

TOWARD A LIFETIME OF JEWISH ENGAGEMENT

THE MOST IMPORTANT
YEARS OF A CHILD'S LIFE—
for building cognition,
character, and identity—
ARE THE FIRST FIVE.

Since up to 85 percent of
these key developmental
abilities are formed by
age five, early childhood
education offers incredible
potential that we are just
beginning to tap.

The region's Jewish early
childhood education centers
play an influential, yet
often unrecognized, role in
introducing children and
their families to Jewish life.
With 230 educators
teaching 1,100 children in
80 classrooms, they are
among our best hopes for
developing healthy,
successful learners and
for providing gateways
to current and future
Jewish engagement.

Colorado Jewish Early Childhood Education Initiative
Progress Report 2008–2012

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Summer 2012





“It takes a community to get things done.”
Educator at a Denver/Boulder Jewish ECE Center

Denver/Boulder Jewish Early Childhood Education Centers:

- Aish Denver Preschool
- Boulder Jewish Community Center Preschool
- BMH-BJ Preschool
- Congregation Hebrew Educational Alliance Preschool
- Congregation Rodef Shalom Preschool
- Garden Preschool and Early Learning Center at Chabad Jewish Center of South Metro Denver
- Robert E. Loup Jewish Community Center Early Childhood Center
- Temple Emanuel Early Childhood Center
- Temple Sinai Preschool

For more information about these centers, visit mazeltot.org

Colorado Partners:

- Allied Jewish Federation of Colorado
- Colorado Agency for Jewish Education
- Colorado Jewish Early Childhood Education Initiative Steering Committee
- Jewish Early Childhood Center Directors Council
- Rose Community Foundation

Funders:

- Paul Gillis
- Mizel Family Foundations
- Jay and Rose Phillips Family Foundation
- Rose Community Foundation
- Two anonymous donors

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“The seamless integration of Jewish curriculum has been extraordinary to watch and experience. We now celebrate family Shabbat every week, and our daughter leads the blessings. She recited the Four Questions at the Seder both nights and told the entire story of Passover to a room full of people whose jaws hit the floor... She has blossomed with self-confidence and charm. One of her preschool teachers... told us about a charitable organization that provides Shabbat meals for families in need. Now my daughter saves her Tzedakah money to donate to the organization because, as she says, ‘Everyone needs Shabbat.’”

(Parent)

This quote is from a parent whose daughter attends one of nine Denver/Boulder region early childhood education (ECE) centers where the Colorado Jewish ECE Initiative—a series of intentional shifts in approach to the teaching, learning environment, and integration of Jewish values into classrooms—has been implemented. It suggests that this ECE center has helped instill a conscious, compassionate Jewish identity in this child, and that the child's experience has reinvigorated her family's passions and connections with Jewish life.

The quote also represents the hopes of numerous stakeholders in the Denver/Boulder Jewish community who have mobilized to improve the quality and impact of Jewish early childhood education in the region—potentially establishing a model that would be acknowledged and replicated on a national scale.

Have the reform efforts initiated at Denver/Boulder ECE centers since 2008 improved the education of children, teachers, and directors; the Jewish experience of families; the relationships between ECE centers and their host institutions; and the value of the centers to the Jewish community? If so which elements should be sustained and enhanced, and how can the region's stakeholders best support them so that ECE can continue to grow as a foundation for Jewish life?

This research report by Michael Ben-Avie, Ph.D.¹ sets out to address these questions. Its findings suggest that outcomes of the Colorado Jewish ECE Initiative have included:

- **Better teaching in ECE centers**
- **Better learning environments**
- **Better integration of Judaism into curricula**
- **Better connections between families and Jewish life**

These positive changes are highly encouraging. Still, there is more work to be done and more progress to be made; beneath these general improvements lie additional questions or data uncertainties that warrant a deep dive into the full report and/or further investigation. But this is an appropriate period for pause and reflection, both on the initiative's successes and on opportunities for future discoveries and improvements. Some insights we have learned in four years of the Colorado Jewish ECE Initiative are detailed further in the following report.

¹ The report is based on: a review of documents; surveys of families and educators; interviews with families, ECE and host-institution staff and educators, and Colorado Jewish ECE Initiative Steering Committee members; and qualitative and quantitative analyses both of prior research and of new surveys. Visit rcfdenver.org/jewishECEstudy for the full report.

