

The Jewish Early Childhood Education Leadership Institute

The Jewish Early Childhood Education Leadership Institute (JECELI) is delivered by the Jewish Theological Seminary and the Hebrew Union College–Jewish Institute for Religion in collaboration with Bank Street College. This 15-month leadership institute aims to provide the knowledge and skills that early childhood education (ECE) directors need to further develop a school's Jewish culture, positive climate, and relationships with the community plus the skills of the entire staff. JECELI participants bring a high level of innovation to their ECE programs in congregations, day schools, and Jewish community centers.

COMPONENTS AND UNIQUE ASPECTS OF THE PROGRAM

JECELI includes an introductory in-person orientation, online study, communication with mentors once or twice per month, two weeks of study in New York City for two successive summers, and travel to Israel for a 10-day seminar. Areas of study include Jewish learning, reflective practice in a social context, leadership development, and community building. JECELI is designed for early Jewish education professionals who have up to five years of experience in a leadership position in a Jewish ECE program or at least three years of relevant teaching experience and interest in assuming a leadership position. Participants also are expected to have the following: at least a bachelor's degree in ECE or a related field; completed at least one course in the area of child development; and a basic understanding of Jewish learning, such as the cycle of Jewish holidays.

DEMOGRAPHICS AND WORKFORCE STATISTICS

Most of the 47 participants across three program cohorts were female (96 percent). Two thirds of the participants (66 percent) were 31–50 years old. JECELI participants came from congregation-based ECE centers ($n = 27$), Jewish community centers ($n = 10$), day schools ($n = 7$), and independent preschools or nursery schools ($n = 3$). Annually, these ECE directors serve nearly 1,700 children who are 0–2 years old, nearly 2,500 children who are 3–4 years old, and more than 1,300 children who are 5–6 years old. The families served are mostly middle and upper-middle income families and represent a mix of denominations as well as interfaith families and non-Jewish families.

Eligibility to participate in JECELI includes institutional commitment. Participants' institutions are responsible for a one-time institution fee of \$2,000 and may choose to provide the participant fee (\$1,000) as well. Institutions also are required to support the educator's participation in all the required JECELI learning experiences, including providing a relief person when necessary so that the person can attend all the sessions. Nearly all employers provided the support required by the program and gave JECELI participants the autonomy to use the practices learned. Most employers

covered paid time for study and travel (i.e., the participants did not need to give up vacation time), reimbursed for books and supplies, and provided some mentoring or coaching related to the newly acquired knowledge and skills.

LEARNING GOALS AND PROGRAM SATISFACTION

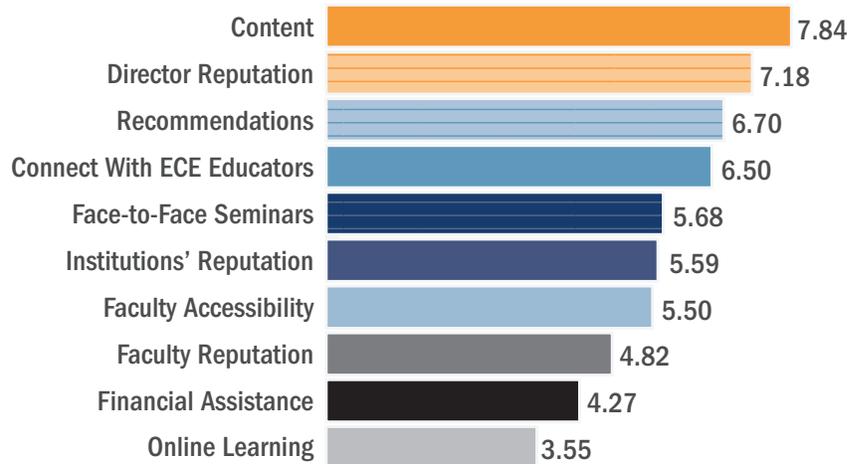
The JECELI participants indicated that a variety of professional development opportunities are available to them as ECE professionals. JECELI stood out as a unique professional development opportunity because of its focus on Jewish educational leadership. When asked to indicate the learning goals most important to them, participants pointed at leadership skills, ECE practices distinctive to Jewish education, and the desire to become a member of a professional network of Jewish early childhood educators (Exhibit 1; based on a sample of 44 survey respondents and rated on a scale of 1 to 10).



