



JEWISH EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION IN DENVER AND BOULDER

MAPPING THE FIELD, SEPTEMBER 2006

Executive Summary

Jewish Early Childhood Education in Denver and Boulder: Mapping the Field

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September 2006

This study of Jewish early childhood education (ECE) centers in Denver and Boulder was commissioned by the Allied Jewish Federation of Colorado, the Colorado Agency for Jewish Education, and Rose Community Foundation because of mounting evidence that early childhood education centers — preschools — provide a unique opportunity to foster Jewish identity and influence Jewish family life.

Preschool years shape a child's personality and identity, including religious identity. Despite this, little is known about the Denver/Boulder Jewish preschools and no Jewish community in the nation has fully researched its early childhood education centers and their impact on families and communities.

This is a summary of the results of a comprehensive assessment of the structure, operation, financial status, and impact of nine Jewish ECE schools in Denver and Boulder based on the input of nine program directors, 111 teachers, and 529 parents. Only one Jewish ECE school in the Denver/Boulder area with a single ECE classroom elected not to participate in the study. The research was conducted by the Center for Policy Research from June 2005 through May 2006 and was funded by a grant from Rose Community Foundation.

Key Findings at a Glance

I. Community

- A. Jewish ECE in the Denver and Boulder communities is large in scale and scope.
- B. Jewish ECE capacity falls short of demand and is concentrated geographically.
- C. Exposure to Jewish ECE schools results in improved perceptions of the Jewish community among people of other faiths.

II. Parents

- A. Parents report the ECE experience has increased and deepened their Jewish practices, with significant increases for liberal Jewish families.
- B. Most parents are Jewish, married, highly educated, and relatively affluent.
- C. Parents care about ECE quality and carefully consider their options before selecting a school.
- D. Parents are satisfied with their schools.

III. Providers

- A. Jewish ECE directors and teachers are trained and educated in ECE, dedicated to the field, and eager for professional growth opportunities.
- B. Most directors, teachers, and assistants are Jewish. While almost all directors have had formal training in Jewish education, a third of the teachers and 44 percent of assistants have not, and those with training say it took place during high school or before.
- C. Jewish ECE teachers are generally pleased with the atmosphere and setting in which they teach.
- D. Jewish ECE teachers express frustration with their financial status, their professional growth opportunities, and the status of teachers within their schools.
- E. Many teachers are considering leaving the field of ECE.

Key Findings: Community

IA. Jewish ECE in the Denver and Boulder communities is large in scale and scope.

The nine Jewish ECE schools in the Denver and Boulder communities:

- ▶ Enroll 1,212 children.
- ▶ Employ 181 teachers and teaching assistants in 67 classrooms.
- ▶ Generate annual income in excess of \$4,793,188.
- ▶ Report net incomes ranging from \$18,497 to \$304,407 per school, for an average return of 23.8 percent¹ before indirect costs are considered.
- ▶ Report a wide range of tuition charges for standard half-day (\$300 to \$595) and full-day (\$600 to \$928) enrollment, with median charges of \$503 and \$752 per month, respectively.
- ▶ Report offering scholarships or sliding-scale fees, with the estimated dollar value of all scholarships given during the most recent fiscal year totaling \$146,221.²

IB. Jewish ECE capacity falls short of demand and is concentrated geographically.

- ▶ Seven of the nine Jewish ECE schools are located in central Denver, and only two small schools are located in Boulder. By contrast, the Jewish population of Denver/Boulder is dispersed, with particular growth in Boulder, and in North and West Metro Denver.
- ▶ The schools serve primarily preschoolers between the ages of two and four years. This age group makes up 80 percent of the enrolled children. Few services are available for infants and toddlers. Only 15 percent of enrolled children are age two or younger and 4 percent are kindergartners.
- ▶ The schools operate at near capacity (94%), and six schools report waiting lists totaling 501 names.
- ▶ There may be additional parents in the Jewish community who would be interested in Jewish ECE for their children. The 1997 survey of Jewish households found that only 21 percent of children under age five were enrolled in Jewish preschools and approximately 42 percent of the households were not using Jewish ECE but reported such education to be of interest.³ Extrapolating these figures suggests there may be an estimated 2,000 Jewish children of preschool age in the Denver/Boulder area who are not in a Jewish ECE program but whose parents would be interested in such a program.

