



Auerbach Central Agency for Jewish Education
Investing in Identity:
Effects of Jewish Early Childhood Programs
on Family Engagement
in Jewish Life



I. Introduction

The Identity Study recently completed by Mayer, Kosmin, & Keysar (2003) concluded that American Jewry must decide what to do in coming years to shape “its own self-definition” and to create “suitable educational initiatives to secure its future” (p.46). One of the most suitable yet underused educational avenues for helping families define themselves Jewishly is Jewish early childhood education. Jewish programs for young children engage families in ways that allow them to understand Judaism as a meaningful way of life for all ages. This paper describes the results of a survey of parents with children who were enrolled in such programs. The survey was undertaken to elicit anecdotal evidence of the effects of Jewish early childhood programs on aspects of Jewish family life, including attitudes and practices, decisions about synagogue membership and choices about continuing Jewish education for children. The conclusions indicate both the power and the potential of Jewish early childhood education in promoting Jewish identification and practice.

II. Rationale

In 2002, a Commission on Jewish Early Childhood Education was established by the Auerbach Central Agency for Jewish Education. The on-going purpose of the Commission has been to promote a better understanding of the importance of Jewish early childhood education in the general scheme of Jewish education and community planning. During the first meetings of the Commission, the lack of research evidence showing the actual effects of Jewish early childhood programs on children and adults became obvious. After much deliberation, the Commission decided to focus on the changes, if any, found in parental attitudes and practices in families whose young children had been enrolled in Jewish early childhood

programs. This study is a compilation and analysis of the responses to a survey of parents whose children who were exiting Jewish early childhood programs in the Greater Philadelphia area to determine the effects that these programs had on them and their families.

III. Literature Review

A literature review of recent studies dealing with similar issues revealed several examples that were used to guide survey content and construction (Beck, 2002, Vogelstein & Kaplan, 2002). Of special interest was the report issued by the Ukeles Associates, Inc., entitled “Jewish Preschools as Gateways to Jewish Life” (Beck, 2002). This study was based on interviews of parents from three cities – Baltimore, Chicago, and Denver. Out of those interviewed, 70% stated that they were “doing something different” in terms of their Jewish observance or lifestyle (Beck, 2002, p. iv). Changes in Jewish identity, an “enhanced sense of community,” and an “increased interest in Jewish education” were also reported (Beck, 2002, p. iv). A substantial increase in synagogue membership was noted (from 40% to 80%) during children’s attendance in Jewish early childhood programs. This increase correlates with the changes in identity and communal involvement. In another study, specifically Jewish programming was not shown to be the primary reason for enrolling a child in a school, but it became an important factor during the family’s experience with the program. It became what kept the children in school and convinced parents to enroll subsequent children (Beck, 2002).

However, another survey noted the relatively small numbers of children involved in Jewish early childhood programs both nationally and locally (Vogelstein & Kaplan, 2002). A study undertaken on the national level by the Jewish Early Childhood Education Partnership entitled *Untapped Potential* found that in the year 2000, there were 700,000 Jewish children in the early childhood population (birth through age 6) in the United States. Only 100,000 were enrolled in Jewish early childhood programs, and the level of enrollment was decreasing (Vogelstein & Kaplan, 2002).

Questions for the Philadelphia study were constructed so that the responses of parents of children in Jewish early childhood programs in Philadelphia could be compared to those in other cities. Special attention was given to items exploring the issues of identity, practice, and communal involvement.

IV. Survey Design and Methodology

The Commission chose the following general questions to use in developing the specific items to submit to parents of children exiting Jewish early childhood programs in the year 2004:

- Why do parents choose Jewish early childhood programs?
- What are the best aspects of Jewish early childhood programs according to parents?
- What impact does the program have on parental attitudes towards Jewish practices and learning?
- Does participation in a Jewish early childhood program have an impact on synagogue membership?
- Does participation in a Jewish early childhood education program have an impact on the decisions parents make about furthering their children's Jewish education?
- What aspects of these programs need attention in order to make improvements or enhance benefits?

