of Kehilla, students spoke about their community as a haven. While their secular schooling was a source of pressure to perform, their Jewish schooling offered a respite from the stresses. One high school student said,

*Kehilla helped to get you through middle school. We were all so self-conscious and insecure.... Kehilla always supported you through those days....*



*At [my public] school a lot of the time, it's a place where teachers are in authority and have a lot more power over the students.... And the teachers take your respect without giving it. But here it's more mutual respect.... Kehilla is a diverse community. People are actually truly respected here for their differences.... They don't want us to memorize things. They want us to learn things. ... There is always an undertone of happiness. It's really a happy place.*

**Alignment:** *Kehilla is fully aware of the limitations of its teachers, and invests a great deal in supervising and supporting them.*

*The school year begins with an eight-day orientation whose purpose is to create a community, and to work on some of the challenges of teaching at Kehilla. During these eight days, members of the tsevet (staff) teach together, bond with one another, and begin to create their own brit (covenant), articulating their responsibilities to one another. They also learn about Kehilla's unique approach to Ivrit and Yabadut, work on the curriculum, and discuss how to facilitate classroom activities with kavod. Once the school is in session, teachers can expect to have weekly meetings of the tsevet, regular supervisory meetings focusing on teaching skills, as well as planning meetings regarding Ivrit and Yabadut.*

**Parent Involvement:** The reciprocal influence of the school on children and adults sometimes takes unexpected and powerful forms. One of the teachers at Kehilla recounted the following story:

*I was teaching a unit around Yom Kippur on teshuva (repentance). It was the beginning of the year, so the lesson had a dual purpose: talking about how we as a community should behave to one another, and also what Yom Kippur means. I put a gigantic target on the wall, and talked about chet (sin, literally missing the mark) and teshuva, returning, and re-aiming. I had the kids sit in a long column leading up to the target. And I had made up scenarios of instances in which we miss the mark, like a missed arrow, and the kids each got a card that corresponded to a chet [and discussed how they could do teshuva for that action]. At the end of the day, I just happened to be in the room, cleaning up. One of the kids, a 5th grader, brought his mother in to show her the target. He said: "Mom, I need to show you what we talked about today." Apparently, he and his mother had been having a lot of tension between them. He saw the exercise we had done in class as a way they could resolve it. There, in front of the target, for 15 minutes, they had a personal conversation using the language of the lesson. They walked out glowing.*

*On another occasion, Ben, a parent at Kehilla, reflected on what his older daughter, now in Tichon, learned, and how this has pushed him to learn more too:*

*I think the biggest success has been cultural and spiritual. ... My daughter loves prayer. She leads t'filla in the evening, a Maariv (evening) service for the kids in Tichon. She's very comfortable in synagogue with the ritual part of it. But she's very thoughtful and well educated in the other dimensions, too. She has gotten a much better Jewish education than I did. In fact I'm now inspired: I'm going to enroll in [a city-wide adult education] program; my kids have left me in the dust from a knowledge standpoint. They can discuss things I don't know what they're talking about.*

## RECONSTRUCTIONIST SYNAGOGUE

Reconstructionist Synagogue, located in an East Coast suburb, offers a progressive educational program, based on a central tenet of its movement's ideology: the best of Jewish and of democratic American life are reconcilable. Belonging comes before belief at this synagogue. The congregation holds its membership to several hundred families—small enough for the staff to recognize, care about, and work with the personalities and abilities of each student and family. But it is large enough to offer choice in how members participate. Currently, the school enrolls 170 children from K-7 and another 25 in high school. It offers a mix of programs for children and their families.

The congregation tries to strike a balance between defining a clear direction for education and providing flexibility and choice for families. The school is particularly noteworthy for offering a range of choices. A more traditional classroom model is one choice. The school, for example, offers a track in which the Reform movement's Chai curriculum and Hebrew curriculum (Mitkadem) are taught. But then there are options too for family and intergenerational experiences. Recognizing that parents seek the right fit for each child and also for the family, the school accommodates different needs by offering a variety of tracks.

The school and synagogue live in a state of experimentation. The school succeeds because seasoned staff members know how to use its limited resources to balance its short- and long-term goals. Front and center: striving to achieve a new model for intergenerational education—the "family education" model popular during the past few decades will no longer do.

Rejecting the notion that the child's education is a lever for changing parental behavior, it engages parents and children in meaningful spiritual and educational experiences outside a limited number of school hours. Shabbat programs are essential to attaining this goal; Reconstructionist Synagogue does not offer a Sunday school program.

**Community:** *Beyond the classroom and the school experiences, the synagogue leadership is committed to fostering positive experiences for children with adults in the community. They want children in the religious school to have a Jewish "neighborhood" experience that no longer exists in the places where children actually live. To this end the congregation launched a new initiative that expands the circle of people who know and care about children by dividing the congregation into ten equal-sized groups. The Kehilla program, which began in the past year, has congregants of mixed ages who live in diverse areas meet six times during the year for Shabbat celebration, Tikkun Olam activity or holiday celebration. "We're trying to replicate the serendipity of relationships that happened when we were a congregation of a hundred families," says the senior rabbi. "This is not about affinity grouping. There already are plenty of people of like mind and interest gathering. We believe being in relationship with people across generations is important." So far they report between thirty and forty percent participation in most of the Kehillot.*

**Experiential Learning:** *Education at the Reconstructionist congregation is deliberately designed to extend beyond the classroom. Formal classes, according to the congregational rabbi, are not enough to influence a child's learning or belonging to Judaism. Therefore while the educational leaders do pay attention to improving the classroom experience, they pay equal if not more attention to creating concentric circles of influence on the child in the classroom, the hallway, the sanctuary and the larger community. All experiences are characterized by caring and warmth and can easily be observed when a child enters the building.*

*The high school classes of the Reconstructionist school gather all the female students for a monthly Rosh Chodesh gathering. One of the rabbis of the congregation leads the program, adapting material produced by a national project. At the end of each Rosh Chodesh gathering two girls pair up and make a scrap book page based on what was discussed. One excerpt from the scrap book reads:*

*Rosh Chodesh it's more than just the head of the month.  
It's a sisterhood, a bond, we all share, a place and time to be you.*

*It's the friends that I make, the advice that I give and get  
and a time just to be. It's a place where you feel safe and at  
home where everyone is honest and true, a place that teaches,  
a place where you learn, but most importantly a place where  
you laugh.*

By fostering a supportive atmosphere of acceptance and respect, some Jewish high schools intentionally set themselves apart from the often large and impersonal public schools their students attend all week. Students associate their Jewish schooling and community with a distinctive set of values. Some of the schools intentionally articulate how they are different from other forms of schooling and often explicitly deliver a message that is counter-cultural: To be in a Jewish place is to behave differently. Judging from the statements of students quoted above, it is a message they appreciate, and a difference they find meaningful.

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**Challenging Students to Think Critically:** *Many lessons observed at the Reconstructionist school encouraged critical thinking. Questions like "What do you think?" or "What would you do?" were heard repeatedly. One class of fifth graders participated in a multi-media session. The teacher explained that her purpose was just to have the students question and see things that may not be readily apparent. "I want them to think, not just know," said the teacher who was a parent in the congregation and a trained museum educator. She began by asking "What do you know about Abraham?" The students developed a list of facts that included: "He tried to kill his son," and "He spoke to angels." Another child noted, "He was the first Jew." "Why wasn't the first Jew a girl?" asked a girl in the class. Whereas the teacher did not have an answer for the student, she praised her for the question. During the class the teacher put on a screen four different paintings, each depicting Abraham at different moments described in the Bible. "What do you see? What do you think is happening? What do you think he is feeling? What would you have done at this time? Who agrees or disagrees with what he*

is doing?” As much as the teacher was conducting a lesson about the story of Abraham, she was also teaching Jewish discernment—how to analyze and evaluate Jewish teachings. This lesson was emblematic of many others offered in the congregation that seem to have at their core a way of engaging in critical thinking more than the mere accumulation of facts. The vibrant and even frightening picture of Abraham raising a knife to his son (the teacher cleared it with the rabbi before showing it) portrayed a story that the students already knew. The focus of the learning though was to think about it critically in order to foster a personal and meaningful connection to the content covered.

**Alignment:** *The congregation has embarked on designing a new curriculum to support its goals. Toward this end, the director of education engages teachers in regular study about how to teach most effectively. Teachers meet twice a month to develop their skills in support of the congregation’s stated learning outcomes. Regular teacher learning has only been in place for a short while, and understandably shows mixed results. However, at their best, teachers are developing sophisticated material to engage students through sophisticated questions, linking the lives of their students to the larger narrative of the Jewish people.*

**Family:** *After an hour in their own classes one Shabbat morning at the Reconstructionist Synagogue, the children join their parents at 10:00 am for shared prayer time. The Cantor’s rhythmic banging of a drum is the knell that services are beginning. Children sit close to their parents, some land right on their laps. “Close your eyes,” instructs the Cantor who also is a young parent who brings his children to participate, “We’re making the rain forest rush. Snap your fingers. Clap. Now say shhh.” Children and adults follow directions. “That’s the sound of the wind. We’re hearing the wind inside of each of us,” teaches the Cantor. Parents and children sing “Elobai nesabama shenatata bi t’horah hi. My God the soul you place in me is pure.” Prayer is soul work indicate the professionals. Using Siddur Kol HaNoar by Rabbi Sandy Eisenberg Sasso and Rabbi Jeffrey Schein, the professionals seem to strike, as one parent said, “just the right balance between traditional prayers—they are not watered down— and ways to feel connected.” Body movement accompanies morning blessings, meditative breathing goes with Shm’a, and sharing of personal stories are a constant as the professionals convey the ABC’s of a Jewish prayer experience to adults and children alike. “I wish my prayer experience was like that when I was a kid,” says one parent; “on the other hand, maybe no one was into drum banging and slow breathing in those days.”*

*Everyone’s contribution is validated with a staff chorus, “That’s a good question.” Even unexpected or almost silly answers are acknowledged. The rabbi explains the Amida is a prayer that says we are able to stand where we are today because of the ancestors who came before us. She asks, “Who are the ancestors who you think about before you say the Amida?” “George Washington,” says one child, “Harry Houdini,” says another. There are a few giggles but there is no chance giggles will get out of control because parents enter the conversation and model thoughtful answers. “I think of my relatives lost in the Holocaust.” “This is the 5th anniversary of my father’s death. I’m thinking about him,” says another parent. The pamphlet that describes the B’yachad program says, “Participants are encouraged to relate their own experiences to the weekly Torah portion in an ongoing effort to make the text relevant to our modern world.”*

## TIKVAH SYNAGOGUE

Small congregational schools are often depicted in terms of what they lack: they don’t have enough students, teachers, materials and program options. Tikvah Synagogue, a 160-member unit Conservative congregation situated in a small Midwestern city with 850 Jewish families (there are two other congregations in the town), challenges this deficit-based perspective. Its 53 students study and use sophisticated liturgical skills as well as primary Jewish texts (Torah, Midrash and Mishna). Almost all of them remain actively engaged in Jewish learning and living throughout their high school years.