TIMELINE

2005

- Allied Jewish Federation, Colorado Agency for Jewish Education, Rose Community Foundation, and the Jewish Early Childhood Education Director's Council begin meeting to assess the state of Jewish early childhood education

2006

- *Jewish Early Childhood Education in Denver and Boulder: Mapping the Field* study published

2007

- Jewish Early Childhood Summit engages 125 stakeholders to create a strategic plan to enhance quality and access
- Colorado Jewish ECE Steering Committee created to oversee strategic plan
- Funders invest \$1.1 million over four years to implement an approach developed by a national Jewish Early Childhood Education Initiative at nine Denver/Boulder ECE centers and to hire a new Jewish ECE Specialist at CAJE

2009

- Four more ECE centers become Qualistar-rated and qualify for Denver Preschool Program
- Steering Committee commissions new study about scholarship needs at center
- MazelTot launched

2010

- Rose Community Foundation grants the Allied Jewish Federation \$484,000 to create a scholarship fund to augment tuition assistance provided by ECE centers

2011

- National JECEI folds, but Colorado Jewish ECE Initiative work continues
- Economic study of Jewish ECE centers in Denver/Boulder commences

2012

- Additional funding enables three more years of Colorado Jewish ECE Initiative implementation
- *Toward a Lifetime of Jewish Engagement* study is published and introduced at an August 13 event

HISTORY AND CONTEXT

Denver/Boulder Jewish ECE centers—whose 230 educators teach and care for 1,100 children in 80 classrooms—harbor the potential to provide gateways to Jewish life for children and families. Findings from a 2006 regional study² echo this notion, yet this study also noted that the region's Jewish community largely did not recognize the important role Jewish ECE centers play in fostering lifelong engagement. The potential exists not only for fostering Jewish lives, but also for bolstering host organization membership and generating substantial economic impact (the centers realize over \$6.3 million annually in revenue)³.

The 2006 study recommended that Jewish ECE centers increase their focus on quality and standards; on seamless curricular integration of Jewish content values and traditions; on educator and director training, recruitment, and retention; and on improved access. In response, a 2007 Colorado Jewish ECE Initiative Steering Committee formed⁴ to execute a long-range strategic plan focused on 1) Promoting Jewish identity in children and deepening family connections with the Jewish community, 2) Improving the quality of teaching in ECE centers, and 3) Expanding quality Jewish educational options for families with children up to age five.

These goals paralleled those of an existing national Jewish Early Childhood Education Initiative (referred to in this summary as National JECEI, to distinguish from the ongoing Colorado Jewish ECE Initiative effort), which had devised an educational change process, professional development, and accreditation program directed toward these goals. Six regional donors⁵ provided \$1.1 million for this National JECEI model to be implemented within nine Denver/Boulder ECE centers over a four-year period. Local Steering Committee members, educators, and families worked together with national consultants to implement these ECE strategies and changes—a shared-governance model that gave each stakeholder a greater say in the result.

² This 2006 study and report, *Jewish Early Childhood Education in Denver and Boulder*, was commissioned by the Allied Jewish Federation of Colorado, the Colorado Agency for Jewish Education, the Jewish Early Childhood Directors Council, and Rose Community Foundation

³ Figures are from a March 2012 economic study of Denver/Boulder ECE centers by Ehrhardt Keefe Steiner & Hotman PC (EKS&H)

⁴ This Committee marshals the expertise and resources of the Colorado Agency of Jewish Education, Rose Community Foundation, the Allied Jewish Federation of Colorado, and the Jewish Early Childhood Center Directors Council—a collaboration highly rare on a national scale.

⁵ Donors were Paul Gillis, Mizel Family Foundations, Jay and Rose Phillips Family Foundation of Colorado, Rose Community Foundation, and two anonymous donors.