In discovering the answers to these general questions, the survey would be able to assess the current impact of Jewish early childhood education, suggest appropriate strategic planning efforts to enhance that impact, and indicate further areas of research.

The Auerbach Central Agency for Jewish Education currently has 48 early childhood programs listed in the Greater Philadelphia area. In October 2003, a copy of the survey created by the Commission on Jewish Early Childhood Education was sent to each of these programs. The program directors were requested to photocopy and distribute the survey to parents of the 4 and 5 year

olds who would be leaving the school in the following spring. The deadline for the return of surveys was January 30, 2004, and all schools which participated were given a copy of the booklet “A Parent’s Guide to Preschool” (Dodge and Phinney, 2002). By April 2004, 218 complete surveys had been returned, representing 25 schools, 52% of all schools located in Center City, Buxmont, the Main Line, Chester County, the Northern Suburbs, Bucks County, Northeast Philadelphia and Northwest Philadelphia. The percentage of respondents for the 25 schools was 24% out of the total possible, a statistically significant return for a mail-in survey.

The schools responding to the survey were connected to Conservative synagogues (11 schools), Reform synagogues (8 schools), and Federation Early Learning Services (6 schools) (Figure 1). Each section of the Greater Philadelphia area¹ was represented so that the sample provides information across the region (Figure 2).

V. Review of Findings

Why do parents choose Jewish early childhood programs?

The most frequently cited reasons for choosing Jewish early childhood programs were, first, the general educational experiences followed by the Jewish programming (Figure 3). Next in importance were both the quality of the staff and the convenience of the location. The hours of operation and the state of the facility were less important, with the affordability of the school receiving the least consideration. The awareness of high quality programming and the integration of Judaic learning into that programming appears to play a very large role in attracting young Jewish parents to come to Jewish early childhood schools in the first place.

¹ The Greater Philadelphia area consists of Bucks, Chester, Delaware, Montgomery, and Philadelphia Counties.

The Best Aspects of the Programs

Survey respondents were asked to indicate which areas of the early childhood education programs surpassed, met, or did not meet expectations. Parents rated the hours of operation, indoor space, outdoor space and equipment, classroom materials, safety and security, general curriculum, and Jewish family programming as meeting expectations. However, the provision of a stimulating Judaic curriculum was rated as *surpassing* expectations. The rating of the Judaic curriculum as surpassing expectations is particularly interesting when considered in the light of the reasons for choosing the programs cited above. While the Jewish aspects influenced *the original choice* of the programs, Judaic curriculum may have had as much or more of an impact on the parents' decisions to *stay* in particular programs and enroll subsequent children.

Parents were also given the opportunity to comment on the best aspects of the programs in which their children were enrolled. The following are typical quotes from the survey:

"The preschool far exceeds my expectations for early learning. The best aspects of the program would be the director, the staff, the learning, the love, the Jewish education."

"The teachers care about the children so much; my daughter loves to go to school; she is getting a base for her Jewish education."

"The [best aspects are the] excitement my children have toward school and the pride they have about being Jewish. The Jewish identities they've developed are strong and will set a tone for who they become as Jews."

"Every holiday is covered and my child can discuss and participate in every celebration!"

"Our children are learning, socializing and getting a foundation in Jewish life."

"[The best aspect is a] loving atmosphere in a Jewish environment"

"[The best aspect is t]he Judaic curriculum and all the family and school events that go along with it"

“ I love that my kids are learning all about the Jewish holidays, Shabbat and prayers/blessings.”

“[The best aspects are t]he friendly atmosphere, Judaica learned; children meeting and knowing the rabbi.”

“[The best aspect is that] my child feels very happy, comfortable and safe at[school]. She absolutely loves her teachers, classroom and friends. She is learning so much every day...from reading to math to science to Judaism.”