Recognizing that with its limited resources it can not do everything, Tikvah Synagogue focuses its energy on Shabbat, offering a program focused on liturgy, Torah and Jewish values for children enrolled in pre-k through grade 6. Adolescents come voluntarily to assume roles in the adult services, assist in the school and to be together. Every Shabbat a luncheon follows services, attracting adults who might otherwise just drop their children off to stay. It is not uncommon in this small congregation to find over one hundred people celebrating Shabbat together at Saturday religious services and the luncheon.

In addition to Shabbat school, all elementary students attend a twice-weekly Hebrew school; 7th-12th grade classes convene on Sunday evening. This includes time for the students and teachers to eat, hang out, and participate in the congregation’s *minyan* before their coursework. Congregant teachers adapt the curriculum according to their own intellectual strengths and Jewish interests.



The rabbi and his wife, a talented educator in her own right, are driving forces in the congregation's educational efforts. He is an ever-present leader and teacher who works collaboratively with a cadre of equally dedicated and creative volunteer leaders to envision, plan and implement programs. This sense of community —of extended family—holds the system together. Tikvah is a place where every person, from the child who returns from a Jewish summer camp and teaches the congregants Israeli dances to the members who prepare the weekly meals—is counted on to contribute ideas, talents, time and energy. The Tikvah model is deceptively simple: the educational program intentionally builds a living and learning Jewish community and congregants are asked to help to build and refine the educational program. The result is a population of students with unusually strong synagogue skills and Jewish commitments who expect to play an active role in the synagogue's liturgical and educational efforts. More broadly, the engagement of families in Jewish living and learning enhance each other.

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**Community:** *Tikvah Synagogue School builds its community by engaging members and children actively in prayer. A parent clarified its appeal: "On a week-to-week basis, it really feels like a community. Just on a regular, on-going basis the people really want to be [there], not just to drop the kids off for Sunday school. It's really being there, and the parents being partners.*

*....Do you know what's so great? Every time there is a bar or bat mitzvah at Tikvah, the child who's being bar mitzvahed, will lead big chunks of the service for weeks and weeks before that, and then the very next week, they're out there doing the musaf service or whatever.*

*.... So the synagogue belongs to everybody. It's not just a performance by the rabbi, which definitely we have seen elsewhere. I love the idea*

*of other people getting up [to lead the service]. ...The service is not about the rabbi leading a service; it's about him facilitating the service."*

**Jewish learning and experiences:** In some class and informal settings it is also possible to discern how children are challenged to internalize Jewish values, engage in critical thinking and clarify to themselves the meaning of Jewishness to them personally. This type of learning goes beyond the cognitive, but is critical for the students' Jewish growth.

*At Tikvah, the school meets on Shabbat and holidays, as well as during the week. A teacher reflected on the difference between teaching on weekdays as compared to Shabbat and holidays: "I have taught both ways. It's a little harder to do it on holy days but then again I think the thing that I'm getting to appreciate ...is ...that you don't have all those pencils and papers and crayons and glitter and glue and stuff. ...When on Shabbat morning, you can't do those things, ...you can stop the kids and try to get them to talk about something. My focus has always been to have the kids offer an opinion. ...I want them to actually think about [the text] and you can't have them draw a picture about it.... What does this mean? What is the story supposed to be telling us? For me, to get kids ...to talk about what they think and see how they really actually incorporate it into their thinking is how I've always tried to work with the kids."*

*Tikvah's rabbi is an actively engaged teacher in the school who serves as a powerful model for high level study. In one class, the rabbi asks the boys to start to read the first text, a Hebrew selection from Bialik and Ravinsky's classic compilation of rabbinic texts translated into modern Hebrew called Sefer HaAgadah or The Book of Legends. The section deals with naming animals. Given the task, the angels fail, so God has Adam do it. The rabbi distributes a vocabulary sheet to help with new words. Each boy accurately decodes even difficult words and together they translate the phrases of the text. It is not done in a word-for-word sequence. Instead the rabbi concentrates on key words by helping the boys find the shresh, the three-letter root that gives a clue to its meaning, and to then figure out how the different prefix and suffix components affect the meaning. He then focuses on the meaning and asks:*

*Why don't the angels get it? Why can't they come up with names?  
What kind of intelligence does Adam have that the angels don't?  
What are the sages [who wrote the midrash] saying about humans?*

*The rabbi wants to make sure students realize that Judaism has something important to say about life's big questions; he focuses on the big ideas.*

*Giving students the opportunity to use their newly learned skills is crucial if they are to retain those skills. A teen at Tikvah synagogue reports on her experience: "After I learned trope ... I've used it. I read Torah, I'd say, most years like every few weeks. I do it a lot and it's something I don't think I could get in a big community because I have a lot of cousins who are at huge ... temples, and they memorize their Torah portions for their bat mitzvah from a tape but they never learned the trope. So it's not that beneficial for them because they don't use it now. Whereas, for us because we're in this small community, we have to be there to help them. We've learned these things that we couldn't even get in a big community."*

**Parents:** Few would doubt that the partnership of schools with parents is critical in the education of children. Some schools go further and involve parents as teachers. This has been one of the great successes of Tikvah Synagogue School, which relies upon lay teachers to staff its classes, particularly in its Shabbat program. *A number of "substitute" teachers are active members who have taught previously in other semesters and fill in when the regular teachers are out of town. As active members these adults have come to know the children, since they see them regularly on Shabbat. One such substitute, for example, brought in a "coffee table" book on archaeology in the ancient Near East. Although the connection to the week's Torah portion was a bit of a stretch, she ably engaged a group of elementary school-aged children in thinking about what life might have been like for the patriarchs and matriarchs.*

## WESTERN HEBREW HIGH SCHOOL

Western Hebrew High School is an 8th-12th grade inter-denominational educational program in a large western city. A secondary campus of the school exists in an adjacent smaller city.

Both campuses are run under the auspices of the local central agency of Jewish education. Each independent program operates two and a half hours a week on a weekday evening. The enrollment for the 2006-07 school year was approximately 275 at the larger campus, with approximately 100 at the smaller campus. The majority of students are affiliated with one of the large Conservative or Reform synagogues in the city. The school offers a wide range of courses to appeal to its teenage students, many of which fuse Jewish content with American popular culture. The central programmatic piece of the school is the popular six-week

Israel and Poland summer trip between 11th and 12th grade of which approximately three quarters of the eligible students participate.

The school resembles many other community supplementary high schools found across the country. Among its distinctive features is its partnership and close coordination with local synagogues. Both campuses of the school have arrangements with local synagogues whose eighth to tenth grade confirmation programs are housed within the Western program. This strong relationship with local synagogues offers a number of benefits to the school and the community at large. Synagogues, some of which have been struggling to support a confirmation program within their own institution, have a wider infrastructure to house and sustain their programs, which permits them to deliver their own specific denominational "brand" of Judaism to their congregants. Partnerships with local synagogues also easily facilitate the use of congregational rabbis, some of whom have extensive teaching backgrounds, as educational leaders in the school. Through this close partnership, the school also has a built-in recruitment stream.

The school's annual Israel trip has become tightly embedded in the fabric of the Jewish community and is a source of much local pride. The students enroll in the school in great anticipation of the six-week trip and anecdotal evidence suggests they come back more mature, more personally engaged Jews, and much more connected to Israel. The school facilitates a variety of post-Israel programming for the entire community. This model of a supplementary school as community magnet, a gathering place for the various Jewish youth of a city, is a system that works well.

The school has also worked hard to sustain professional development and curricular redesign. By participating in serious teaching workshops and privately commissioning educational consultants, the school has gone far to sharpen the curriculum and align the school more closely with its mission to "[empower its students] to be more informed Jews and solidify their Jewish identity." Toward that end, the curriculum offers a range of electives under the following five rubrics: Jewish History and Philosophy, Israel, Texts, Arts and Culture and Jewish Living.

**Valuing Students:** High School programs particularly benefit from emphasizing community building and attention to the needs of the individual student. At the Western Hebrew High School, one of the more charismatic teachers explains his approach:

*With a teenager you've got to connect first. It's always true. For me that's what makes a good teacher. You've got to connect with your audience no matter what. But with a teenager I believe much more in the mentorship style than any other style when it comes to teaching. I spend the majority of my time letting them know that I care about them and that's why I'm teaching them. Not because I have a list of things that I need to impart and then smack them until they learn it, but that I care about you. And I think these things are really going to make a huge difference in your life and you're going to feel better about yourself if you learn it. And look, here's how it has helped me. This is all stuff that I learned. It's very much a mentorship model.*

**Encouraging Critical Thinking:** *One of his colleagues at Western Hebrew High School teaches a senior seminar based on readings from Rabbi Lawrence Kushner's *Kabalistic River of Light*. The class explored complex Jewish perspectives on consciousness, *tehiyat hameytim* (resurrection of the dead) and the "unity of souls." Students were intellectually engaged, posing thoughtful questions and comments. And the teacher is clearly well-read on the subject and is able to promote critical thinking among her students. After class we had a chance to talk to this teacher about her passion for teaching.*

*My objective is to get them to really begin the road to figure out who they are and where Judaism is going to fit in their life. ...You're born Jewish whether you like it or not, you're sort of in this. So why don't you investigate? ...Something is there, some connection. Why don't you spend the rest of your life, a piece of it, finding that out?*

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## ENABLING FACTORS

Good schools put in place a set of building blocks to ensure their effectiveness. These include:

### 1. A Clear Vision or Set of Goals

Ideally, such a vision includes both an image of its ideal graduate and a plan for educating and forming such a student. In the current educational vocabulary, this means in the first instance an "existential vision"—"a conception of the kind of person and community that the process of education should strive to realize." In addition, this vision must be sufficiently clear to provide guidance to stakeholders in the school. In short, it must include "a process of education... organized to realize the ideals identified in the vision with the particular populations that are to be educated, given cultural, economic, and technological realities."<sup>9</sup> In truth, only a few of the schools we observed have such a fully developed vision. Instead, many have a strong sense of the atmosphere they seek to foster and some learning goals. They are clear about the ambience they seek to create and to some extent what they do not want to stress. It is far harder to pin them down on what they would like their students to learn and experience by the time they graduate.

