

The Jewish Resource Specialist Program Year 3 Evaluation Findings

*Prepared for the Jim Joseph Foundation
and the Early Childhood Education Initiative (ECEI) at the Jewish Community
Federation of San Francisco, the Peninsula, Marin and Sonoma Counties*

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Introduction

JRS Overview

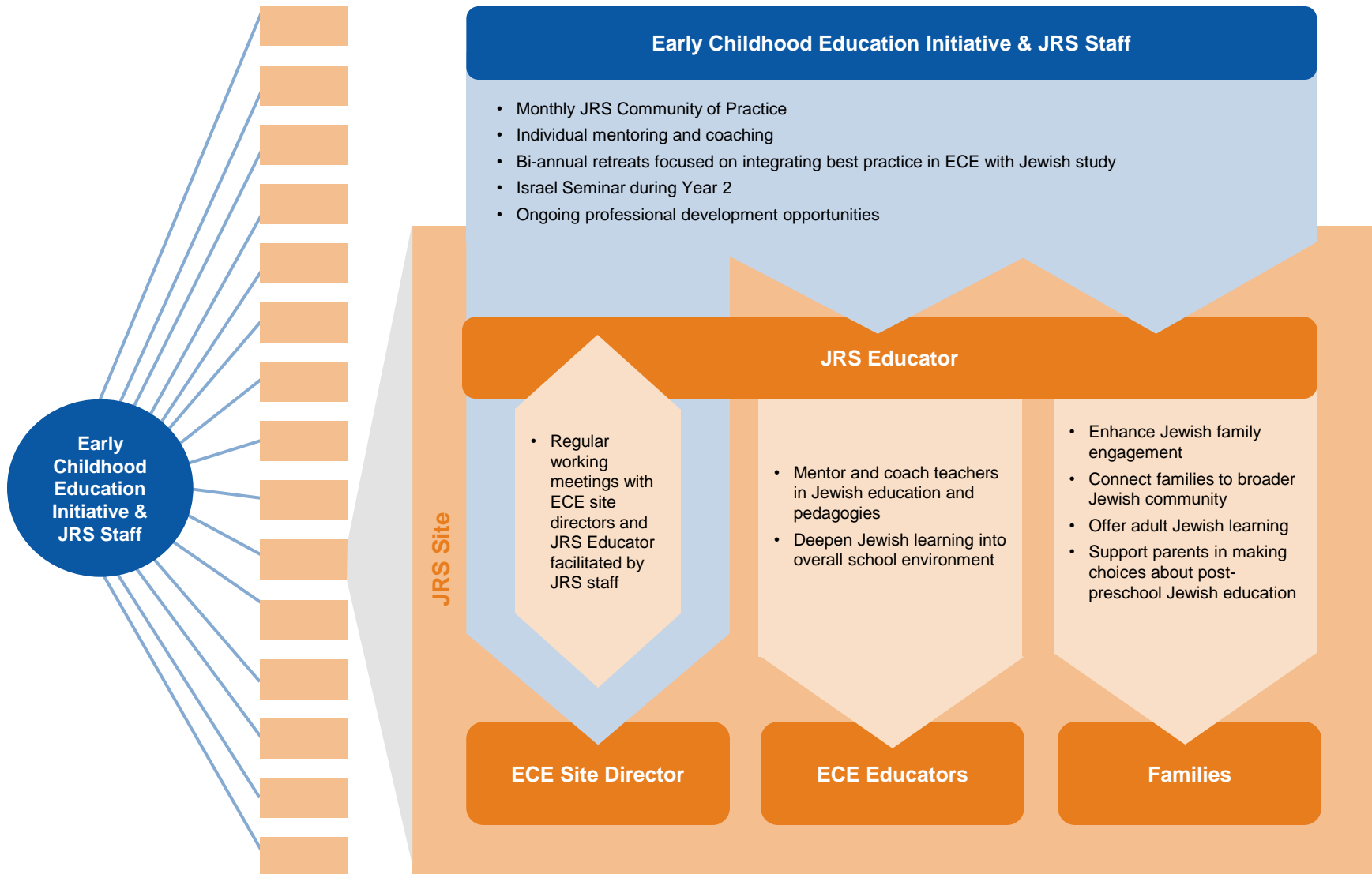
JRS is a flagship initiative of the Early Childhood Education Initiative (ECEI) of the Jewish Community Federation of San Francisco, the Peninsula, Marin and Sonoma Counties. **The overarching goals of JRS are to deepen the overall Jewish experience in Bay Area Early Childhood Jewish Education (ECJE) institutions and support parents in making Jewish choices for their families** while supporting the ongoing professionalization of the ECJE field.

JRS achieves its goals through hiring a seasoned preschool teacher to serve as a JRS educator in each site. Each JRS educator is compensated for an additional 10 hours per week and receives professional development and leadership training focused on Jewish learning and knowledge. Utilizing this additional time, knowledge and support, the JRS educators:

- **Plan and implement Jewish family engagement programming for JRS schools, and**
- **Serve as in-house resources and mentors of Jewish education and pedagogic content within JRS schools.**

JRS was designed as a demonstration project with intentions to replicate, adapt and/or scale. This three year pilot program launched in 2011 at five Jewish Early Childhood Education (ECE) sites in the Bay Area. In June 2014, a new \$1.75 million grant was allocated to expand the JRS program from 5 to 15 Jewish ECE sites in the Bay Area, broadening this hands-on Jewish learning program to include hundreds of local children, teachers and preschool parents.

Early Childhood Education Initiative Jewish Resource Specialist Model



JEWISH RESOURCE SPECIALIST PROGRAM LOGIC MODEL OVERVIEW

PURPOSE: To deepen the overall Jewish experience in the participating JRS schools for the staff, families and students.