Elements of the Colorado Jewish ECE Initiative included:

- **Principles of excellence:** A framework of relationships, learning community, shared leadership, environment, and vision developed through National JECEI guided the process.
- **On-site coaching and mentoring:** National JECEI consultants made regular Colorado visits to coach directors, educators, and host-institution leaders, and convened group meetings as well as an annual gathering where educators shared ideas and learned from experts. Leadership training was provided for ECE directors.
- **New educational approaches:** Educators were trained to implement constructivist early childhood education approaches such as Reggio Emilia—a child-centered, inquiry-based approach that focuses on process over product—and Emotionally Responsive Practice.
- **The “JECEI lenses”:** This seven-concept framework (Reflection, Return, and Renewal; Belonging and Commitment; Dignity and Potential; Intentionality and Presence; Amazement and Gratitude; Inquiry, Dialogue, and Transmission; Responsibility) helped educators integrate Judaism seamlessly into ECE curricula and articulate complexities of Judaic practices and philosophy in ways children could grasp.
- **Qualistar Colorado:** A Colorado Jewish ECE Initiative goal was to improve the quality of early childhood education. The Denver Preschool Program, with a similar aim, was also developing in this timeframe. So some (not all) of the participating Jewish ECE programs began to benchmark themselves according to the Qualistar Colorado rating system, which seeks to objectively measure the quality of the learning environment, family partnerships, adult-to-child ratios and group sizes, and national accreditation status. The Qualistar Colorado aspect of the initiative was not formally connected with the National JECEI approach.
- **A scholarship fund:** Also separate from the National JECEI approach, this fund⁶ sought to address the gap between tuition aid provided by ECE centers and the families' need.
- The Colorado Agency of Jewish Education (CAJE) created an **Early Childhood Education Specialist** position to provide training and continuity for ECE educators between National JECEI coach visits, and to provide seminars on topics related to the JECEI approach and early childhood development.

While the Colorado Jewish ECE Initiative and Steering Committee continued for the full 2008-12 scope of this report and continues today, the National JECEI entity faced internal difficulties and ceased operations in 2011, during the third year of the Colorado implementation. While National JECEI's closure may have impeded an optimal execution of the process as originally mapped out, it had the positive effect of reinforcing the value of a strong network of local support.

SUMMARY ASSESSMENT OF JECEI OUTCOMES

At the outset of the work on this report, the Colorado Jewish ECE Initiative Steering Committee met and rated their perceived progress (on a one to 10 scale) toward a series of hoped-for outcomes—four of which they outlined in 2008, others added later in consultation with National JECEI advisers.⁷ They perceived significant progress in most outcome areas. Most notably, they saw improvements in teaching quality, educationally sound ECE teaching approaches, and learning environment. Steering Committee members generally reached consensus on their ratings of these outcomes. The research in this report validates the scores of the Committee.

This Executive Summary groups findings according to four general themes, detailed on the next page.

⁶ Established in 2010 with a \$484,000 grant from Rose Community Foundation to the Allied Jewish Federation of Colorado, this scholarship fund has distributed \$285,000 in scholarships as of April 2012.

⁷ The exact wording of these 14 outcomes and related Steering Committee ratings can be found in the full report at www.rcfdenver.org/jewishECEstudy.

I. BETTER TEACHING AT ECE CENTERS:

Added professional development and training improved the quality, intentionality, and collaborative nature of teaching. Teachers want more such training, and standards that account not only for quality but also to a tailored, Jewish-focused approach.

"I look forward to continuing to be more emotionally responsive, using more reflective leadership, individualized professional development, and creating new and better ways of learning communities and shared leadership."
(Educator)

A major emphasis of the Colorado Jewish ECE Initiative was on professional development for educators, largely tailored toward the new curricular approach developed by National JECEI. This took many forms: onsite one-on-one consultation with JECEI coaches, workshops on dealing with children with challenging behaviors, ECE center visits to learn from the successful practices of peers, common reads (in which all educators read and discussed the same book), and more. Educators reported that this added training improved their skill sets. 77% agreed⁸ that "our knowledge of educationally sound practices in early childhood education has improved." 90% agreed that "our intentionality and purposefulness when planning learning experiences has increased."

In particular, the work of CAJE Early Childhood Education Specialist Judi Morosohk was lauded, providing continuity that the national initiative often could not. But the experience most teachers (78% agreed) found effective was "teachers helping other teachers." Through a shared-leadership approach, directors mentored educators to take responsibility not only for their own classrooms but for the center as a whole. Relationships improved among teachers at different seniority levels and grade levels, and teachers felt increased satisfaction as a result of having a voice in the curriculum.

It is heartening that parents echoed the educators' impressions of their improved teaching. 91% of parents said their child's teacher "demonstrates excellence in promoting children's development." 92% reported "the teachers respond appropriately to my child's feelings." More than half said "the overall excellence of the ECE center has increased in the last several years."