Here are two explicit articulations of school goals:

The **Western Hebrew High School** has worked to align its curricular design with its mission. The process started when a number of educators at the school participated in a three-year training workshop for supplementary school teachers conducted by local Jewish educational consultants. Using "backwards design," the school first defined desired results for classes and then developed a plan to achieve these results.

*The first step was to help the school articulate a coherent vision and set of goals. The school struggled to answer: "What do we want the student [to know]? ...How can we point to a student who went to [Western Hebrew High] and point to a student who didn't and know the difference?"*

<sup>9</sup> Daniel Pekarsky, "Vision-Guided Jewish Education," in Roberta Louis Goodman, Paul A. Flexner, and Linda Dale Bloomberg, eds., *What We Now Know About Jewish Education: Perspectives on Research and Practice*. Torah Aura Productions, 2008, p. 27.

*The consultants used by the school describe their visioning process as follows:*

*[We] put together what's called the World Café;<sup>10</sup> we've used it a number of times. A room is set up with people sitting down with the checker board table cloths and the candle in the middle and we had a menu [with guiding questions]. And the purpose of this was to go from "Do schools need goals?" to walking away saying "Yes, [Western] Hebrew High needs goals."*

*This visioning process helped the school to transform itself from a program mainly revolving around an eleventh-grade Israel trip accompanied by a "light," loosely-based curriculum to a more intentional curriculum closely aligned with the school vision. The curriculum was redesigned around five key rubrics of concentration (noted above) and, similar to a college system, students were asked to choose an area of specialization or "major" while also fulfilling the minimum requirements within the other core areas of concentration. The school's handbook promises students that over the next four years you will "travel through five areas of study as you uncover things you never knew about your Jewish heritage." Employing the common parlance in the field, the handbook explains that these five areas of instruction encapsulate the school's mission or "enduring understanding" that it is providing students the "opportunity to grow in understanding, appreciation and application of Jewish knowledge, practice and values, empowering them to be more informed Jews and solidifying their Jewish identity."*

Student assessment at **Kehilla** consists of very elaborate rubrics that are based on the goals for Hebrew. For example, the following are some of the goals for Ivrit in the fourth grade:

#### Reading

- *Learners will be able to decode most words in script and print.*
- *Learners will be able to read a string of 6-8 sentences that include nouns and present tense singular and plural verbs, and answer content-related questions.*

#### Writing

- *Learners will be able to spell all target material with correct or inventive spelling.*
- *Learners will be able to answer patterned questions with simple sentences.*
- *Learners will be able to create a string of 6 sentences.*

There are comparable goals for speaking and listening.

For each goal, there are three levels of proficiency. Thus, for example, three levels of proficiency are identified for the last goal listed above:

- *The learner can create a string of 6 sentences independently relying on memory and visual cues. The sentences are fluid and nuanced, displaying a firm knowledge of verb forms, and following a logical narrative.*
- *The learner can create a string of 4-6 sentences relying on memory, visual cues, and occasional verbal ones. The sentences are comprehensible, but may be inaccurate in terms of grammar and structure. Less ambitious sentences with limited verb usage are rendered accurately.*
- *The learner can create a string of 4 sentences, but operates slowly, and will struggle to maintain coherence beyond this number. Sentences are usually comprehensible, but display a lack of creativity and verb usage, often requiring further analysis. The relation of one sentence to the next may be unclear.*

Preparing reports on student progress for parents, each teacher selects the level of proficiency deemed most appropriate, adding a narrative assessment as well. The entire document, including goals and rubrics for reading, writing, speaking, and listening, runs two and a half single-spaced pages.

Kehilla, in short, is very clear about its proficiency goals. By contrast, the school director adamantly rejects bar/bat mitzvah preparation as a school goal: "I'm much more interested in what does it mean to be 13 and make Jewish choices, and have a Jewish vocabulary, and know your history and what that means to you now, and feel like a speaker of the language. That's who I want 13-year-olds to be." Kehilla serves as a model of how a supplementary school can devise clear learning goals and stay focused on those goals, despite pressures to waver.

Most other schools in our sample defined their goals in more experiential terms. This is how **Beit Knesset Hazon**, the large Reform temple, characterizes its goals:

*We know that each person has a story; each person is on a journey. We assist and enrich the lives of our members and our congregation by providing a wide range of learning opportunities, and multiple*

<sup>10</sup> For information on this technique, see <http://www.theworldcafe.com/>



gateways, enabling individuals to make choices that are the best next steps for them personally and at the same time help them connect with our community. Jewish learning is a lifelong endeavor and we seek to engage all learners from preschool through adult, from novice to expert.

*We know that there are many ways to learn and that real learning happens best when it is connected with experience. Consequently our learning programs integrate formal and informal learning, joining academic and experiential approaches. This is evidenced in our youth programs, to highlight one example, by a curriculum that teaches students about the Jewish imperative to engage in tikkun olam (repair of the world) and engages these students in community service work. ... We consider learning to be integral to everything we do. When members of our community come together, they are building relationships and they are learning. Our goal is to make those interactions meaningful and relevant.*

Even though her school pioneered a program for building Hebrew decoding skills and innovative approaches to teasing out Jewish values from practices and texts, the director of the **Chabad school** primarily defines her goals in affective terms:

*Our job is to ignite their souls, teach the Torah as relevant and sophisticated .... It's not my job to do the whole job. We are here to inspire them. God takes care of the rest. It's not my job to finish it. I have them a few hours a week, [and try to] make every minute as rich as possible.*

When it comes to clarifying learning goals, then, these six schools array themselves on a spectrum. Most tend to limit their aspirations to exposing students to good Jewish experiences and fostering a positive Jewish outlook among their children. Of course, they also provide content, but they have not fashioned far-reaching vision-statements or even more formal goals. Only a few try to develop learning goals, let alone align their curriculum and classes with those goals.

## 2. A Culture of Self-Reflection and Collaborative Leadership

Stronger schools strive to create a culture of self-reflection aimed at recalibrating their programs based on a critical examination of what is working and what is not—i.e., along with self-reflection comes a commitment to experiment. In order for such re-thinking to take hold, it is necessary to forge collaborative leadership, harnessing the talents of a

variety of players in a common effort. Good schools tend not to rely too heavily on any single individual. Contrary to conventional wisdom, the synagogue rabbi does not have to be a central figure for a school to work well. As to school directors, we found that those directors who concentrated all decision making in their own hands, tended to be overwhelmed by the immensity of the task and harmed the school, even as they and everyone else imagined that they were single-handedly carrying the school on their shoulders.

*The **Chabad Hebrew School** is constantly assessing its programs and fine tuning, if not innovating entirely new programs. The Chabad rabbi claims his eleven-year-old school renews and revises its programs constantly. The rabbi and his wife, the school director, engage not only in short-term planning but also have developed a ten-year plan for the school's and the Center's growth. (The school and the center are intertwined.) Teachers meet regularly to assess the children's learning and their own teaching; they frequently make changes in order get things right. While they do not answer to a school board, they are always listening for feedback from students and parents about what is working and what is not.*

**Kehilla**, the non-denominational school, engages actively in studying its own teaching, relying on individual reflection and group assessment. The school director notes:

*When teachers accept a job here they know that I will be in and out of their classroom all the time. They're going to be observed; they're going to be talking about their teaching, They're going to be reflecting on their teaching. This is going to be a lot of work. They are going to be very exposed. So for the people who choose to work at Kehilla and whom we hire that has become an attraction of working at Kehilla, which doesn't mean that it's not scary and not vulnerable, but that is an attraction.*

*Educators at **Beit Knesset Hazon**, the large Reform congregation, also regard their program as a continual work-in-progress. This is "where we are at this moment," states the school director. "It's iterative—it's going to continue to move. ... One of our best practices is that we we're not satisfied ever with exactly how it is. We haven't landed, and I don't think we ever will."*

Contrary to what some have argued *it does not necessarily take a charismatic rabbi to revitalize a synagogue*. Beit Knesset Hazon's success is due to the initiative of lay leaders, who, faced with the dissonance between the ideal and the real, worked behind the scenes to articulate a vision, and recruited a rabbi to help



them enact that vision. One of the rabbi's first steps was to hire two creative, capable educators, with whom he worked closely to develop new ideas and approaches.

*The congregational educator began by convening a task force to help her conceptualize the new directions education would take; to this day she continues to work with lay leaders and, of course, with the senior members of her staff.*

*With the help of an outside evaluation expert, Beit Knesset Hazon developed a collaborative evaluation program. This outside consultant met with the staff two or three times to clarify the goals of the program, and to consider the kind of data that would be needed to determine whether the goals have been met. Then the staff worked out to how to collect necessary data: some of the methods they used are an online survey, interviews, and an analysis of student journals. Based on these data, they wrote a preliminary report, which was shared with the entire staff at a group meeting. The willingness of the educators to learn from feedback is crucial. "I really dislike it," observes the outside evaluator, "when I give feedback, and everybody listens, and you just know nothing is going to be different." In contrast, she finds it rewarding to work at Beit Knesset Hazon:*

*They really believe in evaluation. The key variable in predicting the success of congregation-based learning is the willingness to ask for feedback, to collect data so as to inform what you do.... This is a group that asks ahead of time, asks during, asks after, revises, does another iteration, and they do it based on information rather than anecdotes....*

### 3. Making the Most of Resources

Even as they are autonomous institutions, schools do not operate in isolation. A school's congregational or communal base of support is critical to its success, and certainly to its finances. Beyond their immediate funding support, stronger supplementary schools draw upon the wider community for expertise and grants. There is little doubt that schools are at a great advantage when they are located in areas where there is a large potential pool of educators, where a school of Jewish education trains teachers, where a central Jewish educational agency has a broad and creative agenda, where communal funding is available through Federations. Schools, in short, have to consider potential internal and external resources and then plan to make maximal use of such resources. In this regard, size is not necessarily the key point. Both large and

small schools have to be clear about their circumstances and act wisely to benefit from their environment.