Parents also showed great appreciation for the work of directors and teachers:

“The director is wonderful and caring and very knowledgeable in early childhood education. The teachers are very good.”

“[The best aspects are is the] Judaic content and the wonderful staff.”

“I really cannot pinpoint one thing – we have loved the whole program – If I must choose it would be the teachers, each and every one!”

“[The best aspect is the i]ntegration of social and academic skills, interest and skill of teachers.”

“[The best aspect is t]eachers who love the children and love to be there.”

“When you get teachers who love not just the children but what they are teaching, this instills a love of Judaism in the children.”

It is interesting to note that although staff quality may not be one of the first two reasons for choosing a school, the skills and warmth of the teachers and directors are valued by parents and may become important reasons for remaining in the school community.

Changes in attitudes and practices involving Jewish life

Information was requested on changes in awareness and attitude involving specific aspects of Jewish life. Respondents were specifically asked if, as a result of their children’s participation in a Jewish early childhood education program, they were now 1) more aware of the Jewish calendar, 2) more child-centered in

their observances, 3) more aware of feelings about being Jewish, and 4) interested in learning more about Judaism. It should be noted that a few parents indicated that they did not make an attitude or practice change while their children were in the program because they were already very aware of the calendar, engaged their children in practices, or had strong feelings about being Jewish. Therefore, percentages indicate only those whose attitudes *changed* positively during their involvement in the program.

Of the people responding, 70% indicated that they were more aware of the Jewish calendar. The fact that the Jewish early childhood programs were usually closed on holidays probably made this level of awareness a practical necessity. In terms of engaging in observances which included their children, 62% indicated this was now more of a priority. Therefore, most children enrolled in Jewish schools receive more information and practice in Jewish ritual from their parents as well as at school as a result of being enrolled in a Jewish early childhood program. Over half, 51%, indicated that they were actually more aware of positive feelings about being Jewish. Comments from parents reveal what these percentages mean for the Jewish identities of real families:

“Our children’s experiences have been wonderful and they have increased our participation (as a family) in all aspects of Jewish life.”

“Jewish education: It has become more important seeing Judaism through my children’s eyes.”

“Effects: Making Judaism a part of our lives”

“The program absolutely enhances my child’s Jewish identity, especially in a culture that exposes them to so [many] Christian symbols.”

“We have loved it. Our daughter highly identifies with being Jewish.”

“The biggest benefit is my child knows she is Jewish and is proud of it. She knows many others are not Jewish but she has a strong sense of who she is.”

Also, of the families surveyed, 34% indicated that they would be interested in learning more about Judaism. When one considers how difficult it is to entice

people into continuing learning programs, this number represents a very large potential pool of adult learners.

Parents were also asked to indicate if their Jewish *practices* or *lifestyle* had changed as a result of the children's involvement in a Jewish early childhood program. Because of the wording of the question, it was assumed that these are families that were not engaging in these practices immediately before their exposure to Jewish early childhood education. The biggest change in practices for these families was a result of programming designed for their needs and interests: 47% of the parents responding are now attending Jewish family programs. Almost as many, however, noted a change in home observances: over 41% indicated that they are now lighting candles on Friday night and 40% have begun celebrating holidays. Effects on synagogue attendance were also indicated: 27% say that they have started attending services.

Parents' comments revealed the influence of classroom learning on the adults' dispositions to practice Judaism both at home and as part of the synagogue community:

"We feel [she] has learned so much... We've utilized all that she brought home... we also now observe Shabbat at home."

"School is reinforcing our practices and observances in our home. My son has learned prayers and can say them because of the dual components of school and home observance."

"Being part of the preschool has made our family feel very much a part of [institution] as our synagogue. One has filtered over to the other."

Future surveys could yield valuable information about specific Jewish rituals and attitudes that parents may be developing as a result of their children's participation in Jewish education at an early age.

