



MILWAUKEE
JEWISH FEDERATION

Education Task Force Report

AUGUST
2017



Gan Ami Early Childhood Education at the
Harry & Rose Samson Family Jewish Community Center

Since 1902, the Milwaukee Jewish Federation has raised charitable donations and invested the funds in programs of partner agencies and of our own to further our mission of ensuring a thriving Jewish community. This work is wholly dependent on Jewish adults who are committed to sustaining the fabric of Jewish life.

Our investment in developing Jewishly-engaged adults through education and engagement of young people is more important than ever. According to the 2013 PEW Research Center Survey of U.S. Jews, one in five Jews in America say being Jewish is “not too” or “not at all” important to them.

To ensure we are wisely investing in and supporting Jewish education, we convened a task force to determine which programs and services, separately and in combination, will be most successful in educating our children.



OBJECTIVE AND SCOPE

The objective of the task force was to identify realistic recommendations for funding Jewish education in Milwaukee that help fulfill the Federation’s mission of securing a vibrant Jewish community today and for tomorrow.

The scope of the task force’s work included local formal Jewish education (preschools, Jewish day schools, synagogue schools) and informal Jewish education (Jewish camp, youth groups, etc.) of children from preschool through age 18. The scope was intended to be wide, encompassing Jewish education and engagement in Jewish life.

Steve and Shari Sadek Family Camp Interlaken JCC

DEFINING SUCCESS

Successful Jewish education, as defined by Milwaukee Jewish Federation’s Education Task Force, is education that helps deliver on our mission. Our investment in Jewish education will help develop Jewishly-engaged adults who are active in any aspect of Jewish communal life regardless of their affiliation or religious practice. We believe that a healthy Jewish community requires engaged individuals and families representing the diversity of religious and secular Jewish life.

TASK FORCE MEMBERS

Linda Bader and Dan Sinykin served as co-chairs. Members were Nancy Kennedy Barnett, Barbara Glazer, Sara Hermanoff, Joe Kasle, David Lowe, Dana Margolis, Andrea Schneider, Susan Solvang, and Louise Stein. Staff members were Tziporah Altman-Shafer, Hannah Rosenthal, and Stephanie Wagner.

WHERE THE MONEY COMES FROM

The Milwaukee Jewish Federation raises money and invests it in the Jewish community to further our mission. This report refers to funds from our Annual Campaign, which totaled \$6.15 million in 2017. These funds are distributed to organizations serving the Jewish community locally, in Israel, and around the world.

Our Jewish Community Foundation distributes even more funding than the Annual Campaign, about \$11 million annually. These funds are also distributed in the Jewish community to further our mission as recommended by donors who have created endowment funds, restricted funds, and donor advised funds holders.



CURRENT INVESTMENTS

Formal Jewish education partners: Annual Campaign donations support two Jewish preschools: Jewish Beginnings Lubavitch Preschool and Gan Ami Early Childhood Education at the Harry & Rose Samson Family Jewish Community Center. The funds also support three K-8 schools: Bader Hillel Academy, Milwaukee Jewish Day School, and Yeshiva Elementary School.

Informal Jewish education partners: The Annual Campaign allocation to the JCC supports programs like PJ Library and Jewish camping including the Steve & Shari Sadek Family Camp Interlaken JCC and the Albert and Ann Deshur JCC Rainbow Day Camp. BBYO-Wisconsin Region, which engages Jewish teens from grades 6 through 12, also receives funding from the Annual Campaign.