Two of the smallest schools in our sample were especially adept at harnessing resources. **Tikvah**, the small, Midwestern Conservative synagogue school, has been able to teach its students synagogue skills, Hebrew and Jewish texts because of its creative use of local personnel. Necessity forced this school to seek out unusual teachers and to develop them as Jewish educators.

*The school makes a point of hiring Israelis who really know Hebrew, even if these Israelis lack an education background. Of the two young women teaching Hebrew, one has yet to attend a college. But the school leaders are convinced there are good textbooks available to bring teachers up to speed and that knowledge of the language is more important than having teaching credentials. This seems to have worked, perhaps because classes are small. The two teachers work with small groups of no more than four students using workbooks and materials from *S'fatai Tiftab: Siddur Mastery and Meaning* produced by Tora Aura. The teacher adeptly connects the root words that the students read one to another (i.e., *Kadosh* and *Kiddush*). Only a teacher very comfortable in the language would be able to make these connections so effortlessly. The children are engaged and the words are connected to meaning immediately for them.*

*The **Chabad Hebrew School** is also small but it benefits greatly from the larger Chabad network. Most of the teachers are part of an extended family and each year a volunteer or two from Brooklyn or other far-away communities comes to help out. Moreover, the central Chabad office runs an online service for *sbluchos* (emissaries) and Hebrew school directors who seek each other's advice and share techniques. The *sbluchos* also gather annually to compare notes. Even though their schools are small, Chabad school directors can gain access to a national, if not an international network, thereby overcoming their isolation.*

Larger, well-endowed institutions have also proven agile in tapping communal funding to expand their limited resources.

*The maxim that "it takes a village to raise a child" might be translated, in this context, as follows: it takes the resources of a community to transform a school. At every turn, **Beit Knesset Hazon**, the large Reform congregation, was the beneficiary of the resources of its community. A key Federation professional served as*

a catalyst for change; a Federation-sponsored program of high-level adult learning inspired, and continues to inspire, those in leadership positions; and Federation grants made it possible for the school to pay the salaries of several new staff members for the first few years of their tenure. A local college of Jewish studies has provided the funding for the professional development pilot. Last but not least, four out of seven full-time members of the education staff are graduates of a local program in Jewish educational leadership; their shared language and understanding of Jewish education has surely facilitated their collaboration. While few synagogues in the area have maximized these resources in as significant a way as Beit Kneset Hazon, without the resources, change would have come much more slowly, if at all. The school has been smart about utilizing resources in its community.

The **Reconstructionist Synagogue** sought to obtain financial help to launch its *havurah* program, *Ten Kehillot*. Because of the congregation's lack of success in obtaining outside grant support for the program, it tried a different tack, eliminating all of traditional family education programs on the grounds that they were episodic. "Inter-generational learning is more important than grade-based family education," explains the rabbi. "We saw our family education schedule making it harder for parents' calendars. A parent gets stuck saying, 'How am I supposed to be in two places at one time when I have more than one child in the school?'" So to build "meaningful connections," the congregation took all the money designated for a family educator and put it toward supporting the launch of the *Ten Kehillot* program. Additional funds came from two angels in the congregation. Once it had sharpened its goals, the synagogue took the necessary steps to find the funding internally.

Some schools, particularly communal ones, can serve as a resource even as they benefit from support from other institutions. The possibilities for reciprocity are highlighted by the **Western Hebrew High School's** central role in its community.

As a community school with little competition from other supplementary high schools in the area, the school plays a central role in this medium-sized Jewish community. Its strong relationship with local synagogues provides a structure to sustain a number of congregational confirmation programs, some of which had languished within their own institutions until they joined with the high school. And then in time, the school's annual Israel trip has become tightly embedded in the fabric of the Jewish community and is a source of much pride. Students enroll in the school in great anticipation of the six-week trip and our anecdotal evidence suggests they come back more mature, more personally engaged Jews, and much more connected to Israel.

For some it is "life changing." The school facilitates a variety of post-Israel programming which interacts with the wider Jewish community. This model of a supplementary school as community magnet, a gathering place for the various Jewish youth of a city, is a system that works well here and can be replicated.

Schools have augmented their staff by bringing on part-time experts in special education and prayer to complement specialists in music and art. We did observe that the "rich get richer." Once a school begins making a financial commitment to itself and/or acquires outside grants, often more funding follows.

#### 4. Developing a Common Purpose with Lay Leaders and Boards

One of the truisms of school change is that it is vital to involve lay leaders—board members and others—in the life of the school, and to work cooperatively with them to refine the objectives of the school. Several of the schools we studied worked hard to bring lay leaders on board, an effort that yielded long-term benefits. In fact, the drivers of change and innovation in a few schools in our sample were parents and other concerned lay leaders who sustained change efforts even when school directors and teachers came and went. Lay leaders, in short, provide continuity in schools that might suffer greatly at times of personnel turnover.

The **Reconstructionist Synagogue** is driven by strong professional staff and a shared commitment by lay leaders to a vision of education that at its core affirms that, "learners will grow to be connected to and invested in the Jewish community. The way we will achieve this is to build partnerships among the generations and integrate the religious school into the congregation." This commitment by lay leaders resulted from the congregation's engagement in an educational visioning process lasting 18 months. The congregational experiment has spawned multiple experiments supported by lay leaders and professionals.

A national project supported the congregation in selecting a task force made up of teachers, students, parents, and a wide range of adults in the community. This group reflected on its core values and hopes. Members researched how various models of education worked and forged a shared vision. Lay leaders were trained through the process to expand their leadership capacity to support education.

The congregation has continued to involve lay leaders in being "guardians of the vision," monitoring progress, learning from mistakes and making plans for future work.

*Sustaining lay involvement is a constant challenge. Recently, the congregation launched a new model of engaging more lay people as “owners” of learning at the congregation. They selected a number of congregants to be trained in Congregational Community Based Organizing (CCBO), a process that has involved the majority of congregants, including teens. The Reconstructionist Synagogue serves as a model of how walls separating congregational education and the work of the larger synagogue can be dismantled.*

*Much of the success of the Reform congregation **Beit Knesset Hazon** may be attributed to the initiative of lay leaders, who, faced with the dissonance between the ideal and the real, worked behind the scenes to articulate a vision, and recruited a rabbi to help them enact that vision. One of the rabbi’s first steps was to hire two creative, capable educators, with whom he worked closely to brainstorm new ideas and new approaches. For her part, the congregational educator, convened a task force upon her arrival to help her conceptualize the new directions congregational learning would take.<sup>11</sup> Recalling her first meeting with the task force, the congregational educator noted, “I told them that I was not going to talk to them about programming for a year, that we had to talk process.” The task force met six times over the course of a year; the vision they arrived at now appears in partial form at the congregation’s website:*

*At Beit Knesset Hazon, we know that each person has a story; each person is on a journey. We assist and enrich the lives of our members and our congregation by providing a wide range of learning opportunities, and multiple gateways, enabling individuals to make choices that are the best with our community. Jewish learning is a lifelong endeavor and we seek to engage all learners from preschool through adult, from novice to expert.*

*To this day she continues to work with the lay members of this task force, and, of course, with the senior members of her staff.<sup>12</sup>*

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## ON-GOING CHALLENGES

To round out our discussion of how these schools developed the building blocks to achieve a measure of success, we note the intractable challenges endemic to the field. Observers of supplementary schools cannot fail to notice how these challenges affect the decision-making and perceived options of even the best schools. To one extent or another, all the schools we examined grappled with these issues. The following

discussion therefore does not link these challenges to any particular school; they form the backdrop for all schools.

1. **The gap between curriculum and good lessons.** Curricular materials are available to schools through the denominational education departments, central agencies for Jewish education, commercial publishers and independent organizations. The challenge lies in implementation. In quite a few schools in the sample, it was evident that some teachers were in over their heads and had limited grasp of the subject matter. More commonly, schools lacked the support for teachers in the form of curriculum planners and coordinators to help teachers translate textbooks and other pre-packaged curricula into lesson plans. Even fewer schools employ assessment tools to help teachers determine how successfully students are learning.
2. **The scarcity of teachers well-versed in Hebrew and Judaica who have the skill to transmit their knowledge to students.** Even at schools located in a community where teacher training is available, principals lament their inability to increase their student bodies because they lack confidence they will find sufficient numbers of qualified teachers. Schools in areas of sparser Jewish concentration are even more hard pressed to find proper personnel. Some of the schools in the sample have enlisted unconventional staff members, avocational teachers with some expertise in Judaica or high school and college students. There is no single answer to this shortage of personnel, but few would doubt that it is hard to improve schools in the absence of qualified staff members. All the curricular initiatives, school revitalization efforts and other initiatives to ratchet up school quality depend on people who can undertake the necessary work.
3. **Burn-out of teachers, but especially school directors.** Directing a school is a demanding job. Too often schools rely on the director to be a superman or more commonly superwoman who handles everything. Most schools have a shallow bench so that pinch hitters do not come to the aid of directors. In recent years, better-endowed schools have begun to hire additional full-time educators to serve as assistant principals, and/or coordinators of family education, adult learning, and high school programming.

