

## **For Immediate Release**

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### **New “Standards of Excellence” Offer Guidelines for Jewish Early Childhood Education**

*After decade of initiatives and millions invested, landmark publication paints clear picture of exemplary marketing an educational practices*

Denver, CO -- The [Standards of Excellence for Jewish Community Centers and Synagogues with Early Childhood Education Centers \(SOE\)](#)—a new publication with robust and concrete guidelines and benchmarks—is designed to help synagogues and Jewish Community Centers (JCCs) with early childhood education (ECE) centers improve nearly all facets of their work and ultimately welcome more families with young children into Jewish life. Viewed as a major development for Jewish ECE educators and leaders in ECE, the SOE—accessible at no cost—is a result of a decade of work and millions of dollars invested in multiple initiatives.

“The Standards of Excellence is a landmark publication for all who work in Jewish ECE and who care deeply about the next generation,” says Lisa Farber Miller, Senior Program Officer at Rose Community Foundation, which supported the SOE development “It’s one thing to talk about exemplary practices, but the SOE paints a clear and rich picture of what high-quality Jewish ECE looks like—and, critically, what needs to be done to create excellence.”

The SOE builds on the work of previous efforts in Jewish ECE, most recently the BUILDing Jewish ECE (BUILD) initiative—the first of its kind and recently completed three-year national marketing and family engagement initiative for synagogues and JCCs with ECE centers. Rose Community Foundation brought together the Union for Reform Judaism (URJ), Jewish Community Center Association (JCCA) and United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism (USCJ) to provide coaching and tools to effectively market for inquiries, increase enrollment and enhance family engagement at nine Denver/Boulder ECE centers. Cathy Rolland of the URJ and Mark Horowitz of the JCCA served as coaches for Cohort 1; Maxine Handelman of the USCJ and Karen Stokes of Xplor Child Care served as coaches for Cohort 2.

“We learned from BUILDing Jewish ECE that with ongoing coaching and a strong support system, synagogues and JCCs can transform how they market to families with young children *and* how they engage families in these formative years,” says Cathy Rolland of the URJ. “The ECE centers that participated in BUILD changed the ways they offer tours to prospective families, how they stay in touch with prospective and newly enrolled parents, how they collaborate with their lay and professional partners , and so much more.”

“Building Jewish ECE led us through an engaging, educational experience that took us on a wonderful journey,” says Debbie Kohn, Preschool Director, Temple Sinai in Denver. “We have become intentional in everything we do—from defining our vision and developing our

leadership team, to marketing our center. At the same time, we strengthened our relationship with the URJ and are now fully on a path of growth and continued success.”

The SOE, comprised of 15 overarching standards, address areas that BUILDing Jewish ECE focused on such as brand identity and marketing strategies—areas that most educators and directors have not received training in—as well as dynamic and developmentally appropriate curriculum and “seamless Judaism,” which addresses how to integrate Jewish ideas and learning into the everyday routine. The Standards are comprehensive, multidimensional, and include guidelines related to preparation, action, and outcome. They are a workbook to help Jewish ECE centers understand and document their accomplishments in *both* educational and marketing strategies, and to develop action plans for change. The SOE authors note that for ECE centers and the broader institutions in which they exist to be successful, to be financial viable, and to fully welcome families into Jewish life, both excellence in marketing and educational quality must be addressed.

“We want ECE leaders and educators at a synagogue or JCC to come together at least once year to review their progress, to measure themselves against goals they identified, and to celebrate what they’ve accomplished,” adds Michael Ben-Avie, Ph.D., affiliated with Yale Child Study Center's School Development Program and the Independent Evaluator for BUILDing Jewish ECE and the Colorado Jewish Early Childhood Education Initiative. “Whether a center reads the SOE cover to cover or picks specific areas on which to focus, the SOE can help a center understand what excellent ECE looks like, feels like, and where and how it occurs.”

Jewish ECE offers vast opportunities to create and sustain vibrant Jewish life in many communities. For children, preschool years are a critical time in the development of cognition, personality and identity—including religious identity. When children enjoy Jewish learning and rituals at school, they bring them home, often introducing them to the entire family. For parents, a preschool is their first educational choice for their child and family, one that can spur a lifelong Jewish journey. Parents who perceive an ECE program to be of high quality are more likely to attend and absorb when an educator invites them to engage in Jewish experiences and learning. Moreover, young parents often choose Jewish preschools primarily to meet other Jewish parents and to form community.

“The role of an early childhood director in a Jewish setting is not only a sacred task with much joy and great rewards but a stressful and difficult undertaking,” notes Mark Horowitz of the JCCA. “BUILDing Jewish ECE provides directors with the tools and means to accomplish tasks in the areas of the business of early childhood Jewish education that few of our professionals possess. This exponentially increases their confidence in themselves and their work and brings the message of their vision and philosophy to their communities in a professional and meaningful way. BUILDing Jewish ECE is a concrete and pragmatic gift.”

Adds Maxine Handleman of USCJ, “When schools, institutions and early childhood Jewish educators intentionally strive to create relationships among families, they strengthen not just the families, but the entire Jewish community.”

*The [SOE](#) was developed as part of the Denver/Boulder ECE strategic plan, a partnership of JEWISHcolorado (formerly the Allied Jewish Federation of Colorado), Colorado Agency for Jewish Education, Jay & Rose Phillips Family Foundation of Colorado, Rose Community Foundation and other anonymous donors designed to help the Denver and Boulder Jewish ECE centers.*

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