PROBLEMS/ISSUES ADDRESSED	TARGET CONSTITUENCIES	ACTIVITIES	SHORT-TERM OUTCOMES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Jewish families are not inspired by Jewish life and learning and lack information about Jewish educational opportunities There is a need for enhanced Jewish education for Jewish preschool children Preschool institutions and educators need support to integrate enhanced Jewish frameworks into their classrooms, family programming and relationships with families Public perception of ECJE teachers and directors is poor ECJE standards of excellence are not yet widely applied There is high turnover among ECJE teachers and directors and challenges filling director positions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 5 JRS school sites ECJE teachers and directors JRS preschool parents and their children Bay Area ECJE community <p>RESOURCES/INPUTS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 5 JRS educators 5 school partnerships ECEI Department Consultants supporting the JRS Community of Practice Funding from JJF; funding and long-term institutional support from JCFSF; annually increasing funding from 5 JRS schools JRS Advisory Committee JRS curricular resources School supports to JRS educators (e.g., JRS parent) Jewish adult learning opportunities 	<p>ACTIVITIES</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Jewish family engagement Jewish learning for parents Mentoring and coaching for teachers in Jewish education and pedagogic content Jewish professional development for 5 JRS educators <i>and</i> for 5 JRS schools Awareness raising in ECJE community <p>OUTPUTS</p> <p>JRS Educators</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 10 hours/week supporting teachers, engaging families and deepening Jewish curricula Number and nature of new programs and outreach methods Number and nature of coaching and mentoring supports to teachers <p>Families</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Parents attend programs at JRS schools <p>JRS Schools</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Continued JRS partnership <p>School Educators & Directors</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Support received from JRS educators Meetings with JRS educators and school directors New or improved resources in schools <p>Bay Area ECJE community</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Meetings with host institution leadership Meetings highlighting JRS 	<p>SHORT-TERM OUTCOMES</p> <p>The JRS School</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increased capacity to connect families with Jewish community resources and post-preschool educational opportunities Deepened Jewish knowledge and Jewish pedagogic knowledge among teachers Improved integration of Jewish learning into classrooms JRS is sustained in 5 sites <p>Families</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increasingly meaningful family participation in school events Increased proportion of families informed about Jewish life/learning opportunities <i>and</i> whose Jewish engagement is informed by JRS <p>Partnerships & Community Awareness</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increased school interest in learning about the JRS model <p>LONG-TERM OUTCOMES</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increased prominence and prioritization of family engagement at JRS schools Increased integration of Jewish frameworks into school-wide activities The JRS position is institutionalized in 5 sites <i>and</i> expands to 5+ additional schools Continued contribution of JRS educators to the ECJE community The Bay Area is an ECJE leader

ULTIMATE IMPACT: Bay Area families are engaged in and inspired by Jewish education and Jewish life in their community.

5 Diverse JRS Schools + 5 Diverse JRS Educators = 5 Different JRS Programs

Preschool	Location	Total Families (2013–2014)	Total Students (2013–2014)	Host Site	Affiliation
Chai Preschool	Foster City	54	62	None (housed at a Congregation)	None (loose connection with Chabad)
Osher Marin Jewish Community Preschool	San Rafael	96	110	Jewish Community Center	Jewish Community Center Association
Oshman Family JCC Preschool (T'enna)	Palo Alto	247	271	Jewish Community Center	Jewish Community Center Association
Temple Emanu-el Preschool	San Francisco	97	105	Congregation	Union for Reform Judaism (URJ)
Temple Sinai Preschool	Oakland	76	85	Congregation	Union for Reform Judaism (URJ)

Evaluation Overview

This report presents the final cumulative evaluation findings for the Jewish Resource Specialist Program (JRS) over the three years of the JRS pilot, including key achievements and challenges. The evaluation assesses the JRS program overall—as a model—and not individual sites.

This evaluation addresses the following two distinct evaluation questions:

- 1. How, and to what extent, are families at JRS schools increasing their engagement in Jewish life and learning within JRS schools and in the community?**
- 2. How, and to what extent, is JRS deepening Jewish learning within the JRS school environment?**

This evaluation also seeks to document the growth and change of JRS across the three years, providing insights into aspects of the program best poised for replication and scale.

Informing Change will document the JRS model in the fall of 2014. This process will identify and describe key components of the model, including clarifying those that are most important to ensuring its success. The process will conclude with a narrative report that will be disseminated to stakeholders. Components of the model not addressed in this deck of findings will be addressed in the forthcoming report.

DATA COLLECTION METHODS*

1. Key informant interviews:
 - JRS educators
 - JRS school directors
 - Teachers in JRS schools
 - ECEI/JRS staff
 - Host institution directors
2. Site visits to each of the JRS schools
3. Survey of parents in all JRS schools
3. Review of materials about the JRS program

* Please see the appendix for further information on the data collection methods and evaluation strengths and limitations.

Programmatic Findings: Jewish Family Engagement

Schools have markedly improved the quality of Jewish family engagement and attribute this change explicitly to the JRS program.

All types of evaluation informants report ongoing improvements in Jewish family engagement programs*, similar to previous year's evaluation learnings. We see this as a positive development, indicating that JRS is making progress towards its short- and long-term goals and continuing a trajectory of growing and improving.

Jewish content continues to be more meaningful and relevant, holiday programs draw more deeply from Jewish tradition and classroom learning is more explicitly integrated into family programming. Secular programs, such as back-to-school events, more intentionally integrate Jewish content.

Additionally, JRS schools continue to offer increasingly diverse and creative programs. Many of these efforts, such as intimate grade-level programs or family camp, were not offered prior to the JRS initiative. Further, schools are incorporating parent interests into increasingly diverse parent engagement programming.

"There's been more focus and intention on family programs. The difference is in the details and in the engagement itself. There's more symbolism and more music. I have been getting more positive feedback from parents, too, about the connection to Judaism."

—Teacher

* The use of the word programs in this deck refers to activities, events and programs that are Jewish in nature, unless otherwise noted.

EXAMPLES OF NEW & IMPROVED FAMILY ENGAGEMENT PROGRAMS OVER TIME

Integration of Jewish content into secular family events & programming

- Messages from JRS educators in weekly parent newsletters
- Including more Jewish resources and references in parent e-newsletters
- Including Jewish values into parenting workshops
- Integrating Jewish content into an annual welcome picnic, school nature day and gardening events
- Introducing Jewish growth, in addition to overall developmental growth, into parent teacher conferences.
- Integrating the Jewish lifecycle into a science and nature programs

New and/or Enhanced Jewish family engagement programming

- Sukkot family breakfast
- Havdalah family program
- Tu BiShvat seder and tree planting
- Tzedekah family program
- Challah baking classes that introduce families to Shabbat
- Mitzvah Day
- Weekend Family Camp
- Kevah adult Jewish learning groups
- DIY preschool family Shabbat dinners
- Classes on Jewish food
- Preschool gallery hour at the Contemporary Jewish Museum
- Rosh Chodesh family evening
- Assigning new parents a “buddy” family
- Smaller segmented events (e.g., age-group events, father’s group)

Other

- Increased events and conversations about post-preschool Jewish educational opportunities
- “Jewish holiday 101” flyers, targeted to interfaith families, that offer basic information about a given Jewish holiday and encourages families to ask questions and participate in Jewish rituals and traditions
- Preschool Facebook page
- JRS educators greeting parents at morning drop-off to build visibility and sustain relationships
- More partnerships around family engagement, such as cosponsoring programs with PJ Library
- Hebrew club for alumni students

The JRS Parent role enhances family engagement programs and builds the capacity of JRS in each school.