<sup>11</sup> For a discussion of the uses of a task force as the engine for change in congregational life, see chapter 6 of Isa Aron, *Becoming a Congregation of Learners* (Woodstock, VT: Jewish Lights, 2000)

<sup>12</sup> For more on collaborative leadership in synagogue life see chapter 4 of Isa Aron, *The Self-Renewing Congregation* (Woodstock, VT: Jewish Lights, 2002)

4. **Severely limited time.** With the large majority of students attending school for a handful of hours each week, whether once or twice a week, schools are severely constrained. In response, some schools have focused very sharply on achieving goals that are attainable. Remaining mindful of the time constraints under which they operate, they do not promise more than they can deliver. The question is whether this hard-headed approach to time, results in too low a set of expectations.
5. **The inevitability of making tough curricular choices.** Like all schools, supplementary ones must contend with time constraints, but because of their limited hours they are even more constrained than other types of schools. This circumstance forces them to ask tough questions about what to emphasize and what to omit. Schools make trade-offs between subject matter—e.g. Hebrew language vs. Jewish history, teaching about holidays or Israel, building prayer skills vs. talking about God—between the time and emphasis they allocate for each, and also between content knowledge and community building or other affective activities.
6. **Deciding on the goals of Hebrew language study.** A particularly difficult curricular choice relates to Hebrew language instruction. Many schools are unclear about what to teach and toward what end: Is the purpose of Hebrew language study to be able to participate in synagogue services or to converse? To read Biblical, rabbinic or modern Hebrew? To read or to speak? Commercial publishers have muddied the waters by producing textbooks that purport to meet all of these goals. Within schools, teachers lobby for a greater emphasis on modern Hebrew because it may be more accessible to students or easier to teach. But learning a foreign language is difficult, and without utmost clarity about goals and whether specific goals are attainable, schools surely will not succeed.
7. **Rapid and high attrition after bar/bat mitzvah.** There is little doubt that parents and many children regard the end goal of supplementary school to be the bar/bat mitzvah. The fact that over one-third of students in supplementary school drop out the year after they reach this milestone and 55 percent leave within two years offers powerful evidence of their priorities. Schools, by contrast, tend to set very different goals for themselves. Many explicitly downplay their role in preparing children, and most try to retain students well beyond 7th grade. How to manage

this disparity in expectations and stem the post-bar/bat mitzvah attrition is a central challenge facing schools. In fact, many of the schools in our sample judge their success in part by rising rates of retention.<sup>13</sup>

8. **Conflicting time commitments and parental priorities.** With a range of activities beckoning to children, supplementary schools must compete for the attention of families. Between sports programs, music and play rehearsals, social action programs and other after-school activities, children are over-programmed and their parents must choose between a catalogue of options. Jewish education, then, is merely one of many supplementary programs. Compared to the recent past, Jewish education now must compete with far more options—and often loses out.

<sup>13</sup> On the Bar/Bat Mitzvah syndrome, see Stuart Schoenfeld, “Folk Judaism, Elite Judaism and the Role of the Bar Mitzvah in the Development of the Synagogue and Jewish School in America.” *Contemporary Jewry*. 9 (1988): 67-85



## POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Most of the findings in this report are geared to schools that wish to improve their effectiveness. In the course of its work, the research team also drew some conclusions about steps that policy-makers in different sectors of the educational community ought to consider. Most will require partnerships with philanthropists to move the supplementary school sector to higher levels of achievement.

- A concerted effort within schools and in cooperation with parent bodies, local central agencies and denominations should be launched to foster hard thinking about the objectives of supplementary schooling, self-reflection on how well these objectives are being met, and serious work on re-organizing programs based upon these considerations.<sup>14</sup> Even some of the better schools in our study have made only limited progress in thinking through what they hope to accomplish, what their ideal graduate will have mastered and experienced, and how they define their short-term and long-range goals. By their own admission, many schools are most interested in giving students positive Jewish experiences. While they also devote time to teaching skills and content, they often lack a clear sense of the ends they wish to achieve.

There is no shortage of reasons why this is the case: the part-time nature of the enterprise leaves little room for thinking through what the school hopes to accomplish; the limited time available with students encourages some schools to take a scattershot or minimalistic approach, exposing students somewhat haphazardly to many different aspects of Jewish culture and religion; the broad range of learners suggests to some that we cannot determine a single set of goals because individual students will take away different lessons based on their own interests, temperaments, family backgrounds and unique personalities. In addition, some educators argue, the goal ought to be to give students good feelings about being Jewish so that they will become lifelong Jewish learners. Indeed, the purpose of supplementary schooling may be to ignite a spark of Jewish enthusiasm

and challenge students to engage with Jewish values and concepts, rather than fill young Jews with a great deal of content they may not retain for long.

Though no agency can dictate to schools what they ought to be doing, we can hope to stimulate conversation about the vision they wish to set for themselves and the means they use to engage in self-evaluation to determine how well those objectives are being met. This does not mean that schools should necessarily rely upon standardized testing or externally imposed criteria for success. It does mean that supplementary schools, like all educational efforts, would do better if they were clear about their goals and honest with themselves about how well they are succeeding. As matters currently stand, standards of success are subjective at best. Both educators and the lay leaders who support their work may feel much better about the enterprise if they are clear on their objectives and measures of success. Certainly, students are likely to benefit from well-focused and well-executed formal and informal Jewish education offered by supplementary schools.

- Funders can work in partnership with central agencies for Jewish education and denominational bodies to develop sustained programs assisting educators in making informed curricular decisions. Due to the highly decentralized nature of the field, many schools shape their own curriculum. Some schools employ or adapt curricula devised by denominational education arms, such as the Chai curriculum prepared by the Department of Lifelong Jewish Learning at the Union for Reform Judaism. Others base their teaching largely on textbooks devised by commercial publishers. The existing national bodies do not currently reach into most schools; and local central agencies only have limited impact, particularly at a time when many lack the budgets and authority to provide direct services. In addition, teachers often arrogate decision-making authority, changing curricula to suit their own interests and tastes. Some of this is inevitable given the diverse circumstances of schools. Precisely for this reason, schools would benefit greatly from on-going curricular help.

<sup>14</sup>Helping schools think through their goals and then formulate a structural arrangement to attain those goals is a primary component of the ECE-Re-imagine Project, which has worked with some 40 schools to date. PELIE is also committed to outcomes assessment.

- This, in turn, highlights the paucity of champions for the field of Jewish supplementary education. It is easy to blame the national organizations or the central agencies for the unsatisfactory state-of-affairs, but upon closer inspection it is evident that these institutions often lack the capacity, the personnel and the authority to help schools. In the absence of such resources, there is only so much they can accomplish. Just as funders are banding together to aid other sectors of Jewish education—day schools, summer camping, early childhood programs, birthright Israel, and teen programs, the field of supplementary Jewish education will also need an infusion of money and energetic leadership. The creation of PELIE, the Partnership for Effective Learning and Innovative Education, is a step in the right direction, but it is beginning modestly. Philanthropists who send their own children or grandchildren to supplementary schools should band together to give PELIE and the denominational education offices the support they need to reach into schools. This means staffing to levels that will be sufficient to work with schools in a sustained, rather than as currently, episodic, fashion.
- Nowhere is such support more needed than in small schools. With 60 percent of Jewish supplementary schools enrolling fewer than 100 students, it would be wise not to overlook this niche. In some cases, schools left to their own devices have developed highly creative and effective programs. Tikvah Synagogue in our sample is a dramatic case in point. But while necessity as well as strong rabbinic leadership has propelled Tikvah forward, few comparably sized schools even know of its approach. The model of the Institute for Southern Jewish Life may offer one approach through circuit-riding educators who visit small communities. It is possible to conceive of a section in the denominational offices or other national agencies dedicated to small schools, as well as an initiative such as the Mandel Teacher Education Institute designed expressly to work with teachers in small schools. Alternatively, the needs of small schools might be well-served if central agencies can develop the resources to help them with the particular challenges they face. A partnership of philanthropists and regional lay leaders and educators should develop creative ways to meet the needs of small schools.
- Creating a clearing house for good ideas. Some of the national organizations such as CAJE, the Coalition for Advancing Jewish Education, and JESNA, the Jewish Education Services of North America, try to play this role. But here too

budgetary constraints limit what can be accomplished. Moreover, it is not enough to make available ideas for programming. Schools need guidance in *how* to adapt curricula, programs, initiatives from other settings. Absent the infrastructure, communal support, and trained personnel, the models we have described above may not fit in other schools. It is not only ideas, then, that must be exchanged but also hands-on guidance about *how* to adapt them. Philanthropic support can develop a strong clearinghouse and educational arm for schools.

- Finally, as clergy, lay leaders and educators consider how to effect changes in their own schools they must bear in mind that *change must be multi-levered*. It must draw upon multiple resources and strive to affect different aspects of the school. Too many schools focus on a single arena, believing that by improving curriculum or intensifying professional development or forging a strong bond between the synagogue and the school they can redirect the entire school enterprise. Each of these is important. But schools are complex institutions and require *a series of interventions* to turn them around. So many components of school life are inter-related and therefore fixing one aspect will have only limited impact if others are amiss. For the most part, the rich schools—those with financial resources and a critical mass of concerned lay leaders—are getting richer because they draw upon multiple resources, rather than rely on a single action alone. Small schools, which constitute the majority within the supplementary network, will have to find ways to harness resources so that they too will be able to engage in a broad-gauged process of renewal.

Beit Knesset Hazon offers a powerful example of this multi-levered approach, or what some might term “the perfect storm.” The school made a dramatic turnaround because a constellation of factors combined: the local Federation director advocated for school change, serious adult education became available in the community, the Federation helped fund new positions, Jewish college students at nearby universities were enlisted as educators, and the congregation was ready to take a great leap forward.

A few programs currently exist to help a limited number of schools work through the kinds of systemic changes they need to make. Thus far, not more than 100 schools have benefited from such help. Here too philanthropic support and pressure can get schools beyond the silver bullet mentality and set them firmly on the path to systemic change.

## APPENDIX I: HIGHLIGHTS OF FOUR ADDITIONAL SCHOOLS

Readers of an earlier draft of this study reported difficulties in keeping in mind each of ten distinctive schools. For purposes of clarity and brevity, this revised report has chosen to illustrate broader trends with reference to a sub-sample of six schools, which cumulatively cover a broad range of models. Choosing the six schools to highlight proved a difficult task because each school we observed has noteworthy features. This appendix introduces readers to four additional schools observed by the research team. Far more detailed portraits of all ten schools appear in our forthcoming book, *Learning and Community: Jewish Supplementary Schools in the 21st Century*.