IC. Exposure to Jewish ECE schools results in improved perceptions of the Jewish community among people of other faiths.

Nearly a quarter of the parents surveyed in this study described themselves as “not Jewish.” These parents report that:

- ▶ Their child’s experience at a Jewish ECE has made them feel more positive about Judaism and the Jewish people.
- ▶ While Jewish programming was not an important factor in their decision to select a Jewish ECE, 47 percent of non-Jewish parents rate the quality of Jewish life programming at their child’s school as excellent.

Our family is not Jewish, however, I think it is important for my children to understand the Jewish faith... The exposure to Judaism has greatly enriched our life and we have tremendous respect for that faith and the community. It is an amazing culture.

— Parent

¹ Based on reports from seven of the nine schools.

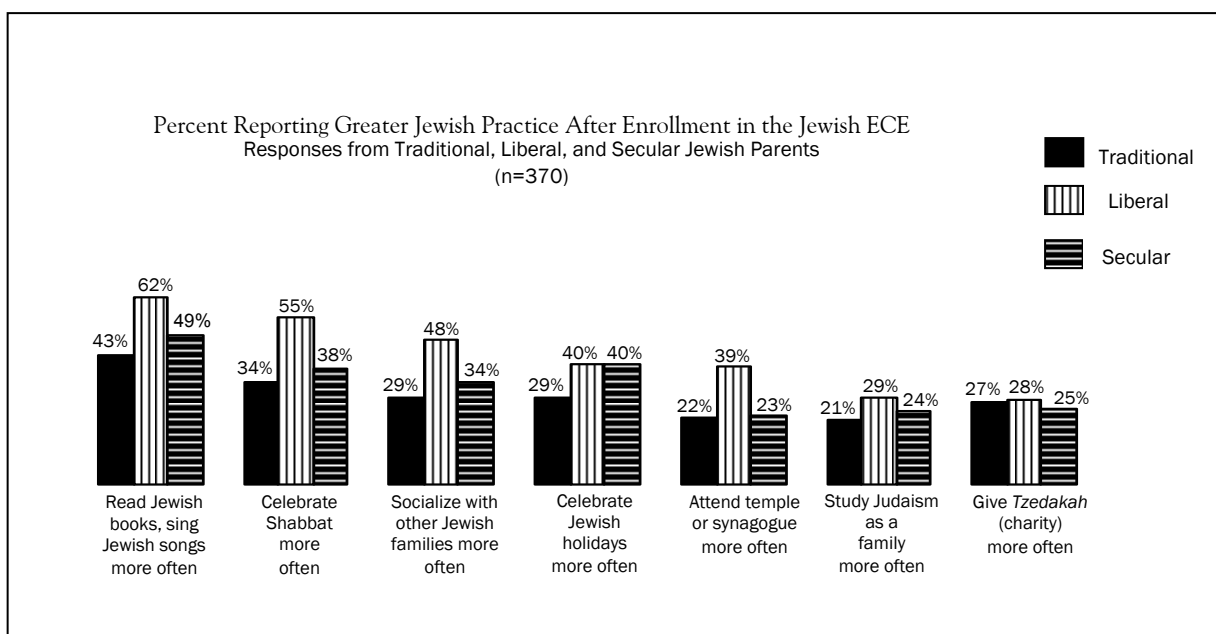
² Based on reports from seven of the nine schools.

³ Miller, Ron and Jacob B. Ukeles, (1998). *The 1997 Greater Denver/Boulder Jewish Community Study*. Denver, Colorado: Ukeles Associates.