The JRS Parent, a volunteer role in which a parent helps the JRS educator plan and deliver family programs, continues to be a highly successful Jewish family engagement strategy. The JRS Parent brings an understanding of parent interests, facilitates connections with other parents and helps JRS educators offer relevant family programs, all while supporting the JRS educator at their site. Additionally, this role creates opportunities for parents to be more active in Jewish life.

JRS schools are beginning to develop and offer adult Jewish educational programming. However, the quality of these programs is often uneven.

In response to parent interest and a desire to engage families more deeply, JRS schools have developed adult Jewish educational programs. This is not yet common practice in Jewish preschools, and, as such, is an encouraging new effort often attributed to the JRS program.

However, some sites have struggled to attract a critical mass of parents and most report a need for higher-quality programs. Part of this is because JRS educators do not have the requisite skill set for leading adult educational programs. Some would prefer that adult education be the responsibility of an on-site seasoned adult educator or offered through an external provider such as Kevah. If JRS educators will be expected to implement adult programming, they will require more training.

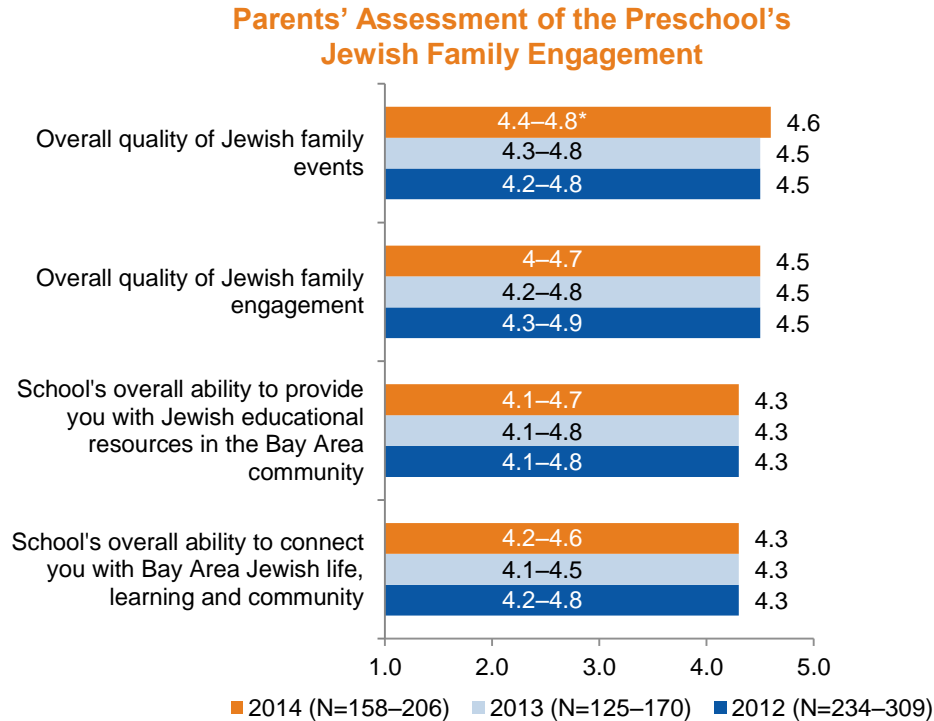
"[JRS parent] is really enthusiastic. She had a voice from the parents that I wasn't dialed into. She picked parents' brains about what they wanted and came back to me and shared...It is really cool to have a parent who supports what we're doing to add to the richness of the Jewish lives of these families."

—JRS Educator

Parents at JRS schools are highly satisfied with Jewish family engagement in their children’s preschools.

The vast majority of parents are highly satisfied with the major program elements of Jewish family engagement.

While responses for each question range from 1 to 5, most parents chose “good” (4) or “very good” (5) across the three years of the JRS pilot. Overall ratings have been consistent since the beginning of this evaluation.



SURVEYING PARENTS IN JRS SCHOOLS

The parent survey for this evaluation gathers information about Jewish family engagement and the overall Jewish learning environment from all parents at all five JRS preschools. This evaluation takes a cohort approach, gathering feedback from the cohort of all parents at each school each year, rather than tracking the same parents from year to year. Changes from year to year, whether an increase or decrease, refer to the sample as a whole and not individual families. Therefore, some of the observed differences may be due to differences in the parent sample from last year to this year rather than the intervention itself.

* The numbers within each horizontal bar represent the range across the five sites.

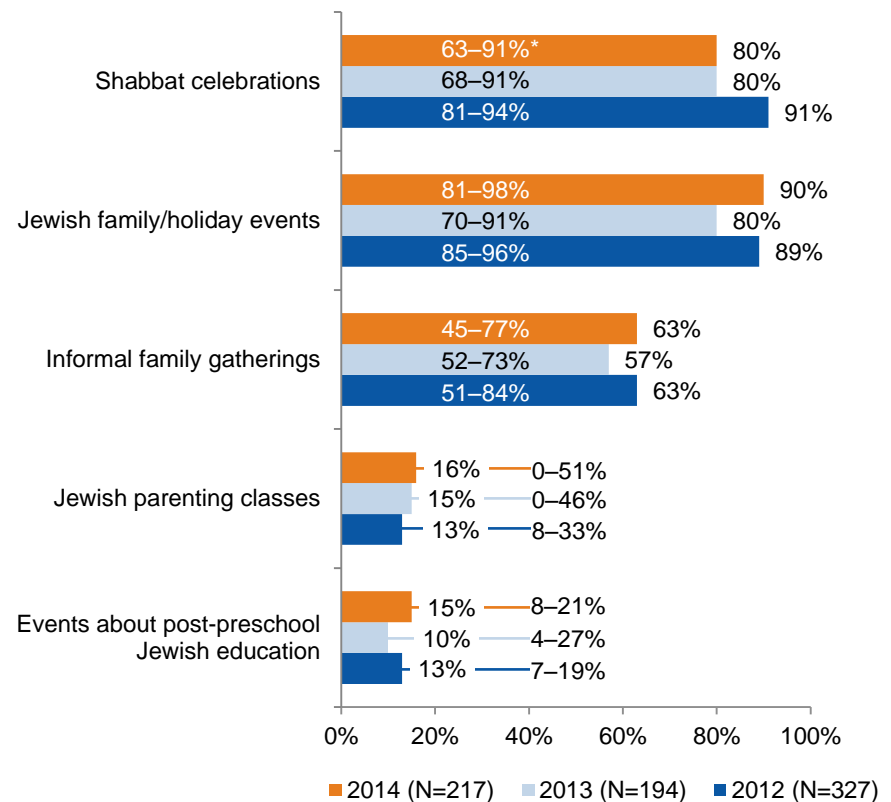
Parent participation is strong in Jewish events at the preschool, particularly Jewish holiday programs.