Meanwhile, five ECE centers began to participate in the Qualistar Colorado rating system; Qualistar staff also provided training to help ECE centers achieve selected standards. Qualistar can provide guidance for parents on ECE center quality, and adds a competitive edge for highly rated centers. But reviews were mixed on Qualistar's value and on whether its general metrics were wholly relevant to the distinct goals of the Colorado Jewish ECE Initiative's approach. Some educators felt it focused overly on institutional aspects (such as health and safety) unrelated to the instructional mission, but it's worth noting that such regulations aim to benefit children, not educators per se. Notably, Qualistar will incorporate child/teacher relationships into its rating framework going forward, an indicator that it may increasingly reflect Colorado Jewish ECE Initiative ideals.

A notable perception gap between parents and educators emerged on whether the ECE center "effectively prepares children for Kindergarten." While 84 percent of educators felt it did, only 73 percent of parents agreed; it is worth tracking responses to this on a future survey. (The children were not tracked over time as they entered Kindergarten, so preparedness could not accurately be gauged.)

While evidence indicates that the Colorado Jewish ECE Initiative has led to higher-quality teaching, this approach warrants continued training and sufficient resources to enable teachers to continue to collaborate in an optimal way. In all, educators experienced a newfound sense of professionalism as a result of the initiative, and remarked often about feelings of increased purpose, meaning, and satisfaction.

⁸ The data point represents educators who had worked at their ECE centers for 6+ years, to ensure an appropriate interval for gauging improvement.

2. BETTER LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS:

Intensive efforts to teach teachers to abandon a “cookie-cutter” ECE approach—and adopt more progressive, engaged, emotionally responsive approaches in warmer, more naturalistic classroom and school settings—were effective and well-received.

“Our classroom is calmer and more enjoyable. Children are respected and recognized as individuals. Our style of teaching has changed, and the children guide our classroom activities.”
(Educator)

Beyond mere increases in educator training, the Colorado Jewish ECE Initiative was underscored by an array of tailored ECE approaches that draw on a recent body of research on ways children learn best. The Reggio Emilia approach—which promotes intellectual curiosity through such attributes as reflection, documentation, and inquiry—focused on the children’s interests rather than on an inflexible, top-down lesson plan, on sustained long-term projects, and on process over product.

As a result of this Reggio-inspired approach, educators often found themselves using the phrase, “Let’s find out together.” Whereas previously they may have applied a prescriptive approach to teaching (“the eyes go here, the nose goes there...”), Reggio Emilia precepts allow for more individualization and direct communication with each child. One parent alluded to this inclusive, engaged spirit when she said, “The involvement in learning by children makes it a school, not a day care.” And an educator observed that though “throughout this country, we’ve squashed children’s eagerness to discover, this approach could be a viable remedy for education in America today.”

In addition to the philosophical changes, structural changes to the classroom setting also received positive reviews. Colors, lighting, and textures were softened: comfortable chairs and pillows were introduced. In some centers, plastic furniture, toys, and playground equipment were replaced with those built of wood or other natural materials. Trees and gardens were planted, and outdoor artifacts made their way into the classroom, which became “a venue for peace and calm that enables the children to feel safe and secure.” One educator said, “During my first year, we spent most of the time inside during winter. Today, the children spend time being in nature all year round.”

Though many parents did not connect the teaching changes to the philosophy behind it (only 47% claimed to be “familiar with the Reggio Emilia approach”), the underlying elements were well received by parents. And significant majorities of educators reported that they would implement or continue relevant elements such as a play-based approach (84%), a project-based emergent curriculum (66%), emotionally responsive practice (73%), and a nature-based environment (66%).

3. BETTER INTEGRATION OF JUDAISM INTO CURRICULA:

Jewish content and values became more seamlessly and effectively integrated into the curriculum.

“Our son had not been attending a Jewish Pre-K program before. But in less than two months, he has learned more about Jewish traditions and has developed more of a Jewish identity than he has in 4½ years before, and far more than I ever would have imagined.”
(Parent)

The National JECEI entity stated a goal for its seven lenses as opening “windows to transcendent Jewish values... ideally manifest daily in each of our early childhood centers—in the ways in which we structure our time, our curricula and our classrooms; the quality of our relationships with our students, our faculties, our host institutions, and the partnerships we forge with the families.” Underlying the lenses is the idea that we are Jewish all the time, not only on holidays.