Federation operations: In addition to our education partners, the Federation supports Jewish education and engagement through our own programs. These programs are funded by an Annual Campaign allocation to cover our operations:

- The Coalition for Jewish Learning's Congregational School Initiative provides professional development services for supplementary (Sunday and Hebrew), preschool, and day school teachers. The services are provided at no cost, and supplementary school teachers receive a stipend for participating. The program attracts educators from every supplementary school, preschool, and day school in the Milwaukee area.
- The Federation supports formal Jewish education through scholarships:
 - We work in partnership with Bader Philanthropies to distribute \$500,000 in scholarship funds each year. These scholarships are distributed to all local Jewish day schools including three local Jewish high schools. Our blind scholarship program assesses applications from local families and makes decisions based on need.
 - Our Jewish Community Foundation supports Jewish education by raising funds to support need-based scholarships to attend overnight camp.
 - The Federation participates in One Happy Camper, a program of the Foundation for Jewish Camp. We raise funds, recruit campers, and distribute grants without regard to need, as required by the Foundation for Jewish Camp, to Jewish public school students attending Jewish overnight camp for the first time.

LOCAL AND NATIONAL RESEARCH

Local stakeholders: We conducted 76 face-to-face interviews with local stakeholders including 14 congregational rabbis, 4 cantors, 22 school directors and assistant directors representing all Milwaukee Jewish schools, 14 informal educators, 9 lay leaders, and 13 others. We also fielded an online questionnaire that was completed by 137 individuals. Altogether these individuals reported affiliations with 18 schools, 12 synagogues, several camps and youth groups, the JCC, and multiple Milwaukee Jewish Federation programs and services.

Local resources: The work of the Education Task Force was informed by local research including student censuses of Jewish education conducted by the Coalition for Jewish Learning from 1992 to 2017, as well as the 2011 Jewish Community Study of Greater Milwaukee Revised.

National resources: The task force considered national research into best practices in Jewish education from around the United States, participation at the Association of Directors of Central (Education) Agencies, consultation with Jewish Federations of North America, and numerous books and articles about issues and best practices in Jewish education.





Milwaukee Jewish Day School

KEY FINDINGS

To be effective, Jewish education must be joyful, fun, and engaging.

Unless children and teens are interested and engaged, they will not thrive and will often drop out of programs altogether. This is especially important with informal Jewish education because the barriers to entry and exit are very low.

All forms of Jewish education, if done well, can be effective. In general, each form of Jewish education has advantages and disadvantages. It is important to have options that meet the needs of a diverse community. Quality and innovation are critical to maintaining students' interest and for keeping students engaged over more years.

Family is the greatest influencer of Jewish identity. The inverse is also true: Jewish identity within families is influenced by their children's Jewish educational experiences. Family involvement in Jewish education programs is critical.

Intensity and duration of education experiences are both important. Intensive experiences like day school, Jewish overnight camp and youth group conventions tend to make a high impact. Attendance at synagogue-based religious school can also make a high impact, especially if participation lasts for at least seven years. For all programs, the benefit grows with more years of involvement.

Jewish friends and social networks are key influencers. Children are more likely to enjoy (and therefore participate in) Jewish education if their friends participate. Similarly, parents' decisions about sending their children to a Jewish preschool are influenced by their friends.

Gaps and transitions between programs present an opportunity. Ideally students will pass without interruption from one Jewish education experience to the next. In order for this to happen, organizations should see themselves as part of a process of connectivity, not as stand-alone providers.

Engagement can occur at multiple entry points. Students can successfully begin Jewish education throughout their childhood and teen years. Having many options for Jewish education from preschool through high school is important to ensure that all students and families can find appealing opportunities.

Engagement has a cascade effect. Earlier engagement, as in preschool, is an important foundation. Adolescence is the most critical point for Jewish engagement because it often leads to involvement in college and beyond. Earlier engagement indicates greater likelihood of engagement in adolescence.

ADDITIONAL OBSERVATIONS

Preschool: Early childhood education is one of the most important entry points for building a strong Jewish identity. Identifying a “next step” in Jewish education is important when children age out of preschool. Our community needs to see an increase in the number of students enrolled in Jewish preschools and an increase in parent involvement.