Parents most frequently attend Shabbat celebrations and Jewish family and holiday events. Throughout the three years of this evaluation, parents report attending an average of 8–10 Jewish preschool events each year. Parent participation in preschool events varies and is related to school size and types and quantity of programming offered.

"I expected to have excellent Jewish content and engagement for the kids in the classroom, and my expectations have been met. What I didn't expect was the great Jewish parenting content and support outside the classroom. In this area, my expectations have been exceeded."

–Parent

Preschool Events Attended

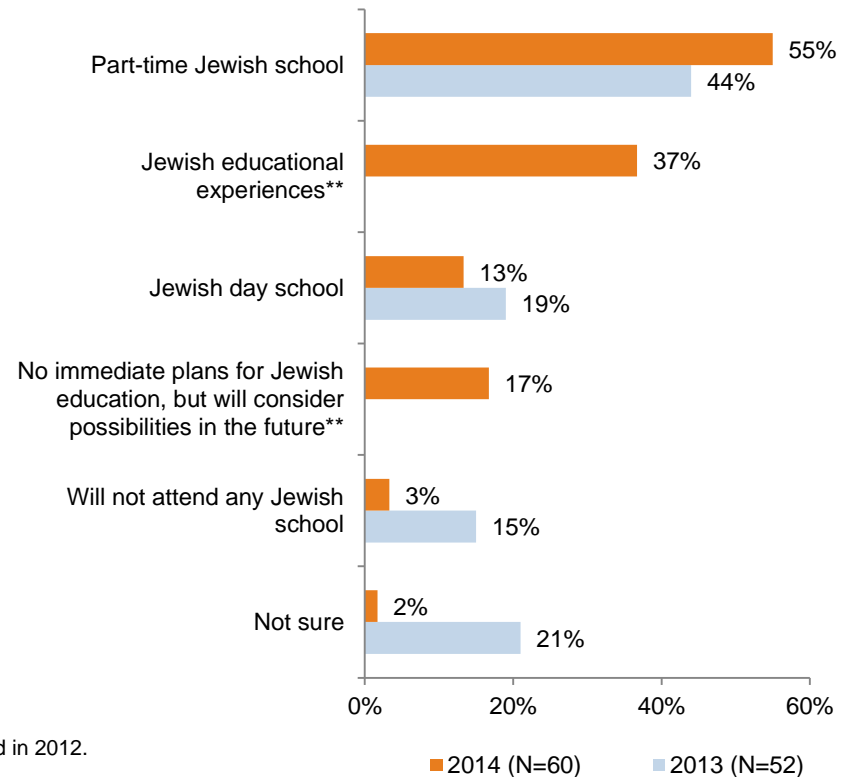


* The numbers within or connected to each bar represent the frequency range across the five JRS sites.

The majority of parents with children in the final year of preschool are choosing a Jewish educational framework for their child, and preschools are helping them consider their options.

- Across this evaluation, **between 63–80% of parent respondents with children in the final year of preschool report that their child will be in a Jewish educational framework** (either part-time Jewish school or day school) after preschool.
- Of parents with children in the final year of preschool, **between 69–78% report that their preschool has supported them in considering the role of Judaism in their post-preschool plans** for their child.
- Throughout the evaluation, parents have expressed interest in learning more about Jewish educational options in the Bay Area for their children.

Post-Preschool Plans for Jewish Education*



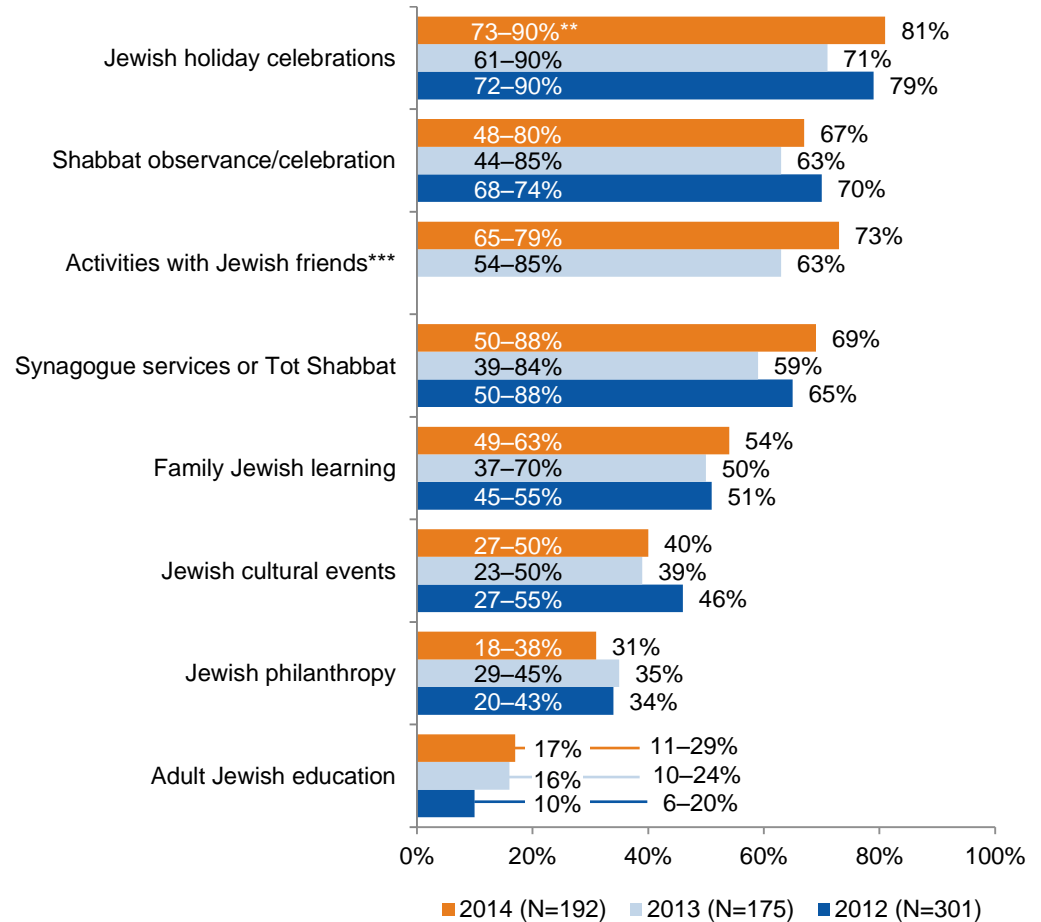
* Responses exclude families that do not identify as Jewish. Question not asked in 2012.