Because of the level of participation in family programs in particular, special attention should be paid to comments relating to these programs in order to understand how they were perceived and how they could be enhanced. These

comments were not significant in number, but do provide suggestions for future planning:

“Aside from Chanukah and Passover shows...and Parent Association family events, I do not think there is a lot of Jewish family program[ming]. There used to be a grandparent Shabbat, but it wasn’t held in the 2002-2003 school year. What happened? What about having it for parents?”

“I think there should be more activities that the family is involved [in] like holiday parties, etc.”

Programming for families remains a rich area for engaging parents and their children in Jewish practices and has the potential to be even more powerful as it is further developed.

From the data and these responses, it seems reasonable to assume that Jewish early childhood programs positively affect the Jewish identities of entire families as well as the children enrolled.

Impact on Synagogue Membership

Does participation in a synagogue early childhood program result in more members for the host institution? This issue comes up frequently in discussions of the value of early childhood programs for synagogue viability. According to this survey, 34% of the families were synagogue members when their children were first enrolled. Two thirds of this group belonged to the synagogues hosting their children’s schools. Another 28% of the non-members eventually joined, bringing the total members to 62%. Almost all of the remaining respondents (23%) indicated that they would join a synagogue if it were less expensive. It appears that most families do become members, and that even more might join with a further consideration of the current economic realities of young families.

Jewish education after the early childhood program

Survey participants were asked to rate the general overall importance of continuing their children’s Jewish education after the early childhood program.

Out of 174 respondents², approximately 55% chose “extremely important” to describe the priority of continuing the Jewish education of their young children while another 33% indicated “very important.”. Therefore, 88% placed a high priority on the continuation of their children’s Jewish education (10% chose “somewhat important” and 2% marked “not important”). When asked if their children’s attendance in a Jewish early childhood education program had had any effect on their thinking about continuing their Jewish education, 48% responded affirmatively. It would appear that even though this population is already inclined to participate in Jewish education (given the selection of their children’s first educational experience), this inclination is further strengthened for almost half by their participation in Jewish early childhood programs. In response to other items, 93% of the respondent parents indicated that their children would be continuing in their formal Jewish learning. When asked to choose between day school, Hebrew/Sunday school, and Jewish family programs, 91% indicated that their children would be attending Hebrew/Sunday school. The range for day school choice was from 4% to 9% (several respondents indicated both Hebrew/Sunday school and day school).

Comments made by parents about continuing their children’s Jewish education are indicative of the interest aroused or sustained by experiences in Jewish early childhood programs:

“[We] joined a temple and enrolled in Sunday school in part because of positive Jewish experience at day care.”

“Our son...knows HEBREW SONGS, letters, holidays...and Shabbat. He likes the Rabbi (synagogue rabbi) and is comfortable with him. It is a great start to his Hebrew/Sunday school education.”

“[We] decided to put younger siblings in Jewish preschool instead of secular school.”

“[Why did we choose the program?] Networking and bonding: my daughter is with children that she will go through Hebrew school with for the next 10-13 years.”

² All respondents were Jewish or were part of an Interfaith household.

“We strongly considered sending our children to Jewish Day School, something we would probably not have considered if we hadn’t had such a great experience.”

The high percentages of families choosing to continue Jewish education and the illustrative comments above are particularly interesting in light of the fact that only slightly more than half of the families had been provided with information about further Jewish educational program options. It is possible that many parents had to seek out information on their own, and that more choices could be made if parents had a chance to learn about them. The most frequently cited reason for **not** intending to continue their children’s Jewish education was its cost. There clearly is room for improving communication about options for continuing Jewish education beyond early childhood as well as finding ways to support those families who do not continue because of its high cost.

Needed improvements

Approximately 34% of the respondents indicated that the schools could improve in specific areas. Several comments focused on difficulties in communication between staff and parents, such as:

“It appears that pre-school policies are not consistently enforced. Need more follow through and better communication with parents.”