### ADATH SHALOM<sup>15</sup>

Adath Shalom is a congregational school (kindergarten to 12th grade) housed in a large Conservative synagogue in an upper-middle-class suburb approximately one hour away from a major Northeastern city to which many commute for work. Children in kindergarten through second grade meet once a week on Sunday mornings for three hours. Third grade to seventh grade students meet two weekday afternoons a week (for a total of four hours) plus every other Shabbat they are required to attend specially designed services (for a total of 16 shabbatot over the school year). In order to be eligible to celebrate a bar or bat mitzvah in the synagogue, the student must attend religious school for the five years from kitah aleph (3rd grade) to kitah hay (7th grade). Attending religious school for kindergarten and first and second grades are optional. Three components comprise the curriculum for elementary grades: Ivrit, Yehadut and Tfillah (Hebrew language, Judaism

and prayer). High School students are involved in a wide variety of programming that take place at various times throughout the week. The school has placed considerable emphasis on the blending of formal and experiential learning and strives to integrate children's education with family education. In the 2007-2008 school year Adath Shalom's religious school had an enrollment of 220 children in the kindergarten to kitah hay level, and 160 youth in the various high school programs (both formal and informal).

While Adath Shalom bears a resemblance to many other supplementary schools in the country, it has a number of unusual strengths. The school is housed in a synagogue with strong, experienced professional leaders who are proud role models for Conservative Judaism. Many of the lead personnel in the synagogue and school have been with the congregation for decades, adding to the stability of the program. And the school can draw upon a large critical mass of congregants to recruit students.

The school is administered by an educational director who is well trained and accomplished in Jewish education. Her teachers admire her and enjoy working under her supervision. She is well respected and liked within her congregation. With her broad educational mandate, the school director is able to place her stamp on many facets of the synagogue. Even though she administers a large school, the head has formed a relationship with every child and family.

The school excels at offering a large range of educational offerings (both formal and informal), particularly in the high school (which has a reported two-thirds retention rate in the last few years). The strategy of offering multiple paths to Jewish engagement is in keeping with the latest

<sup>15</sup> Here too, all school names are pseudonyms, as are the names of the personnel.

successful trends in supplementary education. The school also places considerable emphasis on integrating children's education with family education. Some examples include the "mitzvah projects," a teacher's new blog initiative, and the new synagogue pillar which aims to forge havrutot between families. Other strengths include experienced and talented lead teachers who help supervise newer teachers in the elementary grades, and the popular practice of offering community service certificates to high school students to help bolster college applications.

An important strategy for improving the supplementary school experience is to find ways to better involve parents in the educational process. Clearly reflective in her work, the head of school at Adath Shalom works actively to engage parents and students by running a blog.

*I send an e-mail to the parents, "check the new information on the blog and see what Johnny did." They'll go on; they can ask a question. They can see what their kids are interested in. I want them to know what's happening in Hebrew school because when a kid comes home, he doesn't [necessarily] talk about Hebrew school. So the idea is to engage the parent in what the kid is doing. If I sent home something on birth that asked: "what is your Hebrew name and where did you get it?," I want to let the parent know the kid is bringing it home and I want them to engage together. ...And all of a sudden I have a parent letting me know that Johnny is not coming to Hebrew school because he is playing saxophone. [So now I can figure out what I can do to keep him caught up].*

### EAST COAST COMMUNITY HIGH SCHOOL

East Coast Community High School is located in a suburban area of a Middle Atlantic state. Its classes meet only on Sunday mornings. Two-thirds of its 270 students from grades 8-12 are recruited from Conservative synagogues, with smaller percentages coming from Reform and Orthodox homes and around 20 percent drawn from unaffiliated families. According to the estimates of the school administration, between 20-25 percent of children have at least one Israeli-born parent, an extraordinarily high figure. In addition 20 percent of students attended Jewish day schools prior to enrolling in the high school, with the rest coming from synagogue religious schools. The Israeli and day school children (some pupils are both), however, make it possible for the high school to offer advanced classes that are quite unusual for a supplementary

setting—e.g. an advanced Hebrew class in which the instructor and most students primarily speak to one another in Hebrew (here the children of Israelis play a disproportionate role) and a Talmud course in which students engage with the original text and medieval commentaries (Rishonim).

The ambience of the school is religiously traditional. Boys are expected to wear a head covering and food that is overtly from non-Kosher eateries is not permitted in the building. The Orthodox influence is particularly evident in the orientation of college-age tutors who work with small groups of students: all are Orthodox. The faculty is also skewed heavily toward a modern Orthodox orientation.

What is most striking about the program is its insistence on maintaining as many of the formal trappings of a school as possible:

- A Judaically well-educated and experienced faculty, many of whom have education degrees.
- A senior and associate school administrator who both have advanced degrees in either Judaica or education.
- Clearly articulated attendance and tardiness policies.
- A requirement that students who miss five class sessions must make up the time by writing an additional paper; if they do not, they will not pass their courses.
- A wide range of course offerings from which students select their programs.
- A fair number of courses include strong textual components—required readings, use of Rabbinic texts, comparative analyses of texts and written forms of assessment.
- A curriculum intended to be of "high interest and meaningful" to high school students.
- A predominantly dialogical approach in the classroom, so that students interact with each other and their teachers.
- A requirement of each teacher to provide a course description, syllabus, and final exam for each course. A common formatting and structure in these documents adds to the cohesiveness of the program.
- Assigned homework in some classes.



- A commitment to assessing student learning through graded formal papers and/or exams each semester.

*In response to student interest, the East Coast Jewish High School created a Talmud course that works with the original text. In this class of eight students the exchange between teacher and students is rapid-fire and non-stop. It ranges from students reading the text of the Talmud to analyzing a commentary by the eleventh-century medieval exegete and legal scholar, the Rif, Rabbi Isaac ben Jacob Alfasi. The teacher explains how the latter understood the Talmudic text under discussion (in the Tractate Ketubot), a discussion of the punishment for rape. And the students actively engage him in the analysis. Simultaneously, they also offer a running commentary, giving vent to their skepticism. As the teacher explains why it is important to understand the reasoning of the majority and minority opinions cited in the Talmudic discussion, some students question the entire enterprise. "Orthodoxy gives too much credit to the rabbis of the past," one student complains. Another, assuming a thick East European Jewish accent, replies sarcastically, "You don't know how wise the rabbis were."*

*The teacher continues to talk through the static and then addresses the students' concerns. He calmly explains that if one is prepared to work within the system of rabbinic law, it is important to understand the reasoning leading to the majority and minority views. "If you don't want to work within the Jewish legal framework, that is your prerogative." The interaction about the Talmud and the sidebar commentary continues. Several aspects of the class are remarkable. One is the high level of Talmudic study. The students can work with the original text under the teacher's guidance. The other is the good-natured banter. At no point does the teacher get defensive. As the class concludes and the next session is about to begin with the same teacher; a class on Israeli Supreme Court decisions, the majority of students stay in place; they have elected to take two courses with the same patient teacher, who is wise to the ways of adolescents.*

Even as the school strives to maintain serious academic study, it works assiduously to cultivate the affective domain, running a broad range of extra-curricular programs to engage students in retreats, Shabbatonim, community service and recreational activities with their peers.

## TEMPLE REYIM

Located in a large Middle Atlantic city, Temple Reyim, a Reform congregation, has about 1600 member units and operates a Sunday and weekday school for its approximately 450 students.

Unlike schools that are attempting to "re-invent" congregational education, Temple Reyim accepts the traditional school framework—a certain number of contact hours in classes led by teachers who are in some sense professional. Within this framework, however, almost everything is being questioned and improved. Lay and professional leaders have developed a mission for the school that will shape its educational offerings. One aspect of the mission—helping each child develop a personal relationship with God—is featured in several aspects of its curriculum, most notably a bi-weekly, student-led ma'ariv service. Its explicit commitment to Jews in Israel and in the wider community is seen in a range of formal and informal programs that are sometimes sponsored by organizations outside the congregation.

With the support of the central agency in its community, the Temple has engaged its faculty in serious, ongoing professional learning so that they can together develop the new curriculum and improve their pedagogy. By paying teachers for the additional work, they devote more than twenty hours in joint learning and planning that should over time result in a new curriculum with clear goals and methods. Reyim educators believe that since teachers are helping to define the new curriculum, they will be committed to teaching it in interactive and innovative ways.

Reyim's experiences demonstrate many things that are consistent with the research on educational change. These insights include:

- An enormous amount of energy and commitment is needed to work simultaneously on the inter-related building blocks of congregational education, including governance and leadership as well as its curriculum and pedagogy. Each element requires time and the active engagement of the educators and lay leaders. The first phase, focusing on governance and leadership, resulted in a mission statement and a clear organizational chart. The school is now tackling its curriculum and pedagogy.
- Reyim turned to its central agency when it was facing a crisis related to leadership. Once that was stabilized it used the agency's expertise to help it determine a way to look at and improve its teaching and pedagogy. Without outside expertise it is highly unlikely that these improvements would be happening. Congregational schools rarely have the financial and human resources to handle these efforts on their own.

- Systemic and significant change necessitate a timeframe that is long enough for people to understand, internalize and implement the new approaches; this is especially true for improving pedagogy from both methodological and content-based perspectives. Temple Reyim was in its third year when observed; it will take more years for the new approaches to become “business-as-usual.”
- Temple Reyim struggles with the question of what it must give up in order to maintain the needed focus on its goals and there are forces that work against this. Traditions and inertia make it hard to change a school’s activities and approaches. But if the new content and programs are just added on top of what has always been the case, the efforts will become diffuse and confusing.

One of the large challenges facing Jewish education is to find a place for students with special needs.

*This is how a parent of a child with a learning disability described her experiences at Temple Reyim: We left another synagogue because they couldn’t provide for my daughter educationally. And we came here, and they said “well, we’ve never had a kid like her, but why not?” My daughter is severely disabled. And so not only [was it] okay to take her, it was so far above and beyond that. She was welcomed with open arms, she was loved. She became a Bat Mitzvah at fourteen using a communication device, and we have so many different kinds of kids here and ...not only is nobody turned away, but nobody’s ever made to feel different or unwelcome. And that’s what’s really special.*

*The commitment to these students does not end with bar and bat mitzvah:*

*After my daughter’s bat mitzvah I said [to the school director], “Well what now? Cause she loves coming!” So we started a group for post b’nei mitzvah special needs kids called the Lamed-Vavniks<sup>16</sup>, and there was a group of them that were very closely bonded, and they came every Sunday to class. They had a social activity once a month; they went to New York every year, and then they had confirmation.*

Feeling a special bond with the community that helped them, parents who get involved through special needs programs often become active in the congregation.