** New item asked in 2014 (not 2013)

Parents are actively participating in Jewish life within the broader Jewish community.

Parents most frequently attend Shabbat and Jewish holiday events, activities with Jewish friends and synagogue services or Tot Shabbat. Across the three years of data collection, parents report attending an average of between 14 and 19 Jewish community events annually.

Jewish Community Events Attended*



* Excludes families that do not identify as Jewish.

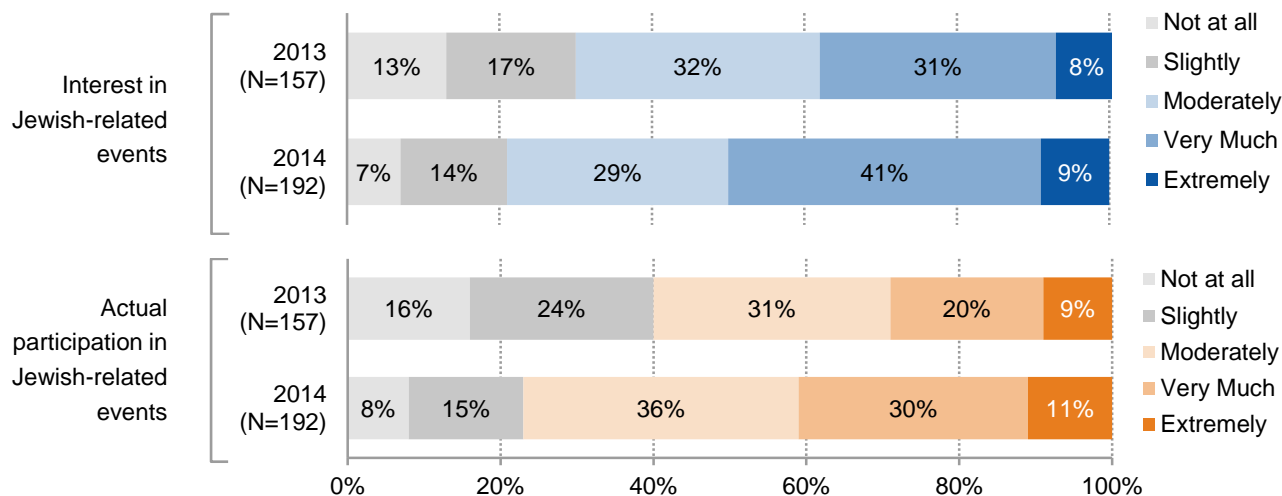
** The numbers within each bar represent the frequency range across the five JRS sites.

*** New item asked in 2013 and 2014 (not 2012)

JRS Preschools are influencing parent interest and participation in Jewish life in the Bay Area.

Across this evaluation, between 39–50% of parents report that their preschool “very much” or “extremely” influenced their **interest in Jewish-related events or activities** in the Bay Area. Between 29–41% of parents report that their preschool “very much” or “extremely” influenced their **actual participation in Jewish-related events or activities** in the Bay Area. On both of these measures, the influence of the preschool on parents increased between 2013 and 2014.

Preschool Influence on Parent Interest and Actual Participation in Jewish-Related Events*



* Excludes families that do not identify as Jewish. Question not asked in 2012.

Further improvements to Jewish family engagement are limited by some institutional barriers across JRS schools and host sites.

Across different sites, the JRS program is facing similar obstacles that make it difficult to ensure high quality Jewish life and learning opportunities for families. These challenges are not unique to JRS sites, and likely mirror obstacles experienced in other Jewish preschools and Jewish institutions.

- **Connecting families to the broader Bay Area Jewish community:** Across the three years of this evaluation, and with the exception of post-preschool educational opportunities, JRS preschools have not focused on building their capacity to connect families to Jewish life and learning opportunities in the broader Bay Area Jewish community. While JRS schools report limited time to identify and share such opportunities with parents, this may reflect a larger challenge. For preschools affiliated with a specific movement or denomination, promoting community programs is, at worst, perceived by JRS educators and/or leadership as not mission aligned or, at best, not a top priority.
- **Engaging working families:** Respondents report that family engagement programs in Jewish preschools have historically been offered during or immediately following the preschool day. As schools are increasingly prioritizing Jewish family engagement, they are realizing that programming during the workday (between 9–5) precludes the participation of many working parents. JRS schools are thinking about how they can better engage working families, such as offering more weekend and evening programs, though none have yet finalized solutions.
- **Integrating JRS into institution-wide family engagement efforts:** In a few sites, the JRS position has expanded its exclusive preschool focus to an institution-wide effort with intentions to better integrate Jewish family engagement. For example, JRS educators are coordinating with congregational religious schools or JCC family engagement coordinators and planning more events together. While institutions are pleased with increased integration, which deepens JRS's value-add, this does blur the scope of each JRS educator's responsibilities and, in a few instances, has created some cross departmental "turf" tensions.

Programmatic Findings: Deepening Jewish Learning

All types of interview informants report that the JRS program helps schools deepen Jewish learning, improve Jewish curriculum and enrich the overall Jewish environment of each JRS site.

Deepening Jewish learning findings from this final year of the JRS pilot evaluation are similar to those from the 2013 evaluation learnings, demonstrating that the JRS program is continuing a trajectory of growing and improving. School directors suggest that Jewish learning might have deepened without JRS, because it is a school priority, but likely not as much or as consistently. Most respondents attribute these changes to the JRS program.

- Within each JRS school, **Jewish content and concepts are more intentionally integrated into the overall curriculum**, the physical space and, perhaps most importantly, the culture and structure of JRS schools.
- **JRS educators support teachers to improve classroom practices** by offering fresh ideas for activities, integrating Jewish themes into the curricula and bringing new resources to teachers.
- Teachers, even those with years of classroom experience and self-reported strong Jewish backgrounds, appreciate that **JRS educators have created a school environment that offers richer Jewish tradition, values and culture.** Teachers particularly value learning opportunities in which they, as adults, explore Jewish concepts. This helps them more effectively translate these concepts into their work.