“At times I believe the parent-teacher communications could be improved.”

“Administrative [area needs to be improved] – they need to be flexible/receptive with parents’ concerns and/or suggestions”

Another area that received criticism was academic curriculum. Parents were concerned that educational experiences were not always matched to the abilities of the children:

“The 2 year old program is too socially geared and not academic enough.”

“I’d like to see reading instruction the kindergarten for those children that are ready for it. I’m having my son tutored privately.”

“Kindergarten needs to be more academic.”

“The pre-K year is not educational enough.”

“A child should be put in a classroom not just based on age but on the ability of the child and development.”

It may be that increased communication could also alleviate this mismatch of curricular goals. Parents often need help understanding how young children learn academic skills and associate only worksheets and drills with learning. The goals of Jewish early childhood programs, including both how academics are being taught in an age-appropriate manner as well as the role of Jewish learning, need to be made clear to everyone in the school community. The generally positive feeling about the teaching staff noted above speaks to the typical success of these programs. It is possible that, given the proper tools, the connections between staff members and family members could be strengthened and made even more satisfying. In a Jewish school in which the parents are being welcomed into a Jewish school community, these ties are especially important.

Additional Information

Other survey questions revealed possible avenues of influence of the Jewish early childhood programs on the parents of young children. One of these avenues was the number of years that families had one or more members enrolled in an early childhood program. The range was from one to eleven years, with four years as the average. First children spent approximately 26 hours in school each week, while second and third children attended for 21 hours each. By comparison, the day school week for older children is generally 34 hours long, and children in supplementary schools spend from 2 to 7 hours per week in their programs. It seems possible that the amount of time that each family spends both during the year and across the period of enrollment in Jewish early childhood programs increases the likelihood of the impact on parents' practices and attitudes found in this study. Further investigations could clarify the impact of

time spent in a Jewish early childhood program on parental practices and engagement.

Respondents were also asked to describe their households as “Conservative,” “Interfaith,” “Reconstructionist,” “Reform,” “Secular,” “Not Jewish,” “Orthodox,” and “Other Jewish.” These particular categories were chosen and put in this order so that a variety of ways to self-identify would be available and to avoid judgments about belonging to any particular category. Out of the 173 people who responded, 39% self-identified their households as Reform; 36% as Conservative; 13% as Interfaith; 8% as a mix between Conservative and another Jewish category; 3% as Reconstructionist; and less than 1% as Orthodox or Secular, respectively. If the Conservative and Conservative/other Jewish are considered as in a single category, the percentage rises to 44%. These numbers were obtained, in large part, to corroborate expectations of identification based on the types of programs from which completed surveys were received: 43% of the schools were Conservative, and 31% were Reform (no family self-reported as “not Jewish”). The percentages of parents from each Movement who responded to the survey therefore represent the Movement divisions of the population of institutions to which they belong.

Comments from families from all Movements have been reported throughout this document. However, the comments from the interfaith families are particularly relevant in showing the potential effects of Jewish early childhood education on family identification:

“I am a Christian married to a Jew. We agreed to raise our children in the Jewish faith, and I am happy that we did thanks (in large part) to our experience here at (the early childhood program).”

“My child’s experience at (early childhood program) has been perfect. It’s just the right amount of religion. Since my husband is not Jewish he is not sure about religion. At (the early childhood program) my child learns as my husband learns.”

“[This is a] wonderful way to learn ethnic heritage and education for non-Jewish wife.”

More research is indicated to determine the effects of Jewish early childhood programs on promoting religious discussions and learning in interfaith homes.

The parents have the last word...

Additional comments made by parents reinforce the impact of Jewish early childhood education on children's and parents' Jewish identification and involvement. The question "Is there anything else that you would like us to know about your child's and your family's Jewish experiences in the early childhood program?" elicited the following responses:

"I enjoy that my son comes home with a knowledge of his Judaism balanced with the everyday curriculum."

