



**IDENTITY. QUALITY. ACCESS.**

Jewish futures begin here.

**JEWISH EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION  
IN DENVER AND BOULDER**

A report from the field with recommendations for the future

# IDENTITY. QUALITY.

## JEWISH EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION MATTERS

Jewish preschools build Jewish identity, and quality child development programs for our youngest learners change children's lives. Often, the first Jewish institution to touch a child is preschool, and preschools are a vital venue to instill Jewish experiences, traditions and values in young children and their families.

As we've come to better understand the importance of early childhood development, we've seen increasing local and national emphasis on standards to professionalize the field and to create public funding streams to support early childhood education (ECE). By understanding our assets, the Denver/Boulder Jewish community can seize this opportunity to make a real difference for its families, both within and outside of our preschools.

## WHY WE DID THIS STUDY

Allied Jewish Federation of Colorado (AJF), the Colorado Agency for Jewish Education (CAJE) and Rose Community Foundation all play a leadership role in strengthening Jewish identity through lifelong education. Education is a powerful and culturally treasured tool for the transmission of values and traditions. We were eager to understand how we can support Jewish preschools in adopting emerging best practices in ECE and how we might help enrich the Jewish experiences of preschoolers and their families.

## HOW WE CONDUCTED THE STUDY

This report summarizes the results of a comprehensive assessment of the structure, operation, financial status, and impact of nine Jewish ECE programs in Denver and Boulder. The study period was Fall 2005 through Spring 2006.

Input came from:

**9 directors of Jewish preschool programs ~ 111 teachers (61% response rate) ~ 529 parents (55% response rate)**



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## KEY FINDINGS AT A GLANCE

### PARENTS

- The Jewish ECE experience increases and deepens Jewish practices for all, most significantly for liberal Jewish families.
- Most parents are Jewish, married, highly educated and relatively affluent.
- Parents care about ECE quality and carefully consider options when selecting preschools, with the two most important factors being the quality of staff and teachers, and child development programming.
- Parents say they are satisfied with their children's schools.
- The vast majority of parents (81%) do not plan to enroll their child in a Jewish day school.

### COMMUNITY

- Jewish ECE in Denver/Boulder is large in scale and scope.
- Jewish ECE capacity falls short of demand and is geographically concentrated.
- Non-Jews with children in Jewish preschools report improved perceptions of the Jewish community.

### PROVIDERS

- Jewish ECE directors and teachers are trained and educated in child development, dedicated to the field, and eager for child-development professional growth.
- Most directors, teachers and assistants are Jewish.
- Nearly all directors have had formal Jewish education, but mostly in their youth.
- Nearly half (44%) of assistants lack training in Jewish education.
- Jewish ECE teachers believe that their schools are good, but are frustrated with low financial and professional status and the lack of professional growth opportunities.
- Many teachers are considering leaving the ECE field.

To access the complete study and executive summary, or to find more information about ECE and early childhood development, please see the online resources on the back cover.

**“85 percent of a person’s intellectual, emotional and cognitive ability is formed by the age of five, making the early years a vitally important time in a child’s life.”**



“Our children are smart, caring, and they are the Jewish leaders of tomorrow because they started life in a Jewish preschool.” —A preschool parent

## FAST FACTS

- Jewish ECE in the Denver/Boulder community is large in scope:
  - 1,212 children enrolled
  - 181 teachers
  - 67 classrooms
  - annual revenue is nearly \$4.8 million
- Median monthly tuition cost is \$503 for a half day, \$752 for a full day.
- Scholarships and sliding-scale fees were \$146,221.
- No Jewish preschools are Qualistar rated, and only two are accredited by the National Association for the Education of Young Children.

# RECOMMENDATION No. 1 : IDENTITY

## ASSIST EARLY CHILDHOOD CENTERS TO CULTIVATE JEWISH IDENTITY IN CHILDREN AND TO CONNECT YOUNG FAMILIES TO THE JEWISH COMMUNITY.

### WHY

- Preschools build Jewish identity for parents and their children, but they are largely not recognized for this important role by the organized Jewish community.
- Jewish ECE substantially increases the Jewish behaviors of families. With half of the Jewish families in the Denver/Boulder Jewish community unconnected and uninvolved, preschools offer a gateway for young families to integrate Jewish behaviors and to get involved.
- The 2000 National Jewish Population Study finds that more intensive forms of Jewish education in childhood are associated with lower intermarriage rates.
- 65% of parents say they will continue their child's Jewish education after preschool.

### HOW: ACTION STEPS

1. Seamlessly connect Jewish content, values and traditions with child development practice in schools.
2. Capitalize on increased parental interest in Jewish life by offering Jewish learning and experiences for the entire family—parents and children.
3. Provide parents of preschoolers both within and outside of the Jewish ECE programs with exciting Jewish education and Jewish parenting education that addresses their needs and preferences.
  - Ask parents what they want and deliver programs and services to them—bring the Jewish community to parents.
  - Introduce parents to other Jewish institutions and places of learning.
  - Create a Jewish “personal trainer” or “concierge” service that will help parents connect.
  - Explore Melton Mini-School and other Jewish education programs for preschool parents.