*Sometimes respect for students must extend to those who opt to leave the school. One busy day at Temple Reyim, during the change of classes a mother and her son were making their way to the door to the parking lot. The principal, rushing by, notices, stops and engages the boy with a warm and open attitude. “Paul,” she says, “I know you’re leaving and going to a different school.” The principal had heard that he visited another congregational school where he has a few friends and had decided to go there. He was not happy at Temple Reyim. In turn, the principal tells him that she was so glad he was at her school and the Temple will miss him. “You know, sometimes in situations like this, people can feel uncomfortable with each other. There is no reason to. You will always be welcome here—to visit or if you find you don’t like the new school to return. And if you see me in a store or somewhere, you don’t have to feel strange and ignore me. Come over and tell me how you’re doing.” After a few more encouraging remarks, the mother and son leave with smiles on their faces.*

#### TEMPLE SHALOM

Rabbis and staff at Temple Shalom, a Reform synagogue located in a West Coast exurb, claim they offer a counter-cultural approach to the acquisitive, work-dominated values pervading the secular community. Despite its affluence and established position in local Jewish life, it seeks to engage entire families in alternative models of Jewish education, regarding itself as a countercultural institution. Its educational program stands on five pillars: integrating school and congregation, creating countercultural learning and experiences, assuring that poor implementation does not undermine inventive programs, building a shared sense of purpose, and focusing on authenticity.

The school sees its lay board as an educational partner in communicating with congregants and students. Viewing lay governance as fund-raising vehicles, synagogue leaders argue, undermines the long-term goals of the school and congregation.

Temple Shalom offers a progressive education for its 500 students, emphasizing affective growth over cognitive gains. This does not translate into sparse academic offerings; the school offers a lengthy list of educational activities.

<sup>16</sup>The allusion is to a rabbinic notion that there are thirty-six (*lamed vav*) just people alive at any given time and it is because of them that the world is not destroyed.

But it does mean that knowledge is not an end unto itself. The school regards content knowledge as a step toward individual growth among students and as an alternative model to the secular community.

*At Temple Shalom, educational leaders are even more direct in stressing the affective above all else. In describing their vision, educators and lay leaders alike repeatedly return to the desire to “build community” and foster “feeling good.” “Content is secondary,” an educator notes. “We strive to have kids learn; we can be most successful in having kids love being Jewish. And love to celebrate. When my students are bumming at home, they carry that spark with them on a bigger level, the holiday celebrations here are very memorable.” One of the rabbis elaborates: “We’re focused on enculturation—we want our kids to feel comfortable in Jewish time and space. It is a loving place, where they are comfortable in Jewish holidays, culture; they know basics and they develop enduring understandings. But some of the content doesn’t get covered. ... Our program is more affective. Kids see what they learn is modeled.... We feel that learning is lifelong, that Judaism is not just for the clergy.... Something else that I’d add is that we have a clear sense of success: If we can keep kids attached and connected. Do they like the place? Do they feel positive? We get a lot of indicators this is the case; we also have kids who don’t connect.*

*Our success is if the kids will identify as Jewish as they grow up. Do they want to transfer Judaism to their kids? ... We’re using the camp model. We build a community that is vibrant. Content will follow. You can look at the depth of the adult learning that we offer here. The content will be there; they’ll take Hebrew and Jewish courses in college.”*

The school enrolls approximately 500 students in grades K-7. It does not run a formal high school program but does have a confirmation class of 29. It also utilizes 65 high school students as aides. Its Shabbaton program attracts 70 families from 3:30-6:00 p.m. on Saturdays and its pre-bar/bat mitzvah program brings families to the temple on Friday evenings for services.

*A parent at Temple Shalom reflects on the impact of the school’s Havdala study program: “For our family the Shabbaton program has a huge social component. We also joined a havurah in the congregation. We have a havurah coordinator. They put new families together by interest, age or geography. Our havurah is part of the Shabbaton program. We often go out to dinner after Shabbaton together, so we are spending from 3:30-8:30 p.m. together on a Saturday.”*

Temple Shalom aims to reach its students where they are and to be attuned to what young people find meaningful.

## APPENDIX II: SCHOOL GOALS AT A GLANCE

TABLE 2: SCHOOL GOALS AT A GLANCE

School	Articulated Goals	Methods of Self-Evaluation
Adath Shalom	<p>The educational vision of the school flows directly from the larger vision of the synagogue, which emphasizes a personalized approach to Jewish commitment where each congregant can enter the “ladder of commitment” at different points. The religious school thus strives to create an environment comfortable for all children, youth and families at their own level or style of Jewish commitment. Blending the formal and experiential allows students to find Jewish connections in traditional classroom learning, social action “mitzvah projects,” as well as prayer services. The school strives to create a foundation of Jewish learning, encompassing Hebrew, prayer, holidays, Shabbat, values, life-cycle events, Bible, history, synagogue skills, Israel and God to be built upon throughout the life course.</p>	<p>The religious school does not have a standardized system for evaluating students on the content of the curriculum. Individual teachers use their own discretion in deciding if and how they will evaluate students. Evaluation of teachers and the school director are also done informally and on an ad-hoc basis.</p>
Beit Knesset Hazon	<p>BKH has three over-arching goals:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To create a strong community</li> <li>• To make Judaism an integral part of people’s lives</li> <li>• To inspire students to make Jewish learning a life-long endeavor</li> </ul>	<p>While there is no formal assessment of the first two goals, there is a general sense that the goals are achieved. Everyone we interviewed, from students to staff to parents talked about how important community was, and how the school had become a stronger community. Most of the classes we observed asked the students to apply the text, story or concept that was taught to their own lives; this is a particularly high priority in the bar/bat mitzvah program. The third goal is one that can only be assessed by a long-term follow-up study; given that the school’s transformation began only five years prior to our study, it is too soon to tell. The school did hire an outside researcher to do evaluation.</p>
Chabad Hebrew School	<p>The overall goal is to “ignite the Jewish soul” of students. The school emphasizes Hebrew decoding, teaching about Jewish religious observances, especially pertaining to the home, and introducing students to Jewish ways of thinking about issues.</p>	<p>The school engages in on-going assessment of teaching, but is less focused on student learning.</p>
Eastern Hebrew High School	<p>The school aspires to challenge students through academically-oriented classes while simultaneously offering them a range of informal learning opportunities and extra-curricular programs.</p>	<p>Students must take exams, submit written homework in some classes and write papers. These written items are mainly designed to foster an academic ambience and grade student performance, rather than to assess the overall success of individual classes.</p>

School	Articulated Goals	Methods of Self-Evaluation
Kehilla	<p>For Ivrit (Hebrew), Kehillah has extensive rubrics at every level (1-7) that cover reading, writing, speaking and listening.</p> <p>For Yahadut (Judaica), students rotate through three year-long curricula, focusing on: holidays and life cycles, the “whys” and “hows” of Jewish rituals and customs; Jewish history and memory; and values and ethics.</p>	<p>For Ivrit—classes are very small (rarely more than 6 or 7 students), so teachers know from instruction and observation how the rubrics apply to each student.</p> <p>For Yahadut—assessment is much more informal, based on the students’ participation in class and work on projects.</p>
Reconstructionist Synagogue	<p>The mission of the congregation is to build an intergenerational learning community in order to build learners’ commitment and investment to the Jewish community.</p>	<p>The congregation conducts yearly paper/online surveys. The school holds regular focus group discussions with parents and children to get feedback and measure how well the goals are being achieved. The Director of Education states, “we don’t assess skills.” Staff is responsible for monitoring children’s progress in skill development without tests. Because “belonging” is an essential component of the program, staff is also charged with attending to the welfare of children.</p>
Temple Reyim	<p>The school’s mission statement reads: <i>The religious school of Temple Reyim inspires Jewish learning through study, worship and acts of lovingkindness. The school provides educational resources and develops a personal relationship with God in an environment where students of all ages and abilities can understand and practice a lifelong commitment to Jewish heritage, Jewish family values, the State of Israel and the Jewish community at large.</i></p>	<p>Reyim engages annually in a self-assessment that looks at all areas of the school. This is based on a protocol developed by an external agency, which also trained lay leaders in how to conduct the assessment. Though it does not evaluate student achievement or the impact of the school on the students, the protocol looks at teaching practices and curriculum as well as governance and procedural issues. The principal and school committee use the information to set goals for the coming year and to consider appropriate changes. In addition, the school assesses students’ ability to decode Hebrew. Informal feedback flows regularly from parents and teachers to the principal.</p>
Temple Shalom	<p>The primary goal is to create a community in which learners will value Jewish education highly and engage in it regularly so that they may become committed, knowledgeable, participating, Reform Jews. They will be able to make informed Jewish choices and will live up to the highest ideals of our tradition.</p>	<p>The school differentiates evaluation and assessment. Evaluation is used to understand whether the educational programming is fostering the community described in their vision. To this end, yearly surveys are done online. Older children complete them on their own. Younger children complete the surveys with help of parents. These surveys are designed and implemented by lay leaders and professionals.</p> <p>Assessment for what children learn is done formally and informally. Each year teachers administer Hebrew skills testing. Results go on students’ records and inform learning for the following year. Families are sent report cards twice a year, recording Hebrew proficiency and participation. “Menschlichkeit” demonstrated is also an area for reporting. Teachers are told to focus on giving informal feedback to parents about children’s participation and comfort with the school community.</p>