Interviews with directors, educators, and families yielded a consensus. Through the teaching of JECEI’s lenses, Jewish content became a focus of the ECE centers, and 92% of parents say these centers effectively taught their children about Jewish life. This approach helped “create a shared language” among educators; 78% of educators

agreed that the JECEI approach “gave them a vocabulary for what they were already doing.” Rather than segregating Jewish content into “holiday boxes,” the approach helped educators holistically integrate Jewish content related to holidays such as Rosh Hashanah and Tu B'Shevat into day-to-day activities year-round.

Teams now “talk in values, and not just themes,” one educator said. For example, a center held a “Sour New Year” celebration: instead of the usual apples and honey, educators organized “taste tests” and discussed why sweet foods were associated with the holiday, and not sour ones. “Staff walkthroughs” early in the implementation process motivated educators to see how Jewish values could be embedded throughout the center, and helped them see their work, quite literally, through new lenses. 83% of parents agreed that Jewish content was seamlessly integrated into the curriculum.

Most educators (73%) agreed the seamless approach to Jewish values and content would continue. Less clear is whether the nuts and bolts of the “lenses” framework will remain embedded within ECE centers for the long term. One educator alluded to their abstractness, asking “How am I supposed to teach this to a 1-year-old?” Just 50% said they would maintain the lenses going forward. By 2012, few educators could name all seven lenses, though this could tie back to the defunct status of the lenses proponent (National JECEI) than to their potential effectiveness.

That said, 70% say National JECEI's approach created higher expectations for Jewish ECE. This and other data points suggest that regardless of incremental tweaks, this approach to the integration of Jewish content help get educators on the same page about introducing children and families to complex Jewish cultural and historical traditions in an ECE setting.

4. BETTER CONNECTIONS BETWEEN FAMILIES AND JEWISH LIFE:

The ECE centers promoted family connections with Jewish life. ECE centers became “learning communities” and began to solicit engagement, even leadership input from parents. Positive steps were taken to help ECE centers integrate better with host institutions and mitigate access barriers.

“It’s been fundamental in helping to build a sense of Jewish community in an area where Jews are a minority, and where many of us moved here from other locations that had strong Jewish communities. It has tightly integrated Jewish education in general and with the local community for our children, so that they consider them one and the same rather than thinking of Judaism as a separate lens.”
(Parent)

A most encouraging finding was the degree to which ECE centers increased family engagement with Jewish life. When family participation in 17 attributes of Jewish life was measured, a linear relationship was seen: the longer children had attended their ECE center, the more likely their families were to participate in Jewish life.

The ECE centers have largely risen to the challenge of forging programmatic and personal connections with families. Parents spoke warmly of gathering with educators at family homes for Shabbat. They were invited to learn alongside teachers and children on Jewish topics such as Passover rituals, and on broader parenting skills such as raising calm and compassionate children. This learning partnership built continuity between the ECE center and home.

Educators said they have made active efforts to welcome and respond to parent questions (100%) and to tell parents what has happened with their children (97%). Parents (80% of whom say their ECE serves children and families alike and communicates well with them) now sense an openness at ECE centers that some felt was not there before. Centers established leadership teams that included parents, center staff and educators, and host institution leaders; nearly two-thirds of parents believed their ECE center “actively promotes opportunities to become involved in the ECE center’s leadership.”

One reason for this perception of increased openness may stem from the Reggio Emilia emphasis on documentation, which one parent appreciated because “you can’t hear everything from your child.” Interestingly, this documentation emphasis was adopted by one host institution’s Hebrew school for older children, one of several signs of improved relations and “same-page behavior” between host institutions and ECE centers since the Colorado Jewish ECE Initiative began.

As a result, 71% of parents felt a stronger connection with the Jewish community, and a similar proportion formed new Jewish friendships. It should be noted that Jewish ECEs serve many interfaith and non-Jewish families; 28% of participating families do not intend to raise their child Jewish. The intent of the Colorado Jewish ECE Initiative is not to inculcate families with the Jewish religion, but rather to generate awareness and appreciation for Judaism. One parent said, “We view the Jewish community more positively, but the Jewish half in our family still doesn’t really identify as Jewish, nor does he feel the children need to be raised Jewish.” But another said the ECE reinforced positive, universal aspects of Jewish community, independent of religion. “As a non-Jewish family at the ECE, we still share many of the values of the school and feel our daughter has grown intellectually and emotionally. In addition, we have made close family friends with both Jewish and non-Jewish families. This has enriched our lives immensely.”