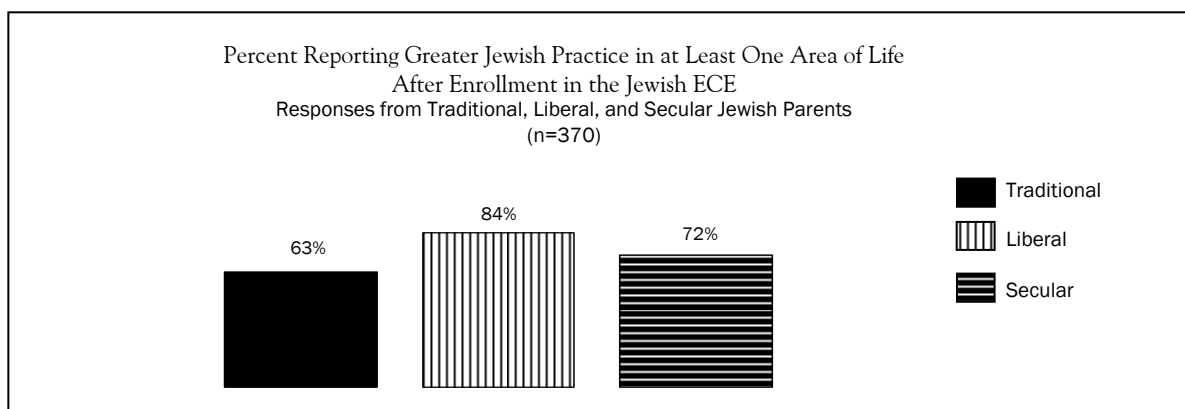
Key Findings: Parents

IIA. Parents report the ECE experience has increased and deepened their Jewish practices, with significant increases for liberal Jewish families.⁴

- ▶ Following the enrollment of their child in a Jewish preschool, many parents report substantially greater participation in Jewish practice, such as celebrating Shabbat, attending synagogue, or studying Judaism, with increases in every area of Jewish practice asked about in the study.
- ▶ The increase is generally most pronounced among parents who describe themselves as secular Jewish or liberal Jewish, rather than traditional Jewish families. The traditional Jewish families reported greater activity pre-enrollment and as a result had less room to increase.



- ▶ Another way of looking at change in Jewish practice is to compare the percentage of traditional, liberal, and secular Jewish parents who report increases in at least one activity following enrollment in Jewish preschool. The results show that all three groups make gains, but only the liberal group shows a statistically significant increase.



⁴ Traditional parents are those who describe themselves as Orthodox or Conservative. Liberal parents are those who describe themselves as Reform or Reconstructionist. Secular parents are those who describe themselves as Secular Jewish, Just Jewish, or Part Jewish.

IIB. Most parents are Jewish, married, highly educated, and relatively affluent.

- ▶ Most parents (77%) are Jewish.
- ▶ Virtually all parents (97%) are married or in a marriage-like relationship.
- ▶ Three-quarters of the parents are between the ages of 31 and 40.
- ▶ Over 90 percent have at least a college education.
- ▶ Two-thirds have household incomes over \$100,000; 30 percent have incomes of \$200,000 or more.
- ▶ Most responding parents are either home full-time (42%) or employed only part-time (35%), with only 24 percent in full-time employment.
- ▶ Over a quarter of the households (28%) have a full or part-time nanny.
- ▶ Only 13 percent of the homes have two parents working full-time with no nanny.

IIC. Parents care about ECE quality and carefully consider their options before selecting a school.

- ▶ Approximately 70 percent of the parents report looking at other ECE schools before making a preschool decision, and 50 percent looked at both Jewish and non-Jewish preschools.

The two factors of greatest importance to parents in selecting a school are:

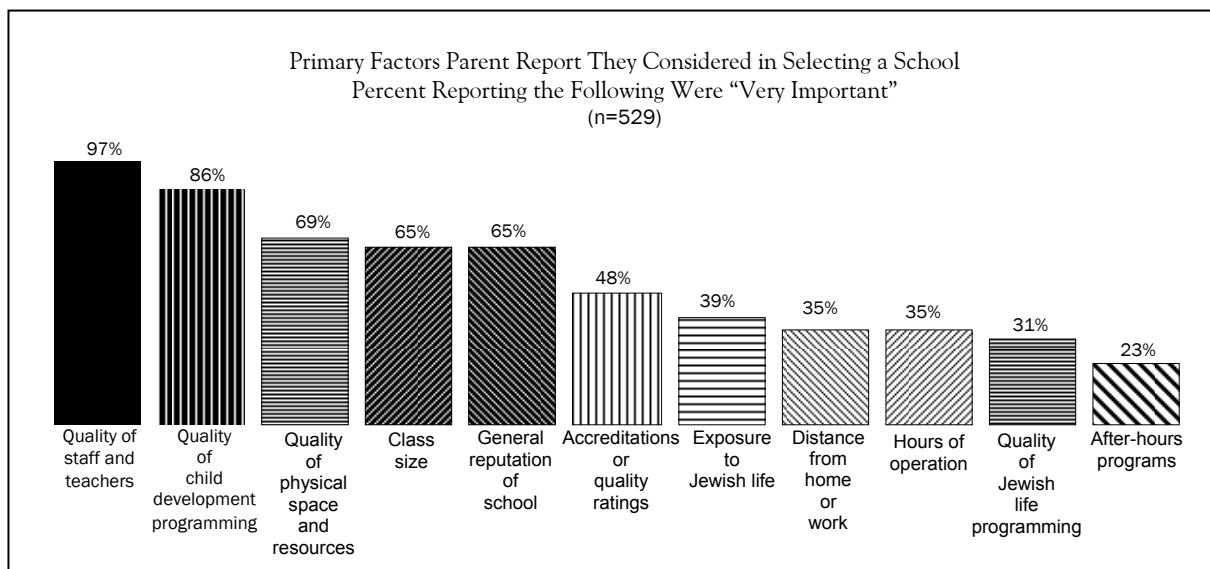
- ▶ The quality of staff and teachers; and
- ▶ The quality of the child development programming.

Other important factors include:

- ▶ Class size;
- ▶ The school's reputation; and
- ▶ The physical space and resources.

Our coming to the school was based on the quality of teachers and how they deal with children – not the quality of Jewish education. Teachers first, Jewish education second.

– Parent



Licensing and accreditation matter to parents and teachers.

- ▶ Most preschool directors question whether parents care about licensing and accreditation, and if it would be worth the cost and effort given their full enrollments and waiting lists. Only two preschools are accredited by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), and when the study was conducted, three schools had opted out of state licensing by using their religious exemptions.
- ▶ Almost half (48%) of all parents say accreditations and ratings were “very important” in their choice of a school.
- ▶ Among those who are familiar with licensing, 84 percent of parents and 80 percent of teachers and teacher assistants say state licensing is generally “very important.”
- ▶ Among those who are familiar with accreditation, 62 percent of parents say NAEYC accreditation is “very important” and 42 say a Qualistar⁵ rating is generally “very important.”
- ▶ Among teachers, the percentage reporting NAEYC is very important is 56 percent and for Qualistar the figure is 36 percent.

Parents will select a K-12 school based on its academic program and teacher quality.

- ▶ Over 90 percent of the parents say the quality of teachers and staff, and the quality of the academic curriculum will be “very important” in their choice of a K-12 school.
- ▶ Other factors that will be “very important” for parents include class size (78%), the school’s general reputation (69%), accreditation and ratings (65%), physical space (58%), and enrichment and extracurricular programs (53%).
- ▶ Most Jewish parents (81%) do not plan to enroll their preschool children in a Jewish day school. This finding is similar to findings reported in other studies⁶ that have looked at intent to use Jewish day schools.
- ▶ Among those parents who describe themselves as traditional Jewish families, 41 percent plan to send their preschool child to a Jewish day school. Among liberal and secular Jewish parents, the comparable figures are six and eight percent.
- ▶ Among Jewish preschool parents, 68 percent say Jewish curriculum will be “not very important” or “not at all important” in their selection of a K-12 school.
- ▶ Among those who do not plan to use Jewish day schools, most parents say it is “very” (65%) or “somewhat” (18%) likely that they will continue their child’s Jewish education when they enter grade school.

IID. Parents are satisfied with their schools.