School	Articulated Goals	Methods of Self-Evaluation
TIKVAH	<p>The congregation has made Shabbat the focus of its educational and communal experience with the expectation that students will live as well as learn about Jewish life. They participate in classes and tfillot while parents participate in tfillot and the entire community shares a Shabbat luncheon each week. In order to accomplish this, the educational program focuses on skills for understanding and leading prayers and provides ongoing opportunities for students to use their skills in the different services and activities. In addition, study of Torah and other texts is done in order for students to be knowledgeable about core Jewish texts and to explore the relevance of the ideas for their own lives. As the students' mastery progresses, they assume more active leadership roles in the congregational community, thereby reinforcing the link between learning and living Judaism.</p>	<p>Self-evaluation is generally informal. Since the community is small, people are in frequent contact with each other and reactions, ideas and feedback are regularly shared among students, parents, the rabbi and other congregants. Programs are planned and assessed on the basis of these informal observations and discussions.</p>
Western Hebrew High School	<p>The school sees its mission as creating an active learning community that is responsive to the needs of a diverse group of young Jewish adults. Students have the opportunity to grow in understanding, appreciation and application of Jewish knowledge, practice and values, empowering them to be more informed Jews and solidifying their Jewish identity. The school believes that being an informed Jew in a secular world enables one to integrate Judaism into everyday life. Its leaders describe the students' experiences as their "personal Jewish journey" which allows them to uncover things they never knew about their Jewish heritage.</p>	<p>In order to maintain a learning environment which is less stressful than the one students attend for their general education, Western Hebrew High does not formally evaluate its students on course material. All teachers are evaluated annually by the head of school.</p>

## APPENDIX III: THE PROJECT DESIGN

Research on supplementary schools tends to fall into two categories: a few works are based on intensive, long-term observation; others examine a specific aspect of the process or offer brief thumbnail sketches of schools.<sup>17</sup> The current project aimed to survey a range of schools by bringing together a team of ten researchers who would collectively observe ten schools and report to each other, initially orally and then in writing, about their findings. Each school in our small sample was observed by two individuals—an academic student of Jewish education and a veteran practitioner who had taught and administered a supplementary school and also brought a broader communal or national perspective to the enterprise of supplementary Jewish schooling. Each set of observers then benefited from the active suggestions and reactions of a group of peers similarly engaged in observing schools.

All the schools in our sample were observed during the year 2007 with observers spending time in classes, interviewing key professional and lay personnel, and also reviewing written information on the schools, including web-based material. The task of writing a draft report was assumed by the academic partner who then received substantive suggestions and critical feedback from the practitioner. Each report was then read and critiqued by the entire team of ten researchers before undergoing further revision.

The research team also worked together to develop leads about schools worthy of study. Team members made contact with informants in the different Jewish religious movements and knowledgeable observers of the field to learn of promising schools. As there is no scientific means of selecting good schools, we

relied upon word of mouth to ferret out promising schools. The actual selection process then entailed calls to those schools, which in some cases set off warning signals—e.g. a long-term school director had just left, a new rabbi had recently arrived at the congregation and had not placed his/her stamp on the school, a simmering controversy was affecting the ambience of the school. We eliminated schools that were struggling with potentially wrenching transitions. In some cases, schools that came highly recommended did not live up to their billing upon closer inspection. And then some fine schools had to be dropped because they were too similar in approach or even denominational outlook to others in the sample.

Early in our project we resolved to keep the identities of the schools and their personnel confidential; hence all school names and personalities in our reports are pseudonyms. The schools designated as Adath Shalom and Western Hebrew High were observed by Randal F. Schnoor (York University, Toronto) and Billy Mencow (Gribetz Mencow Associates); Beit Kneset Hazon and Kehilla were studied by Isa Aron (Hebrew Union College, Los Angeles) and Nachama Skolnik Moskowitz (Jewish Education Center of Cleveland); Chabad Hebrew School and East Coast Community High School were studied by Jack Wertheimer (Jewish Theological Seminary) and Serene Victor (consultant with the United Synagogue for Conservative Judaism). Susan Shevitz (Brandies University) and Marion Gribetz (Boston Hebrew College) studied Temple Reyim and Tikvah Synagogue; and the Reconstructionist school and Temple Shalom were observed by Harold Wechsler (New York University) and Cyd Weisman (The Re-Imagine Project of the Experiment in Congregational Education).

<sup>17</sup> Perhaps two of the best known book-length books are David Schoen, *Ethnic Survival in America: An Ethnography of a Jewish Afternoon School*. Atlanta: Scholar's Press, 1989; Joseph Reimer, *Succeeding at Jewish Education: How One Synagogue Made it Work*. Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1998. See also Samuel Heilman, *Inside the Jewish School: A Study of the Cultural Setting for Jewish Education*. New York: American Jewish Committee, 1983. A collection of shorter sketches appear in Barry Holtz, ed., *Supplementary Jewish Education: The Best Practices Project*. New York: Council for Initiatives in Jewish Education, 1993, revised edition 1996.

## THE RESEARCH TEAM

**Isa Aron** is Professor of Jewish Education at the Rhea Hirsch School of Education, HUC-JIR, L.A., where she teaches courses in teaching, philosophy of education and organizational change. She was the founding director of the Experiment in Congregational Education, a project of the RHSOE, now in its 16th year. She continues to serve as the senior consultant to that project, which works with synagogues throughout the United States, helping them become congregations of learners and self-renewing congregations, and to re-imagine their religious schools. She is the author of *Becoming a Congregation of Learners* and *The Self Renewing Congregation*, both published by Jewish Lights Publications. She is co-author, together with Steven M. Cohen, Lawrence Hoffman and Ari Y. Kelman of *Sacred Strategies: Moving Synagogues from Functional to Visionary*. (Woodstock, VT: Jewish Lights Publishing, 2009).

**Marion Gribetz** is on the faculty of the Shoolman Graduate School of Jewish Education at Hebrew College in Newton, MA. She is also managing director of Gribetz Mencow Associates, an independent consulting firm specializing in improving Jewish education. She has published, researched, taught and consulted in all areas of Jewish education.

**Billy Mencow** founded KOLBO, Inc. in 1978, which grew into the nation's most innovative retailer of Judaica. Billy's new career in Jewish education began as the High School coordinator at Temple Emunah in Lexington, MA, and as the Director of Post-Graduate Studies for the Solomon Schechter Day School of Greater Boston. He moved on to central agency work, and coordinated the Youth Educator Initiative (now YESOD) at BJE Boston. Billy has since served as Director of Camp Ramah in New England from 2000 – 2005, and Associate Director of the Bureau of Jewish Education in Boston. Billy currently consults to Jewish Educational institutions in the US and Israel in the areas of strategic planning and team building.

**Nachama Skolnik Moskowitz** is the Senior Director, as well as the Director of Curriculum Resources at the Jewish Education Center of Cleveland (JECC). Her core focus has been working with JECC-affiliate schools via a three-year process of curriculum planning, design and implementation. Most recently, she has broadened her professional focus to support the field of Jewish early childhood. In past positions, she served as the principal of the Minneapolis Jewish Day School,

the director of education for Temple Israel in Tulsa, OK, and as education program director for a regional office of the (then) UAHC and Camp Swig. She has also authored and edited articles, textbooks and teacher resources, including *The Ultimate Jewish Teachers Handbook*.

**Randal F. Schnoor**, a sociologist, teaches at the Centre for Jewish Studies at York University in Toronto. He is co-author, with Alex Pomson, of *Back to School: Jewish day school as a source of meaning in the lives of adult Jews* (Wayne State University Press, 2008) and of the chapter titled "Bringing school home" in the forthcoming *Jewish Day Schools, Jewish Communities: A Reconsideration* (London: Littman Library of Jewish Civilization). His research on Jewish identity has been published in academic journals such as *Sociology of Religion*, *Canadian Ethnic Studies* and *Canadian Jewish Studies*. Since 2005 he has served as president of the Association for Canadian Jewish Studies.

**Serene Victor** is Lecturer and Faculty Leader of the DeLeT/MAT Program at Brandeis University. Previously, Serene was Consultant for Synagogue Education for the United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism. She has served as Education Director at a large Conservative congregation, designed and directed a national institute for new school directors, supervised interns in the Hornstein Program in Jewish Communal Service and served as a mentor for new graduates of JTS Davidson School of Education. An alumna of the Mandel Teacher Educator Institute (MTEI), Serene received an honorary doctorate from the Jewish Theological Seminary.

**Susan L. Shevitz** is an Associate Professor at Brandeis University and is a senior research associate at its Mandel Center for Studies in Jewish Education as well as an instructor at the Rabbinical School of Boston's Hebrew College where her teaching focuses on the organizational contexts of rabbinic work as well as leadership. Her current consulting, teaching and research focus on change in congregations and educational settings, religious pluralism in Jewish education as well as patterns of leadership. Recent publications include a review of efforts to improve congregational education over the last decade ("Don't Conduct, Improve: New Approaches to Changing Jewish Schools," in Paul Flexner and Roberta Goodman, eds., *What We NOW Know about Jewish Education* and "Building Community in a Pluralist Jewish High School" in Alex Pomson and Howard Dietscher, eds., *Jewish Day Schools, Jewish Communities*, The Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, forthcoming).

**Harold Wechsler** is a professor of education at the Steinhardt School of Culture, Education, and Human Development, New York University. He co-directs Steinhardt's doctoral program in Education and Jewish Studies. His publications include *Jewish Learning in American Universities: The First Century* (with Paul Ritterband), *Access to Success in the Urban High School: The Middle College Movement*, *The Transfer Challenge*, and *The Qualified Student: A History of Selective College Admission in America, 1870-1970*. He also edits the annual *Almanac of Higher Education* for the National Education Association and co-edits the *ASHE Reader on the History of Higher Education* (with Linda Eisenmann and Lester Goodchild). He is the 2008 president of the History of Education Society.

**Cyd Beth Weissman**, is the director of the New York RE-IMAGINE Project of the Experiment in Congregational Education (ECE) of the Rhea Hirsch School of Education of Hebrew Union College, where she also teaches Organizational Dynamics and Curriculum on the New York campus. Prior to her work with ECE, Cyd worked as the Director of Education at Congregation Beth Am Israel, Penn Valley, PA where she was a member of a team that created one of the earliest Shabbat Centered Communal Models of Education. Her recent publications include: "Professional Development Requires A Discipline for Seeing Wholes" in the upcoming book, *What We NOW Know About Jewish Education*; and *Vision by Evolutionaries and Revolutionaries*. Cyd also teaches for the Legacy Heritage Fund.

**Jack Wertheimer** is Professor of American Jewish History at the Jewish Theological Seminary and serves as a consultant to The AVI CHAI Foundation. In the latter capacity he has directed a project on the changing role of Jewish education in the American Jewish community, which culminated in an edited volume, *Family Matters: Jewish Education in an Age of Choice*. He has also completed a number of studies for the foundation on Jewish supplementary education, including most recently a census report.

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# NOTES

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