"JRS is a facilitator. [JRS] doesn't pretend to have all the answers, but she's there to ask provocative questions that guide the teachers. It's collaborative. They come up with curriculum ideas and family program ideas together and then everybody has a role in developing either the family program or the curriculum. And JRS will provide them the information that they need."

—Preschool Director

"The JRS model creates a seamless environment in which there is no separation between Jewish early childhood education and early childhood education."

—JRS Educator

JRS educators continue to be a valuable “go-to” resource for teachers in their schools.

- **JRS educators are working with the unique setting, structure and size of their preschools to provide supports to teachers.** This often requires focusing on particular teachers—such as those new to the school or teaching a particular age group—or on a certain component of Jewish learning, such as holiday celebrations or creating sacred Jewish spaces in each classroom. Utilizing staff meetings as a forum has been an effective way for JRS educators to support teachers in integrating Jewish content and concepts into their classroom environment.
- **Supports from JRS educators are particularly valuable to new preschool teachers and those with little Jewish background.** This has been a consistent strength of the JRS program model.

“If teachers need help with presenting a Jewish topic, integrating a Jewish theme into the classroom learning or developing handouts for parents, we have a special person to go and talk to. It’s very helpful.”

–Teacher

“[JRS] communicates with all teachers to find out what we need. [JRS] is great at telling us the big picture behind what we are teaching the children, which really helps us understand. Once we know and enjoy the story, the children enjoy it more as well. I can’t think of anything [JRS] could do better.”

–Teacher

- **Sites report overall improvements in teacher capacity.** However, it is more difficult for the JRS educator to provide the same level of support in larger schools with more staff.
- **JRS educators are most effective when they present themselves as accessible facilitators** eager to support and partner with teachers. This team-based, relationship-based approach earns them the trust of their peers.

EXAMPLES OF NEW & IMPROVED “DEEPENING JEWISH LEARNING” SUPPORTS OFFERED TO TEACHERS OVER TIME

- Leading school-wide workshops that empower teachers to learn more about Jewish holidays and traditions and which, as a result, inspire new ideas for classroom activities
- Leading Jewish content in staff meetings
- Building a shared school-wide Jewish vocabulary, including Hebrew phrases, words of the month and Jewish values, often aligned with each school’s values
- Ensuring the presence of Jewish ritual objects in each classroom
- Increasing the presence of Israel and Hebrew in the classroom
- Suggesting age-appropriate Jewish books that connect to classroom inquiries, and occasionally serving as “guest storyteller” in others’ classrooms
- Delivering tailored, individual programs—in individual classrooms and age-groups—such as interactive holiday programs, Jewish values based activities and Jewish-inspired art projects
- Connecting science and nature learning to Jewish themes, such as learning about honey from a beekeeper before Rosh Hashanah
- Helping teachers weave Jewish content into parent communications, such as newsletters, whiteboard notes and general, ongoing interactions
- Creating more connections between home and school, such as a classroom Shabbat Box and Monday Havdalah
- Compiling a photo album for each child that includes Jewish holidays and values

Teachers and directors value that JRS educators are first and foremost teachers. However, schools are still searching for the optimal way to support preschool teachers during the school day.

Initially, JRS was designed for each educator to conduct individual classroom observations and mentor teachers to build teacher capacity to deliver higher quality Jewish education and pedagogic content. In light of logistical challenges, however, the JRS program made a key midcourse correction; JRS educators began delivering Jewish content in staff meetings and in meetings with grade-level or other small teacher groupings. Additionally, some schools modified the JRS educator schedule to ensure he/she has dedicated out-of-classroom time to support teachers.

JRS educators and school directors strongly prefer these alternatives, which they report continue to build teacher capacity without the time-consuming logistical challenges. However, because even these smaller group supports require JRS educators to leave their classrooms, this remains an ongoing challenge. Most schools are looking to JRS/ECEI staff to help them identify and develop appropriate solutions that will work within their school structure. As JRS expands to new sites, JRS/ECEI might consider documenting options that new sites can consider as they begin implementing the JRS program.

"The age group meetings that [JRS] started leading with teachers has created a community of practice within the school, something we didn't have before JRS. It's created opportunities for teachers to learn from and collaborate with each other."

–Preschool Director

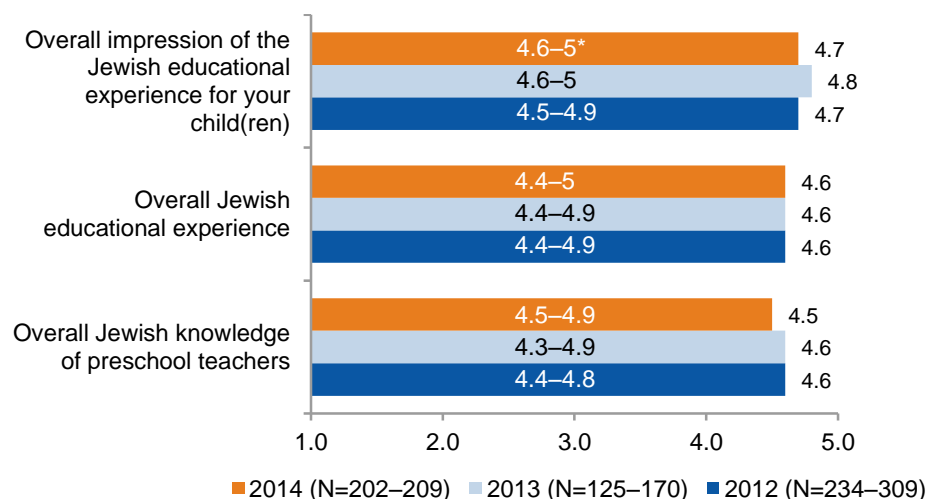
Parents are highly satisfied with the Jewish Educational Environment in their children’s preschools.

“The Jewish environment at [school] is robust and rich. My child brings some excellent questions about Judaism, many of which I can’t answer (which is rather Jewish, isn’t it?). And, [school] has helped spawn a curiosity about his Jewishness.”