Parents describe the preschool in which their child is enrolled as:

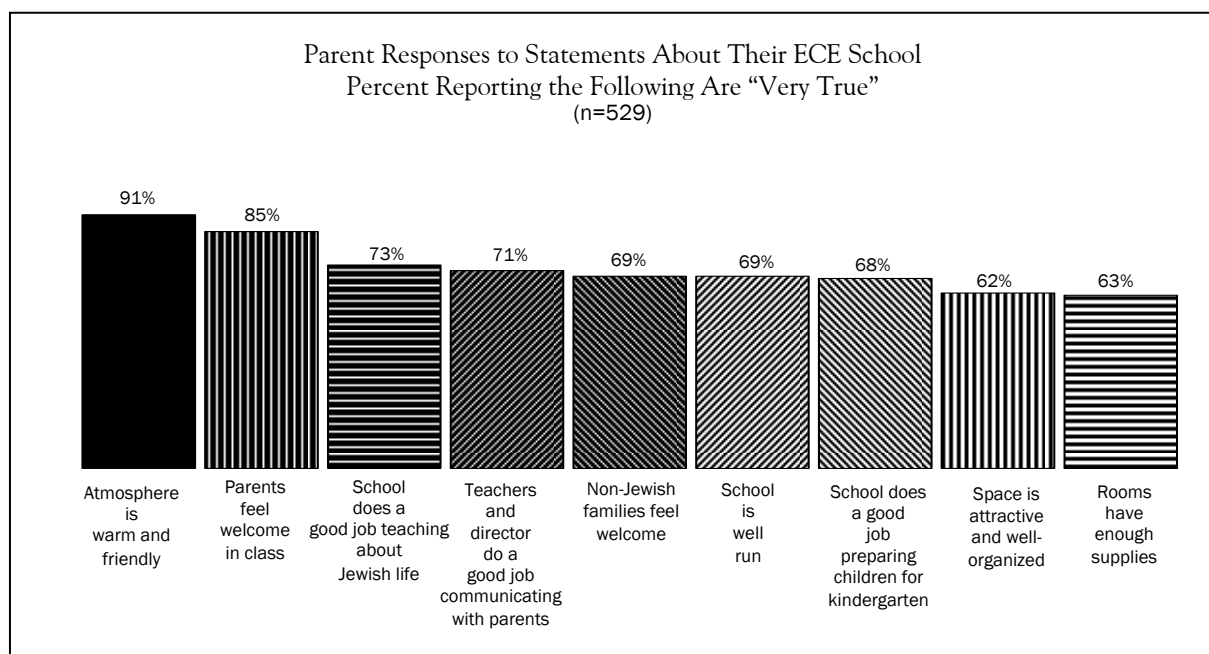
- ▶ Warm and friendly, and welcoming to both Jewish and non-Jewish parents;
- ▶ Doing a good job of teaching about Jewish life;
- ▶ Doing a good job of preparing children for kindergarten; and
- ▶ Well-run, attractive, and adequately supplied.

The school has been the best thing that has happened in early childhood development for our kids and our family. Continue the very high standard of teachers, as teachers mold and create a positive association for kids with school forever.

– Parent

⁵ Qualistar, a rating system that measures the quality of child care and preschool programs, was recently adopted by the Colorado Child Care Commission as the statewide rating system.

⁶ Beck, Pearl. 2000. *Jewish Preschools as Gateways to Jewish Life: A Survey of Jewish Preschool Parents in Three Cities*. Baltimore, MD: Jewish Early Childhood Education Partnership. Miller, Ron and Jacob B. Ukeles, (1998). *The 1997 Greater Denver/Boulder Jewish Community Study*. Denver, CO: Ukeles Associates.



Parents are somewhat less favorable in their ratings of how well the school helps with parenting and promoting Jewish life at home.

- ▶ Most parents say the school does either an excellent (40%) or good (48%) job in helping parents to promote Jewish family life. A total of 11 percent rate these aspects of the school as fair or poor.
- ▶ When asked how well the school does in providing parenting tips and information on child development, parents give the following ratings: excellent (30%), good (44%), fair (23%), and poor (3%). Preschool directors say they are unsure how to provide parenting information since attendance is typically very low at scheduled programs on child development and parenting.

I love the fact that my son is growing up proud to be Jewish!

— Parent

Key Findings: Providers

IIIA. Jewish ECE directors and teachers are trained and educated in ECE, dedicated to the field and eager for professional growth opportunities.