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Since a central goal of this effort is to help Jewish ECE centers become gateways to ongoing engagement with Jewish life, key questions to consider include: Have improvements in ECE centers since the Colorado JECEI implementation helped “move the needle” for young families toward future Jewish activities? Are Jewish ECE centers optimizing access for families of diverse geographic and financial circumstances?

On the first question, the available data is promising, though future follow-up will be useful. Roughly one-fourth to one-third of parents said they are more likely to pursue future Jewish experiences, such as Hebrew school or a Jewish camp, than they were before their ECE experience. (This, despite the fact that only 49% of parents said, “ECE centers encouraged me to consider future Jewish educational options,” and many parents would not claim they are “more likely” because they intended to pursue future Jewish education from the outset.) More than two-thirds of families engaged in some activities at their ECE center’s host institution.

Along the lines of access, one key step was the scholarship fund’s establishment in 2010. Yet issues remain: it was noted that accommodations (such as extended hours, infant care, or alternative vacation care on Jewish holidays) could be improved for working parents who lack schedule flexibility.

What should be done from here—by ECE centers during the Colorado Jewish ECE Initiative’s next three years, and by Denver/Boulder Jewish stakeholders—to build on the progress so far? Recommendations for future consideration⁹ include:

1. **Maintain and support the ECE Specialist position:** A consistent theme was heard in interviews—that this position under the auspices of CAJE should be sustained. With National JECEI’s dissolution, it becomes even more critical to preserve a role oriented not solely toward the priorities of one ECE center or another, but toward instilling a consistent approach across centers and the Colorado Jewish ECE Initiative’s goals as a whole.
2. **Scrutinize the original ECE change model to determine which elements to maintain going forward:** While this report finds general improvements in ECE center outcomes since the outset of the Colorado Jewish ECE Initiative, it is not certain that each individual attribute—Reggio Emilia, Emotionally Responsive Practice, natural classroom environments, shared governance, the “lenses”—has contributed equally to the success, or has benefits that outweigh institutional costs. Certain attributes might be eliminated or optimized; new ones can enter the mix. It is beyond the scope of this report to gauge which aspects of an educational approach are most

⁹ These recommendations are derived from a review of documents related to the initiative, a statistical analysis of prior research, and stakeholder surveys and interviews.

(or least) effective. But since the Colorado Jewish ECE Initiative employs new approaches, it is natural that it evolve through continued attention to local outcomes, relevant educational research, and analysis of logistic feasibility for ECE centers and host institutions.

3. **Focus on professional development:** Effective professional development activities are long-term and co-integrated toward a specific educational approach, rather than episodic and independent. Continued access to external expertise can neutralize staff attrition, enable and motivate educators to improve their skills, and keep gains from being lost. Training tailored toward helping every child succeed, including those with special needs, is important. Meanwhile progress within ECE centers can be enhanced with common planning and learning time for teachers built into the program day. This can help ideas flow fluidly from peer to peer and enable educators to learn in unison.
4. **Establish quality standards that relate specifically to Jewish ECE centers:** Parents and educators alike can benefit from established benchmarks of Jewish ECE quality. While Qualistar Colorado has merits, the system does not represent a perfect overlap with the goals of the Colorado Jewish ECE Initiative. A hybrid system might be devised that integrates attributes of Qualistar and similar rating systems with attributes that account for child-centered approaches and integration of Jewish content. One educator remarked, “What we need is a Jewish Qualistar.”
5. **Find ways to increase Jewish ECE center access:** Scholarships are an integral way to improve access for lower-income families. Building on the fund established by Rose Community Foundation and the Allied Jewish Federation in 2010 can help mitigate financial obstacles for the 43% of families who said they have had to make sacrifices to afford the cost of tuition.

Yet while tuition support has undeniable value, community partners can recognize other innovations that forge connections or mitigate financial, logistic, and geographic challenges for families. A recent initiative that connects young families with Jewish life and each other is MazelTot, launched in 2009 as a comprehensive information and discount resource for regionwide Jewish activities, targeted toward expectant and young families. Programs like MazelTot help young families incorporate Jewish activities into their lives and are valuable complements to Jewish ECE centers—each being links in a chain that can lead children toward future Hebrew school, camp, and synagogue attendance, and toward a lifetime of Jewish engagement. This will have the added benefit of making host institutions more sustainable for the long term.

As one center leader noted, “It takes a community to get things done.”