Although the reputation of the higher education institutions operating the program is an important consideration when selecting a professional development opportunity, participants cared more about the content of the leadership institute and the reputation of the director who directly organizes and leads the institute (Exhibit 2; rated on a scale of 1 to 10).

Most participants (93 percent) were satisfied or very satisfied with the in-person seminars. They noted that the instructors were engaging and delivered practical information that covered relevant and meaningful information and skills. In addition, the seminars highly contributed to the development of a professional learning community among the JECELI participants. In contrast, only about one half of the participants (57 percent) were satisfied with the online component of the program. The reasons for dissatisfaction were difficulties in navigating the Haiku platform used by the program and a feeling that the goals of online learning were not clearly articulated.

Exhibit 2. Enrollment Considerations



PROFESSIONAL GROWTH

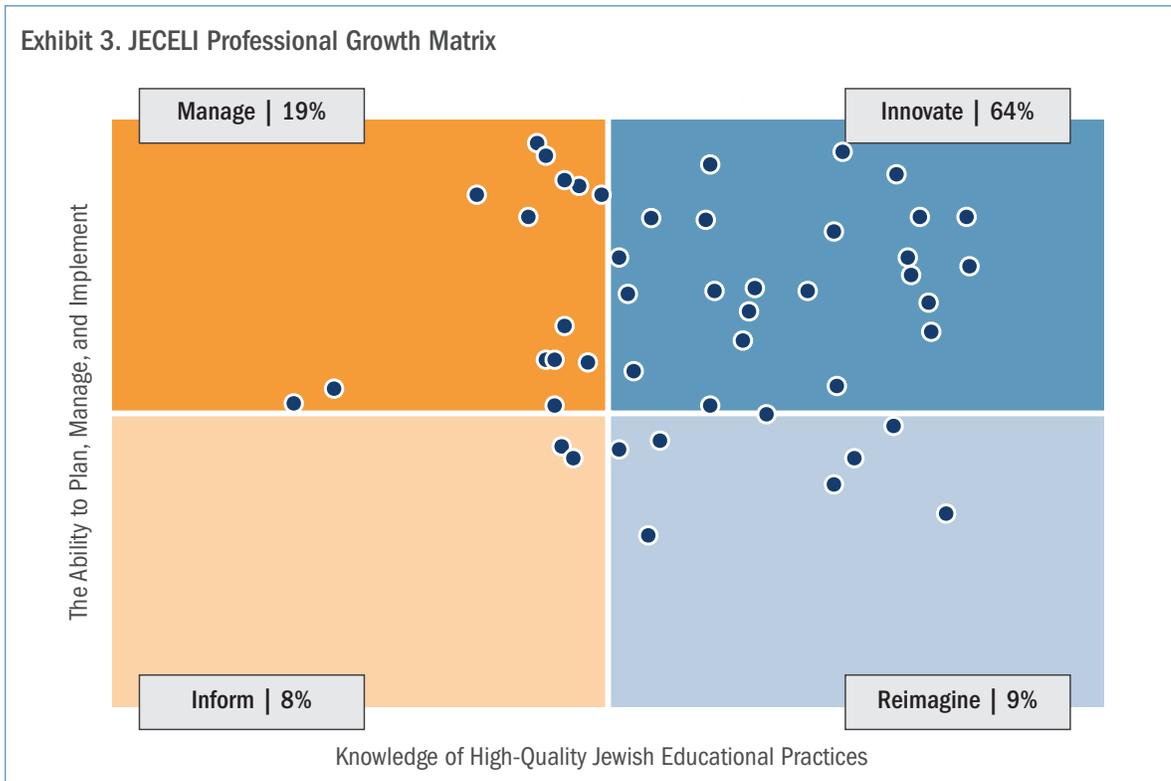
The Jim Joseph Foundation's Education Initiative seeks to increase the number of exceptional educators, administrators, and specialized support staff through investments in programs that attract, retain, and develop talent in Jewish education. The initiative is based on the assumption that given the right opportunities and support for career development, educators, administrators, and specialized support staff can deliver the best possible Jewish education for every child, adolescent, and young adult. To ensure their success, the initiative invested in professional development and degree programs at three institutions: Yeshiva University, Hebrew Union College–Jewish Institute of Religion, and the Jewish Theological Seminary.