- ▶ All nine directors have at least a college degree and eight have a State director’s certificate. On average, they have worked in the field of ECE for 16 years and have directed their current school for 4.3 years.
- ▶ Nearly all of the teachers and most assistant teachers have formal training in early childhood education and about two-thirds have at least a college degree, while only about 45 percent of the teachers in the secular preschool field have a college or advanced degree.⁷
- ▶ Teachers and assistants have worked in their ECE schools for an average of 7.2 years and a median of 5.0 years.
- ▶ Teachers have worked in the ECE field for an average of 9.9 and a median of 7.5 years.
- ▶ Few teachers (12%) belong to any professional educational organization. However, most teachers would be interested in attending classes, lectures, or local conferences related to ECE. Teachers would be willing to attend during or outside of school hours, especially if their school paid tuition or offered compensation.

⁷ Whitebook, M., L. Sakai, E. Gerber and C. Howes (2001). *Then & Now: Changes in Child Care Staffing, 1994 – 2000, Technical Report*. Washington, D.C.: Center for the Child Care Workforce.

- ▶ Teachers are somewhat less interested in Jewish education opportunities, although many would participate if educational opportunities are offered during schools hours, include compensation, and/or are free.
- ▶ Teachers are somewhat more likely to favor more conventional training approaches, such as lectures and classes, rather than more effective ones such as coaching, mentoring, or observing master teachers.⁸

IIIB. Most directors, teachers, and assistants are Jewish. While almost all directors have had formal training in Jewish education, a third of teachers and 44 percent of assistants have not, and those with training say it took place during high school or before.

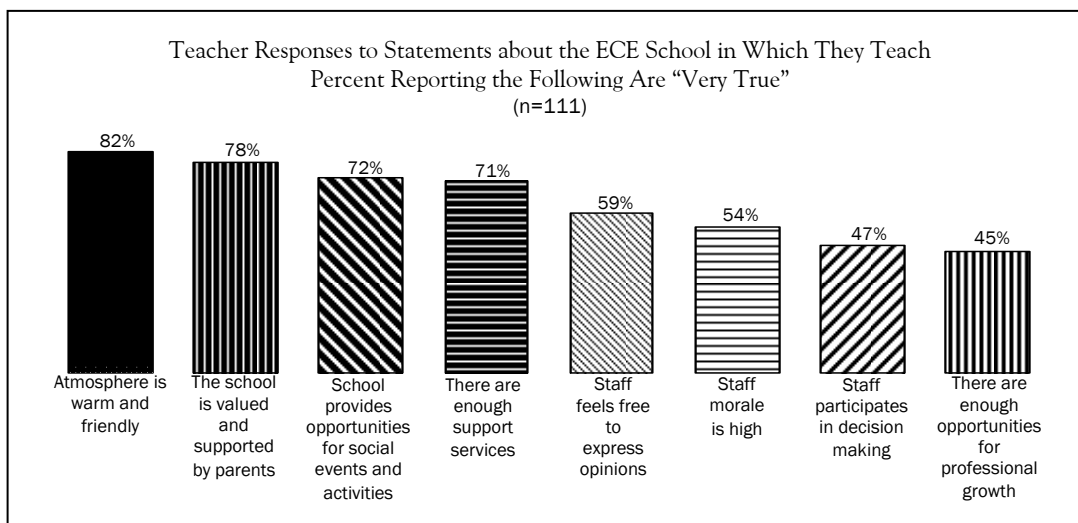
- ▶ Seven directors and nearly 70 percent of the teachers and assistant teachers are Jewish.
- ▶ Approximately a third of the teachers and 44 percent of the assistants have had no formal training in Jewish education, and half of those say they have not received any training beyond high school.
- ▶ Eight directors report formal Judaic education including attending Hebrew school, obtaining a Melton certificate, taking college courses, and/or attending school in Israel.

This year we have a pair of teachers who are very strong academically, but neither is Jewish. They cannot integrate Hebrew or regular Jewish content.

– Parent

IIIC. Jewish ECE teachers are generally pleased with the atmosphere and setting in which they teach.

- ▶ Most teachers describe the schools in which they teach as warm and friendly.
- ▶ Teachers believe the school is valued and supported by the parents.
- ▶ The ECE school is seen as providing ample opportunities for social activities and events.
- ▶ Teachers feel the school has sufficient teaching and administrative support.



⁸ National Staff Development Council Standards, "Moving NSCD's Staff Development Standards into Practice: Innovation Configurations."