"We love how our daughter goes around the house singing Shabbat songs and other blessings."

"We have had nothing but positive, wonderful experiences at [the Jewish early childhood program]. It has become an integral part of our family routine, and has shown my older son a wonderful introduction into Jewish traditional values."

"In part we chose the preschool for childcare and socialization first and the religious component [was] secondary. We were quite pleased with the religious aspect though which increased our own interest in it."

"What a foundation! It helped rekindle my love for everything Jewish. I now attend Shabbat services regularly because of my (older) child's desire to be here on Shabbat because of her preschool foundation!"

We need to know more about which aspects of our programs are having this profound effect on children and parents so that they can be supported and strengthened.

VI. Indications and Implications

The original purpose of this survey was to explore self-reported effects of Jewish early childhood programs on young children and their families. Overall, the results of the survey indicate that the impact of Jewish early childhood education

on attitudes and practices is immediate and powerful: an awareness of the Jewish calendar is developed, rituals begin to be practiced in the home, and parents and children alike become interested in what Judaism can offer in terms of meaningful tools for living. Long term effects of early childhood programs are also indicated, as, based on these first experiences in Jewish education, parents frequently decide to join a synagogue and to continue their children's Jewish education. Further assumptions can be made based on the answers to the specific questions asked at the beginning of the survey process, as seen below.

Why do parents choose Jewish early childhood programs?

Jewish early childhood programs are chosen first because of the quality of the educational program and secondly because of their Jewish content. Therefore, at the critical time when parents are looking for a school for their young children, they may not realize just how important Jewish content can become. As a result, many Jewish parents may not be choosing those programs that could be of great value to them in understanding and engaging in Jewish practice. Ways need to be developed to inform parents about the existence and the potential benefits of the Jewish content aspects of Jewish early childhood education programs.

What are the best aspects of the program according to parents?

From parental comments, it appears that the Judaic content and the quality of the teaching staff were the best aspects of the program. The amount and relevance of Jewish content actually surpassed parental expectations, and this aspect seems to have become even more important during the stay of the family in the program. It would be useful to further define the kinds of Jewish experiences, areas of Jewish knowledge, and pedagogic skills that parents find most valuable in order to make decisions about staff development strategies and how to draw parents into the programs. A deeper understanding of the areas of the programs that are attractive could also reveal how to encourage parents to engage in learning experiences themselves.

What impact does the program have on parental attitudes towards Jewish practices and learning?

According to this survey, the impact is very high: awareness and enjoyment of Jewish identity is increased as well as the actual level of practice. The question then becomes how to maximize the opportunities that Jewish early childhood programs offer in enhancing the Jewish identity and engagement of young families. As suggested above, there are ways of reaching and teaching parents of young children that are not being utilized. The education staffs of many early childhood programs have not been prepared to maximize possible opportunities for providing parents with Jewish learning opportunities. A previously completed Auerbach CAJE study (2001-2002) indicated that 61% of directors and 65% of the lead teachers in Jewish early childhood programs had not had exposure as adults to on-going Judaic studies. In addition, less than half of these educators participated in Judaically-oriented professional development more than three times during the year. Early childhood educators also do not usually have intensive ongoing training in working with parents. A program emphasizing Jewish learning for these teachers would give them more information and a range of Jewish perspectives to pass on to parents. Professional development programs should also be designed to give teachers more information about working with parents.

Does participation in a Jewish early childhood program have an impact on synagogue membership?

Survey responses indicate that synagogues gain members as a result of the enrollment of young children in an in-house early childhood program. In addition, attendance at synagogue services also increases. Synagogues should look more closely at the supportive relationships created between the in-house schools for young children and the overall institutional structure. Increasing accessibility to synagogue life for young families benefits the host synagogue, the early childhood program, and the families themselves.

Does participation in a Jewish early childhood education program have an impact on the decisions parents make about furthering their children's Jewish education?