Supplementary schools: Synagogue-based religious schools generally have declining student participation. Our community needs greater consistency in quality, more innovation, an increase in the number of teachers receiving professional education, an increase number of students participating, and participation by students for more years.

Youth groups: Participation in Jewish youth groups has declined in recent years. Intensive experiences such as conventions or Shabbatonim are most impactful. Our community would benefit from an increase in the number of students participating in youth groups and more participation in the intensive youth group experiences.

Overnight camp: Camp is highly effective at engaging students but often cost prohibitive. Ideally our community would see more children attending overnight camp and increased parent involvement through camp.

Day school: The Federation funds three day schools, each with different education and business models. For many North Shore families, the cost of day school education outweighs the perceived benefits. We need to see an increase in the number of students attending day schools, attendance by students for more years, and increased parent involvement.



Jewish Beginnings Lubavitch Preschool

RECOMMENDATIONS

PHASE A: Invest in programs that have demonstrated success locally and nationally.

1. Congregational School Initiative:

The Coalition for Jewish Learning's Congregational School Initiative provides free professional development for Jewish educators. The program was originally developed for teachers at supplementary schools and has expanded to reach teachers at Jewish preschools and day schools. This is one of the most effective models for improving Jewish education, and it happens to be low cost as well. The program's future is uncertain as it depends upon the generosity of a single donor. Recommendation: The Congregational School Initiative should receive an allocation from the Annual Campaign to ensure that it will be funded. Annual cost: \$20,000



2. Marketing campaign: Increasing the number of students participating in all forms and all levels of Jewish education is imperative. Community-wide marketing campaigns promoting Jewish education have been successful in communities in the United States and Canada. Miami and Detroit have just launched campaigns. Recommendation: Conduct a community-wide marketing campaign to drive greater participation. One-time cost: \$5,000

3. Innovation grants: High quality Jewish education that evolves effectively over time is critical for attracting and retaining students. Many communities have found that grants for innovative ideas in Jewish education lead to significant changes. The grants are used for inventive new programs, not for operational expenses. Annual cost: \$20,000

4. Concierge for Jewish engagement: Milwaukee has many excellent formal and informal education opportunities. A concierge for Jewish engagement can work with educational programs to make families aware of the options, become involved with those that fit their needs best, continue their involvement for a period of years, and transition to new opportunities with few gaps. Recommendation: Hire a concierge for Jewish engagement. Salary confidential.

PHASE B: Explore and invest in more complex solutions for Jewish education.

1. Day school funding: Milwaukee is fortunate to have three outstanding Jewish day schools (K-8). Determining how to apportion funding to the schools has been a challenge as each school has very different strengths and challenges. The formula that's been in use for many years does not address current realities, such as changing demographics and expanding state-supported Parental Choice Programs. A new formula is required that accounts for more variables.

2. Jewish engagement incentive grants: Jewish engagement is costly, requiring most families to make difficult choices. Should they send their children to a Jewish preschool or a less costly secular preschool? Should they send their children to a Jewish overnight camp or a Jewish day school? Targeted incentive grants would make Jewish engagement more affordable. For example, targeted grants could increase enrollment in Jewish preschools or make it possible for a family to send their children to a Jewish camp and a Jewish day school.



BBYO - Wisconsin Region

NEXT STEPS

PHASE A: In June 2017 the Milwaukee Jewish Federation's board of directors approved funding from the Annual Campaign for the Congregational Schools Initiative and innovation grants. The other two recommendations, marketing campaign and education concierge, have been funded with reassigned resources from the Federation's existing operating budget.

PHASE B: The Federation's Community Planning and Allocations committee (CP&A), which is comprised of community volunteers, is responsible for developing recommendations for how to allocate Annual Campaign funds to local agencies. CP&A will begin considering recommendations from Phase B listed on page 7 in the Fall 2017.

For more information, contact Tziporah Altman-Shafer, Jewish education community planner, at TziporahA@MilwaukeeJewish.org or 414-963-2718.



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