–Parent

- **Across all measures, parents reported they were highly satisfied with the overall Jewish educational experience and the overall Jewish knowledge of preschool teachers.** While the range of responses for each question has been from 1 to 5, most chose “good” (4) or “very good” (5) over the three years of the JRS evaluation. Parents, like JRS educators, teachers and school directors, note that the quality of Jewish education does vary by classroom.
- With consistently high parent satisfaction with the Jewish Educational Environment, there is limited opportunity for substantial improvement. The JRS program might consider how it can maintain schools’ capacity to ensure a deep Jewish learning environment over time, especially given the regular onboarding of new staff.

Parents’ Assessment of the Preschool’s Jewish Educational Environment



* The numbers within each horizontal bar represent the range across the five sites.

Reflections on the JRS Model

Key Components of the JRS Model

This section shares key reflections from the evaluation on JRS as a programmatic model. Components of the model not addressed in this section (e.g., the financial model) will be addressed in the forthcoming report that documents the JRS model more fully.

As a reminder, core components of the JRS program include:

- A JRS educator in each site who is who is compensated for 10 hours per week to focus on Jewish family engagement programming and to serve as an on-site resource to other teachers
- Monthly JRS Community of Practice meetings
- Individual mentoring and coaching to each JRS educator by JRS/ECEI staff
- Bi-annual retreats for JRS educators focused on integrating best practice in ECE with Jewish study
- An Israel Seminar during Year 2 for JRS educators
- Ongoing professional development opportunities for teachers in JRS schools

Supports provided by JRS/ECEI are effective and highly valued by JRS educators and schools, proving an essential component of the JRS model.

Ongoing professional development supports, supplemental training and counseling offered by JRS/ECEI staff to the JRS educators and schools have helped JRS sites make targeted improvements to Jewish educational content, enhance program administration, and, when needed, troubleshoot and resolve challenges as they arise.

- All types of interview respondents report that **JRS/ECEI staff bring legitimacy to the program** with their knowledge of the ECJE field and their long-standing, trusted relationships with the preschools.
- JRS educators report that the *Y'mei Iyyun* (learning days) and **Community of Practice are high-quality, engaging experiences**. They appreciate the opportunities to engage in theoretical discussions about learning and teaching as well as to develop tactical skills that help them make progress towards their school's JRS goals.
- **JRS educators highly value the one-on-one coaching**, which has been helpful as they navigate their roles. Directors appreciate consults with JRS/ECEI as they conceptualize and troubleshoot JRS implementation.
- Despite the challenges they experience—balancing both JRS goals, navigating being both a peer and a mentor to teachers, and doing the JRS work within 10 hours a week—all **JRS educators feel supported by the JRS program and their preschool**.
- For those JRS educators who participated in the Israel seminar, it was an enriching personal experience that deepened their connection to Israel. While they developed some new and enhanced Israeli-related curriculum as a result of the experience, they do not report that the Israel seminar helped them make progress towards their school's JRS goals.

"[JRS staff] are fabulous—they're always there. The Community of Practice is really supportive. The professional development is great. I couldn't have asked for more support."

—JRS Educator

Serving as a proof point that JRS is both possible and effective, all five JRS schools plan to continue the program, with some modifications.

- **While each of the five JRS pilot sites is committed to funding JRS over the next few years, all are making modifications to the current configuration that better to fit their schools resources, structure and needs.** For example, some JRS educators will be more focused on Jewish family engagement than supporting teachers and vice versa. Others have expanded JRS into an organization wide effort no longer limited to the preschool. All schools will reduce professional development funding, which stakeholders do not perceive to be a core component of the model or necessary to its success. For smaller schools, maintaining this significant cost would be a barrier to sustaining JRS.
- Preschool directors recognize that deepening Jewish learning and improving family engagement—as priority goals in each school—require ongoing attention. By shining a light on these needs, **JRS helps ensure that preschool directors and staff are focused on deepening the overall Jewish experience in their school**, particularly in classrooms and family engagement efforts. As such, JRS provides accountability and increases the school’s capacity to meet these goals.

“What value are we getting out of JRS? Our teachers are feeling supported and have a partner, which is huge for us and builds their confidence. With the family outreach, JRS connects with families who plan and participate in our family programs. We have done family programs in the past but now they carry a different meaning and show more intention. Having a designated JRS says a lot about the school and what our values are.”

—Preschool Director

- Institutional financial constraints may make it difficult for one institution to follow through on its commitment to sustaining JRS over time. This reality underscores the importance of ensuring that each site's implementation of JRS aligns with institutional priorities and creates widely recognized value for each institution, thereby increasing the likelihood of maintaining funding for JRS during periods of budget cuts.

FROM PRESCHOOL DIRECTORS: IN THEIR OWN WORDS



"I'm so happy I found someone to share my workload! Delegating is a key piece of JRS. Also, family and teacher programs feel more grassroots, more so than when they come from the director. It is really organic and amazing to see it in action."



"With JRS, I have someone to go to who can drive professional development and support teachers."



"Our school needs to be thinking about programs that support our school values, and JRS is a natural way of supporting that."



"We are a Jewish preschool, yet over half of our teachers are themselves not Jewish. So the idea of having a JRS that the teachers could go to peer-to-peer is valuable. To go to a peer and say, 'I don't understand this thing about Hanukkah, or I don't know what this holiday is about' is a more comfortable model."



"Without JRS, you end up forgetting this or forgetting that and so it's really helpful to have one person who really is the resource, the go-to person other teachers know they can get what they need when they need it, someone who is there to be the voice at the table, who remembers the things that drive the school."

JRS has contributed to the retention and growth of professionals who are committed to their schools and high quality Jewish Early Childhood Education.

"JRS definitely influenced my career trajectory. I was a teacher before and now I'm a leader and a resource for teachers. I've been able to grow and push myself".

–JRS Educator

- **Participating in the JRS pilot program has had a substantial influence on all JRS educators.** For each of them, JRS has been an exciting and meaningful opportunity to expand their role and have an influence beyond the classroom, all while developing new skills. More than half report that, because of JRS, they either continued or plan to continue working in their school longer than they otherwise would have. They all also believe JRS has opened new professional opportunities.
- **JRS has piqued educators' interest in pursuing administrative and leadership opportunities in the ECJE space,** a career trajectory none had considered prior to becoming a JRS educator. For younger professionals, JRS has had more of an influence on their perception of themselves as leaders.
- **JRS educators greatly value the intentional cohort approach.** High-quality, relevant Community of Practice experiences helped them build knowledge and skills, reflect on their work and share best practices. They plan to stay in touch with each other after the official Community of Practice comes to an end. They are interested in occasional in person meetings, developing a JRS Facebook group and expressed a desire for ongoing support from JRS/ECEI staff.
- Further, JRS educators, committed to the program goals and the position, proactively initiated a desire to support and mentor the incoming cohort of JRS educators

There have been limited efforts showcasing JRS; the program should more intentionally share the JRS model as the program expands.