IIID. Jewish ECE teachers express frustration with their financial status, their professional growth opportunities, and the status of teachers within their schools.

- ▶ About half (48%) of teachers and nearly 70 percent of assistants report total household incomes of less than \$50,000. The income needed to meet the basic needs of a family of two adults and two children in Denver in 2004 was \$48,065.⁹ Almost three-quarters of the teachers and assistants are in two-parent homes with children.
- ▶ Twenty-two percent of assistants report an annual household income of less than \$15,000, which falls below the federal poverty line in Denver for two adults and two children in 2004.
- ▶ Only 11 percent of teachers and 24 percent of assistants report being very satisfied with their salaries. About half in each group say they are either very or somewhat dissatisfied.
- ▶ Teacher salaries in Jewish ECE schools in this study are consistent with salary levels for ECE in secular settings and with Jewish ECE salaries nationally. They range from \$10 to \$30 per hour for teachers, with median hourly salaries in the range of \$12 to \$19. For assistants, the hourly range is between \$8 and \$15.60, with a median of \$10.
- ▶ The number of hours that teachers and assistants work at ECE schools per week ranges from two to 45. The average and median number of hours worked per week for both groups is about 30 hours.
- ▶ A third of the teachers, and a quarter of the assistants, work a second job.
- ▶ Most teachers and assistants report their school provides, and they use, vacation time and paid sick leave. Although most say their school also provides tuition for a child at no or lower cost, only about a quarter reports using this benefit. Fewer teachers and assistants (58% and 55%, respectively) report the school provides health insurance, and only 50 percent of the teachers and 29 percent of the assistants who are offered health insurance report they use this benefit.

IIIE. Many teachers are considering leaving the field of ECE.

- ▶ Approximately one-third of teachers and assistants say their salary level has caused them to consider leaving the school, Jewish ECE, or the entire field of ECE.
- ▶ At the same time, half say it is very likely they will be working in a Jewish ECE setting in two years.
- ▶ High teacher attrition is common in ECE programs nationally, although less so in Jewish ECE programs. Nationally, Jewish ECE directors report that 12 percent of teachers and 14 percent of assistants either left or are planning to leave this year. In secular early childhood education, the turnover rate is 31 percent with new teaching staff having significantly less education than those they replace.¹⁰

⁹ "The Self-Sufficiency Standard defines the amount of income required to meet basic needs (including paying taxes) in the regular "marketplace" without public or private/informal subsidies. By providing a measure that is customized to each family's circumstances, e.g., taking account of where they live and how old their children are, the Self-Sufficiency Standard makes it possible to determine if families' incomes are enough to meet their basic needs." Pearce, Diana (2004). *The Self-Sufficiency Standard for Colorado 2004: A Family Needs Budget*. Denver, CO: Colorado Fiscal Policy Institute, page 3.

¹⁰ Whitebook, M., L. Sakai, E. Gerber and C. Howes (2001). *Then & Now: Changes in Child Care Staffing, 1994 – 2000, Technical Report*. Washington, D.C.: Center for the Child Care Workforce.



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Methodology

The research draws on data from:

- Nine Jewish ECE schools in the Denver/Boulder area. Only one school, with a single ECE classroom, elected not to participate in the study.
- In-person, open-ended interviews with nine ECE program directors lasting 1½ to 2½ hours. The interviews addressed approaches to ECE and Jewish life programming, staffing issues, economic factors, accreditation, and feedback from parents.
- Data forms completed by directors of the nine schools eliciting information on enrollment and capacity, number of families served, waiting lists, staff salaries and benefits, tuition charges, program income and expenses, and staff director characteristics.
- Paper and pencil questionnaires completed by 529 parents between November 2005 and March 2006 for a cross school response rate of 55 percent. The surveys elicited information on family demographics, Jewish identity, factors in school selection, ratings of the ECE curriculum and Jewish life program, and changes in Jewish practice and behavior following ECE enrollment.
- Paper and pencil questionnaires completed by 111 teachers and teaching assistants during November and December 2005 for a cross-school response rate of 61 percent. The surveys elicited information on staff demographics, secular and Jewish education levels, ratings of the ECE curriculum and Jewish life program, satisfaction with salaries and benefits, and interest in professional development and Jewish education opportunities.

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