

Summary of Research Conducted for PEP and PEASP – 2010-2012

Commissioned by: The Jim Joseph Foundation

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INTRODUCTION

For more than a decade, Pardes's selective two-year Educators Program (PEP), funded by The Avi Chai Foundation, has recruited and trained Judaic studies teachers and helped place them in North American day schools. In 2008, with additional funding support from the Jim Joseph Foundation, the Pardes Educators Alumni Support Project (PEASP) began providing induction support, offering professional development and fostering retention among PEP graduates. Since it was founded in 2000, PEP has graduated 122 Jewish educators, awarding them each a Certificate of Jewish Studies from Pardes along with a Masters in Jewish Education and a Certificate in Jewish Day School Education from Hebrew College, Pardes's institutional partner for this program.¹

This report summarizes Pardes's unique approach to training Jewish educators and highlights key learnings from ReST's one and a half years evaluating PEP and PEASP. The document concludes with recommendations for leveraging Pardes's experience with training and supporting Jewish educators.

THE RESEARCH

The research conducted from June 2010 through December 2011 included:

A formative evaluation of PEASP funded by the Jim Joseph Foundation, which included two phases:

1. An evaluation of the role played by PEASP in promoting alumni retention
2. An assessment of the possibilities and limitations of an alumni support program for the purpose of professional development and teacher retention in Jewish education and the possible role of Pardes in the field.

Market and strategic planning research funded by the Avi Chai Foundation, with two primary goals:

1. To gauge the market in terms of: (1) the continuing need for PEP graduates in the field, and (2) the extent of interest from possible partner organizations and funders in supporting Pardes's work in recruiting, training and supporting Judaic Studies educators
2. To suggest pathways for restructuring the program so as to enable Pardes to best meet the market's needs in a manner that will maximize Pardes's impact on Jewish education in an economically sustainable way.

¹ For the first six years of PEP, Pardes partnered with Hebrew University in Jerusalem for the MA component of the program. In addition, some participants entered PEP having already completed an MA or another advanced degree.

PARDES'S UNIQUE ADDED VALUE: THE OPEN BEIT MIDRASH

According to its website, the Pardes Institute of Jewish Studies in Israel "provides a co-educational, open, inclusive, diverse and intellectually challenging environment in Jerusalem, which engages all Jews in the study of the classic texts and ideas of their heritage. It offers students an intense experience of Jewish life and tradition. Pardes cultivates in its students a life-long love of Jewish learning, the Jewish people and Israel, inspiring them to engage in Jewish life as communal leaders, educators and spiritual leaders." Pardes refers to this intensive learning environment that embraces diverse learners, approaches and ideas in the exploration of Jewish texts as the Open Beit Midrash (OBM).

"I cannot overstate the importance of the support of a cohort of inspiring, dedicated and committed individuals who grapple with text and think deeply about teaching...the Pardes educators community helped nourish me in my early years of teaching, provided me with great pedagogical ideas and has been a valuable resource that helped me grow and find my voice in this field."

Tamar Rabinowitz, Judaic Studies Teacher at the Jewish Community High School of the Bay in San Francisco; PEP graduate (2002).

Pardes is a pioneer in OBM, seeking to expose young adults to classical Jewish texts and provide them with the knowledge, skills and confidence to continue learning after leaving Pardes. Pardes uses textual sources and *havruta* (paired) study as a way of engaging and exploring all areas of Jewish learning and life.

Pardes OBM is the core difference between PEP and PEASP and other "academic" programs that seek to recruit, train and support Judaic Studies educators. Academic institutions stress the discipline of teacher education, with students achieving mastery in

knowledge, skills and practices. In contrast, Pardes emphasizes the experience of participating in a vibrant community of learners in the beit midrash as the basis for building knowledge, skills and motivation required for Judaic Studies educators.

"PEP was instrumental in my development as a teacher and as an educational leader. The deep immersion in beit midrash learning developed and inspired me, and the opportunity to learn about teaching in a community of passionate and reflective peers and mentors was invaluable."