- **The JRS model is not consistently and effectively being shared within JRS institutions.** Host site directors report that they are not entirely clear on the vision, objectives and activities of the JRS program, and are not familiar with program outcomes in their institution. Especially as the host institution takes on responsibility for financially sustaining the program, some host site directors emphasize their interest in receiving more written information about the model and its implementation and more regular communication about JRS from both the preschool director and the JRS educator. A few recommend that JRS/ECEI staff present the JRS model in a future board meeting.
- **Despite not being widely shared with the broader ECJE community, there is clearly growing interest in the JRS model.** JRS educators and school directors report that they are neither actively sharing information about JRS nor receiving requests for information about JRS from other Bay Area Jewish preschools. While JRS/ECEI staff have shared the JRS model locally, there are limited conferences and events at which they can do so. The JRS program expansion, however, indicates that not only is the ECJE community becoming more aware of JRS, it is also interested in being a part of this model.

Given intentions to continue scaling and expanding the JRS program, JRS/ECEI should consider developing concrete plans and timelines to continue raising awareness about this initiative among Jewish preschools in the Bay Area and other relevant stakeholders. Finally, it is important to note that JRS/ECEI will be in a stronger position to more actively showcase the JRS program in the fall of 2014, after the JRS model has been documented.

Based on what has worked well with the JRS pilot and lessons learned from the challenges experienced along the way, particular criteria for success are emerging as the foundation of a strong program model.

- **Shared Purpose:** Ensure a shared understanding of the JRS program's purpose, goals and activities with all stakeholders (e.g., preschool directors, host institution leadership, teachers)
- **Alignment:** Align the JRS program activities with the preschool's Jewish vision, strategic goals of the host institution, parent interests and unique skills of each JRS educator
- **Relationships:** Select JRS educators who are approachable and respected among parents and teachers and ensure a strong partnership and shared vision between the JRS educator and preschool director
- **Accountability:** Provide focus, structure and accountability in each JRS site through setting priorities, developing work plans and documenting activities and progress
- **Flexibility:** Tailor the JRS program to the size, structure and needs of each preschool site
- **Buy-in:** Communicate consistently and regularly with key stakeholders about JRS and its achievements
- **Support:** Provide ongoing, customized support to each JRS school and JRS educator
- **Leadership:** Secure JRS with strong and committed preschool leadership and support from the host institution, when relevant
- **Governance:** Ensure school readiness and capacity for JRS through robust institutional structures and systems that prioritize JRS goals and empower JRS educators

Conclusion

Looking Forward

As the JRS pilot prepares for full program implementation, now is a good time to pause and reflect on the three years of this pilot program. From its first year of experimentation to its second year of refining program components, JRS has now completed a third year, one in which it made targeted improvements to the model and its implementation. While still a young program, JRS is achieving its short-term outcomes and is poised to make progress towards long-term outcomes. As the program expands to 15 sites, we offer the following questions to JRS/ECEI for consideration:

- **Quality Assurances:** Given the importance of tailoring the program to each site's unique context combined with the rapid scaling of JRS, how will JRS/ECEI ensure programmatic quality across sites?
- **Managing Scale:** Recognizing how valuable the group and customized supports have been to each JRS site over the past three years, how will JRS/ECEI ensure it has the capacity to provide ongoing, customized supports to new and existing sites?
- **Leveraging variance across sites:** With more independent, synagogue and JCC preschools of different sizes joining JRS, there is expanded opportunity to further explore how the program can be maximized across the different organizational configurations of Jewish preschools. How will JRS/ECEI identify these differences so that it can further refine the program model?
- **Innovation & Ongoing Learning:** During this pilot, each school has experimented with new structures and programming. As new sites join and pilot schools make modifications to the program, how will JRS/ECEI promote and document ongoing innovation, and, when appropriate, adjust the model? Further, how will JRS/ECEI identify good practices and share learnings across JRS sites?
- **Financial sustainability:** How will JRS/ECEI help sites plan for sustaining JRS over the long term? How can each site structure its goals and activities, as well as its communications, to increase the likelihood of securing long-term funding?
- **Sharing the Model:** Given intentions to continue scaling JRS, possibly beyond the Bay Area, how does JRS/ECEI plan to increase awareness about the JRS model?

Appendices

Appendix A: Data Collection Methods

This multi-year evaluation has utilized a mixed-method approach to address the two evaluation questions. The major data collection approaches are:

ANNUAL KEY INFORMANT INTERVIEWS

JRS educators

JRS school directors

Teachers in JRS schools

ECEI/JRS staff

Host institutions directors

SITE VISITS TO EACH OF THE FIVE JRS SCHOOLS IN SPRING 2012 & 2014

ANNUAL PARENT SURVEY:

Informing Change administered the survey through an online tool (Qualtrics) and offered incentives for participation. Out of a pool of 577–656 parents, 194–335 responded—a 30–55%* overall response rate, ranging from 21–63% across the sites.

ANNUAL MATERIALS REVIEW

Informing Change reviewed applications to JRS, Memos of Understanding, JRS resumes, JRS work plans (for JRS overall and individual schools), semi-annual grant reports submitted to JJF from ECEI, Community of Practice agendas, JRS reflections, ECJE research and other relevant articles.

* The overall yearly response rate is as follows: 2012, 55% ranging from 46–62% across sites; 2013, 30% ranging from 21-50% across sites; 2014, 38% ranging from 23-63% across sites

Appendix B: Evaluation Strengths & Limitations

STRENGTHS

- The evaluation uses multiple methods, which enabled Informing Change to triangulate findings to reach conclusions supported by multiple data sources. This gives BTW greater confidence in the findings and resulting implications.
- The overall survey response rate across preschools is has been 30–55%, ranging from 21–63% across schools, which is important to validate results. Response rates were higher in smaller schools and lower in larger schools, which prevents skewed responses, especially given the range in preschool sizes.

LIMITATIONS

- The primary data sources used in this evaluation are self-reported (e.g., surveys and interviews), which may present some bias. However, this evaluation bases findings only on commonly mentioned responses across multiple informants.
- This is a relatively small evaluation focused around two discrete questions, yet there is much additional information to learn from a pilot initiative.
- This evaluation assesses contribution toward outcomes rather than attribution. It is not possible in this evaluation to determine the degree to which results are due solely to the efforts of the JRS pilot.