According to the respondents to this survey, participation in the early childhood program made them more likely to consider continuing the Jewish education of their children. The fact that approximately half of the parents had not been told about the range of opportunities available means that even more families may choose Jewish education, or more intensive Jewish education, if given the information.

Which aspects of the programs require attention in order to sustain or increase any benefits found?

According to the parents responding to this survey, current methods that teachers and schools are using to communicate with the child's home could be improved. Sharing information is critical for the maintenance of good relationships between school and home. An improvement in this area may also make the transmission of Jewish practices and attitudes more likely. The fact that many intermarried couples responded so positively to Jewish education for their young children also indicates the importance of effective methods of communication. Much more may be done to attract and to support these families so that they are comfortably drawn into the circle of the Jewish community. Again, a program of professional development for teachers that focuses on skills useful in working with parents could make a big difference in what is transmitted and its ultimate effects on the Jewish practices of young families.

VII. Recommendations

The Auerbach CAJE Commission on Jewish Early Childhood Education developed a number of specific recommendations based on the information gleaned from the survey. These recommendations make use of a new understanding of the importance of Jewish early childhood education in furthering the involvement of parents in Jewish life. They promote a new level of awareness

in this area in the community at large. It is hoped that action will be taken on each of these proposals in the near future.

- Getting the word out, Part I:

Meetings of Rabbis, Educational Directors, and community leaders should be convened in order to apprise them of the value and potential of Jewish early childhood programs in engaging young families in their institutions. The information gained from this study should be presented in as many forums as possible so that these leaders will understand the importance of initiatives in this area of education. At these meetings, ways of helping them to show their support and advocacy for Jewish early childhood education can be developed.

- Getting the word out, Part II:

The ways in which Jewish early childhood programs currently advertise their benefits must be reviewed. At the present time, it appears that the programs themselves are not communicating their benefits effectively to the Jewish community at large. Parents should have a better idea of what the programs have to offer and seek them out, rather than be surprised at the Jewish learning offered to them and their children. A review of current marketing strategies could be used as the basis for a discussion with program directors, lay leaders, and community leaders to design more effective approaches to informing the public about the benefits of these programs. Through these efforts, additional parents will learn about the benefits of Jewish early childhood programs and more families will receive them.

- Making connections to later learning:

An additional study needs to be undertaken to determine how parents learn about Jewish education options for their children after leaving the early childhood program. The entire web of connections between synagogue-based and community-based early childhood programs, elementary education

programs, and day schools should be outlined and critiqued. Better liaisons between programs can be created from this informed perspective. Hopefully, with better information, parents will be encouraged to move even more children up from successful Jewish early childhood programs to continue their Jewish education in day schools and supplementary schools.

- Developing and replicating what works:

Pilot programs should be created to provide professional development to early childhood directors and teachers in the area of working with parents and developing substantial Jewish family education programs. The Auerbach Central Agency for Jewish Education already has a professional educational relationship with the staffs in the area's Jewish early childhood programs. It would be possible for Auerbach CAJE to identify and invite pilot schools and design a program that would assess current practices, provide appropriate professional development in the areas of Judaic learning and working with parents, and evaluate the results. It is expected that rabbis and cantors would be asked to participate in these programs to provide Judaic learning. Independent community funding would be sought. Much can be done to further explore the exciting potential of these schools to change the Jewish dispositions of young families.

VIII. Conclusions

At the outset of this study, members of the Commission on Jewish Early Childhood Education were convinced that the survey would discover that there were particular effects that Jewish early childhood programs would have on young children and their families. However, the strength of the responses of the parents – how their positive attitudes, acquisition of practices, and planning for Jewish early childhood education had been stimulated – surprised even those who already know the value of this facet of Jewish life. For the fifty years of existence, Jewish early childhood education programs have provided the

gateway for young families into Jewish communal life. It is time to give serious attention to the study of the early childhood education in order to maximize the numbers of parents and children that enter this gateway to Jewish learning and living.

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