To characterize how the programs supported by the Education Initiative influenced the work of individuals as Jewish educators and educational leaders, AIR researchers developed the Professional Growth Matrix (Exhibit 3), which is divided into four quadrants. Each quadrant embodies a profile of professional growth. The *y*-axis represents the ability to plan, manage, and implement processes and programs in Jewish education settings. The *x*-axis represents knowledge of effective, developmentally appropriate, Jewish educational practices. The currently available data represent the program's short-term effects. Long-term program effects may be greater as participants assume higher level positions that enable the application of their knowledge and skills.

The effects of the program on each participant depend on many factors, including prior Jewish knowledge and attitudes toward Jewish education, the type of organization and professional role in which the participant works, and autonomy to implement new practices and influence programming at the organizational level.

AIR used quantitative and qualitative data sources (participant surveys, alumni surveys, participant interviews, and employer interviews) to analyze the extent to which the master's program supported the professional growth of Jewish educators. Professional growth was estimated according to criteria in two categories: (1) ability to plan, manage, and implement programs and (2) knowledge of high-quality Jewish educational practices. The criteria listed under each category receive equal weight. The resulting score for each category is the sum of all criteria and an error component.

Exhibit 3. JECELI Professional Growth Matrix



Note. $N = 47$ participants; percentages of participants follow each quadrant label.

These data were coded using a systematic review form based on the following criteria:

Ability to Plan, Manage, and Implement Programs

- **Process Knowledge.** The participant deepened and broadened planning, coordinating, budgeting, supervising, staffing, and other management skills.
- **Relationship Skills.** The participant gained practical skills for managing interactions with colleagues, building a committed staff, and establishing connections within the organization and with individuals in other organizations.
- **Instructional Improvement.** The participant applied the new knowledge and skills from the program to refine or create a program or curriculum in Jewish education.
- **Organizational Improvement.** The participant applied the new knowledge and skills from the program to refine or create processes or policies that promote the capacity and efficiency of the organization.
- **Professional Network.** Through the program, the participant became part of a supportive professional network.
- **Professional Commitment and Self-Esteem.** Through the program, the participant developed stronger confidence in his or her own abilities, a commitment to a career in Jewish education, and motivation to apply the new knowledge and skills to support high-quality Jewish education.

Knowledge of High-Quality Jewish Educational Practices

- **Knowledge of Educational Practices.** The participant acquired knowledge of general educational models, research-based practices, and the alignment of pedagogy with learners' needs and developmental stages.
- **Jewish Learning.** Through the program, the participant acquired knowledge of effective pedagogy of Jewish studies and how to infuse Jewish values into staff learning; program development; and the implementation of programs for children, adolescents, and young adults.
- **Community Relations.** Through the program, the participant acquired knowledge of practices to assess the needs of the local community and align the organization's programs with these needs.
- **Job Description.** The participant gained a greater understanding of the responsibilities involved in one's professional role as well as the roles of others in the organization.
- **Translation of Theory to Practice.** The participant gained the ability to identify models of educational practice that are relevant to one's organization and adapt these models to fit the local context of the organization.
- **Needs Assessment.** The participants gained greater ability to collect and interpret data about the needs of one's organization, program, or classroom and identify areas for improvement.