# RECOMMENDATION No. **2** : QUALITY

## CONTINUALLY IMPROVE THE QUALITY OF TEACHING AND UNDERGO REGULAR QUALITY ASSESSMENT IN JEWISH EARLY CHILDHOOD CENTERS.

### WHY

- Early brain development research shows that quality education of our youngest children enhances their learning throughout school and beyond.
- The quality of teaching staffs and instruction matter most to parents.
- ECE is rapidly being professionalized through the efforts of the National Association for the Education of Young Children, and Qualistar in Colorado. Accreditation and quality ratings are of increasing importance to parents (48%) and teachers (56%). Currently, only two Jewish preschools use them.
- Teachers are the key to quality, but they report shortcomings in both resources and satisfaction:
  - Many feel frustrated, and one third are considering leaving the field.
  - Many teachers are close to retirement and demand for well-trained teachers will soon exceed supply.
  - Most teachers depend on their salaries to live, and teachers' salaries and household incomes are very low.
  - Most teachers have had no Jewish education since youth, and many assistants have had none.
  - Teachers report interest in pursuing professional development.
- Communities in the metropolitan area are actively deliberating the creation of public sources of financing for preschools, and will emphasize the Qualistar rating.
- National funders created the Jewish Early Childhood Education Initiative, which is developing a quality assessment tool to measure objectively Jewish learning. Denver/Boulder could be a pilot site for this initiative.

### HOW: ACTION STEPS

1. Encourage preschools to become accredited and Qualistar rated, with continual efforts aimed toward achieving and maintaining the highest ratings.
2. Explore how to assess objectively the quality of Jewish ECE, and how to develop standards for excellence that could be linked to accreditation.
3. Work collaboratively to create standards for high-quality Jewish ECE. Provide training in how to implement them and support to maintain them.
4. Improve the professional status and working conditions to help boost teachers' morale and effectiveness.
  - Examine compensation and benefits, and establish fair and reasonable standards.
  - Create professional development programs to improve teaching quality, morale and retention.
  - Explore ways to reward teachers for professional development, such as linking compensation to training and results.
  - Explore ways to recruit new teachers to the field.
  - Develop a Colorado Agency for Jewish Education (CAJE) initiative to create communities of practice/ learning among teachers for both Jewish ECE and child development, similar to the model CAJE uses in Jewish day schools.
5. Work with the national Jewish Early Childhood Education Initiative to explore their interest in Denver/Boulder as a pilot site to test and refine standards for Jewish ECE.

# RECOMMENDATION No. **3** : ACCESS

## EXPAND QUALITY JEWISH EDUCATION OPTIONS FOR JEWISH FAMILIES WITH CHILDREN FROM INFANCY TO AGE FIVE.

### WHY

- Demand for preschool exceeds supply. Waiting lists are long and schools operate at 94% of capacity. An estimated 2,000 Jewish families are not served.
- The youngest children are underserved; preschools serve primarily ages two to four.
- The market primarily serves high-income families. Most middle and lower income Jewish families are not being served in Jewish preschools.
- Location and driving distance affect school choice; many Jews live far away from existing Jewish preschools.
- Jewish ECE acts as a pipeline to future Jewish experiences for the whole family.
- Preschools are big business and may be profit centers for some institutions.

### HOW: ACTION STEPS

1. Market Jewish ECE to current and prospective parents, including joint marketing projects that include all preschools.
2. Investigate new models to educate young children and expand existing models to provide more access and supply. For example:
  - Collaborate among existing preschools to increase access. Involve directors.
  - Build satellite preschools to serve population centers outside of central Denver.
  - Create more infant care.
  - Add classrooms for all preschool ages.
  - Increase hours of operation and access for working parents.
  - Provide for special needs and eliminate other barriers.
3. Provide quality Jewish education to parents of children ages birth to five who are not in Jewish preschools. For example:
  - Deploy Jewish educational services to Jewish parents in non-Jewish preschools.
  - Create Jewish education home visitation programs.
  - Expand programs like Shalom Baby—which targets expectant and new parents—to help them make Jewish connections.



## ONLINE RESOURCES

To access the complete report and the executive summary of “Jewish Early Childhood Education in Denver and Boulder: Mapping the Field,” go to: [jewishfuturesbeginhere.org](http://jewishfuturesbeginhere.org).

To learn about Colorado preschool quality ratings and statewide efforts to raise the quality of ECE go to: [qualistar.org](http://qualistar.org).

For comprehensive information on early childhood development from the National Association for the Education of Young Children go to: [naeyc.org](http://naeyc.org).

To learn about a new national effort to integrate quality ECE with excellence in Jewish education from the Jewish Early Childhood Education Initiative go to: [jecei.org](http://jecei.org).

This report, “Identity. Quality. Access.” and the research study, “Jewish Early Childhood Education in Denver and Boulder: Mapping the Field” were initiated and produced by



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