Each dot on the graph in Exhibit 3 represents one participant. In this graph, each participant is classified into one of four quadrants based on the estimated program effects on the participant. The quadrants are labeled based on their location on the x-axis and y-axis, as follows:

- **Innovate.** High levels of change in relevant educational knowledge and management skills that enable high impact on the school, congregation, or other educational setting.
- **Manage.** A high level of change in management skills that enables one to execute program with high efficiency plus a lower level of change in one's ability to form a new vision for educational programs, practices, or policies.
- **Reimagine.** A high level of relevant educational knowledge that enables one to develop educational materials and become a source of wisdom for others. Participants in this quadrant have a lower level of change in managing or implementing at the organizational level.
- **Inform.** A low level of change in relevant knowledge and management skills. This quadrant typically represents new entrants to the field who work in positions that limit their ability to change current practice or professionals who have jobs that require a different set of knowledge and skills than those learned in the program.

CASE STUDIES REPRESENTING THE FOUR QUADRANTS OF THE PROFESSIONAL GROWTH MATRIX

Innovate

Debra Klein (pseudonym) is an ECE director in a congregation and joined JECELI because, as a relatively young director with fewer years of field experience than most of the congregation staff, she sought both knowledge and credibility that would promote staff buy-in and commitment to follow a vision for a quality ECE program. After completing JECELI, Ms. Klein began to examine the strength of ECE programs from both congregation-wide and community-wide perspectives, guiding the staff to implement new practices that infuse instruction about Jewish values into all areas of the classroom in terms of both content and classroom management. The teachers began using a wider range of materials for Jewish learning and Israel education and showed increased willingness to engage in text study for their own professional growth. Ms. Klein also established new procedures for conducting classroom walk-throughs and coached the staff to use developmentally appropriate educational practices that scaffold learning and make children safe and cared for. From JECELI, Ms. Klein gained an understanding of the importance of being visible in the classrooms to observe and support teachers. Therefore, Ms. Klein began scheduling regular classroom observations in all classrooms and established new classroom practices to build school-family relationships, including family journals—books that children create about their families. Based on ideas from JECELI, Ms. Klein revised staff meeting processes. For example, instead of a large group meeting that is primarily dedicated to announcements and updates, she divided the staff into three groups that rotate between stations. In each station, the group discusses a specified topic. This change enabled greater active participation of staff and led to regular feedback and suggestions from the teachers.

Reimagine

Shira Kirshblum (pseudonym) is an ECE director at a congregation that serves a highly diverse community that includes a high proportion of new immigrants from outside the United States. After completing JECELI, Ms. Kirshblum established a new plan for staff professional development that included using classroom and online technology and based the professional development sessions on content learned in JECELI. In addition, Ms. Kirshblum started meeting frequently with parents to develop their awareness of the preschool's vision for a quality Jewish education, the value of such education, and how the practices they are using can achieve these goals. Ms. Kirshblum also worked with the staff to identify new ideas for programs that may interest all families and their children, such as an appreciation of nature. The professional development sessions and conversations with staff and families led to new plans to offer flexible programming that meets the diverse needs of families. Ms. Kirshblum expects that in future years, some of these plans will come to fruition and will help sustain community relationships and attract new families to the congregation.

Manage

Miriam Katz (pseudonym) is a preschool director at a modern orthodox Jewish day school and had recently become the director in the year prior to enrolling in JECELI. Before JECELI, Ms. Katz did not have full confidence in being able to manage the preschool and supervise its staff. Following JECELI, she gained greater confidence in discussing preschool plans and practices with the school leadership and the teachers she supervises. The areas of practice most influenced by JECELI were relationship building with staff and the families served by the preschool. Ms. Katz also incorporated knowledge from JECELI at the end of the school year when making staffing decisions.

Inform

Elana Simon (pseudonym) is the prekindergarten teacher at a Jewish day school. The ECE program serves a mix of Jewish and non-Jewish families. Ms. Simon was concerned about the school's trend in the last several years, which was reducing the emphasis on Jewish studies because of a lack of interest in Jewish content by the population being served. After attending JECELI, Ms. Simon now has the knowledge and motivation to revise lesson plans and provide more opportunities for project-based learning and events that include Jewish celebrations and traditions. However, most of the program ideas from JECELI have not yet been implemented because of changes in school leadership and budget cuts caused by a reduction in student enrollment at the school.