Rabbi Marc Baker, Head of School at Gann Academy: The New Jewish High School of Greater Boston; PEP graduate (2002).

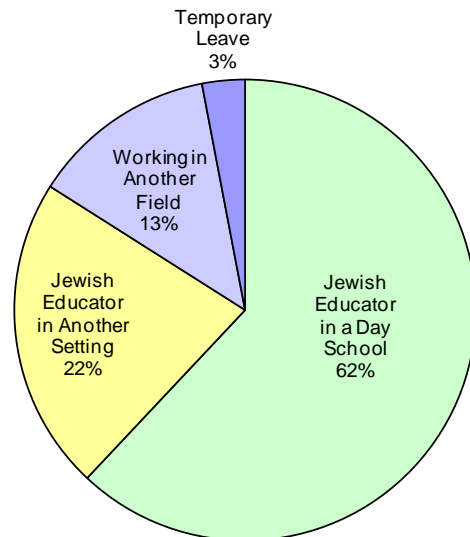
The evaluation assessed the manner in which the OBM model is currently implemented in Pardes's work with Jewish educators, including outcomes for: (1) the recruitment and retention of PEP educators; (2) the reputation of PEP as a teacher education program; (3) the efficacy of PEASP's work with PEP alumni; and, (4) Pardes's ability to economically sustain its work with

Jewish educators into the future.

KEY FINDINGS

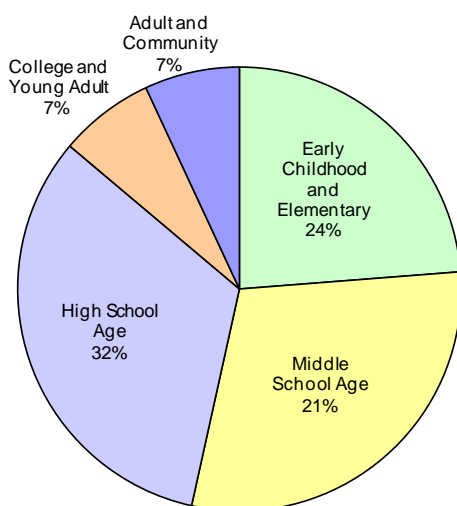
1. Pardes is achieving its primary goal of placing and retaining talented Judaic Studies teachers in Jewish high schools, day schools and other Jewish educational institutions in North America.

Of the six PEP cohorts (at the time of the research in Summer/Fall 2010) whose graduates had completed between three and eight years of day school teaching, 65% still worked in day school education, with just 17% having left the field of Jewish education altogether. These numbers are comparable to or better than similar programs for Jewish educators or teacher education programs in general.



Status of all 122 PEP Graduates as of 2012

A central factor contributing to the retention of PEP alumni in Jewish education is their high levels of motivation and commitment to Judaic Studies teaching. All report attending PEP out of a desire to deepen their knowledge of Torah in the Pardes Open Beit Midrash and to gain the ability to bring OBM to their work as Jewish educators. For most, Pardes helped nurture this passion and opened up a pathway to take their love for Jewish text study to the day school classroom. PEP alumni view themselves as members of a community of fellows, a cadre of elite educators with the passion, motivation and skills for bringing high levels of Jewish text study to day schools and other Jewish educational institutions.



Target Audience Among PEP Graduates who are Jewish Educators

2. PEP alumni report that the primary role PEASP plays for retention is to preserve the feeling of membership in a supportive and visionary community. Within that general charge, the mission needs to play out differently vis-à-vis novice teachers and those alumni who are past the three year commitment made to teach in a Jewish day school.

The evaluation confirms the importance of the focus on the first three years for retention. The induction period determines the overall attitude of PEP alumni to teaching in a day school and is a critical and productive phase for PEASP to focus its resources. In line with other studies, the evaluation shows that a

“supportive school environment” during a teacher’s first three years in the classroom is the critical variable explaining retention. PEASP’s role is especially valuable, as PEASP’s staff steer PEP alumni to schools that offer supportive and nurturing work environments. Alumni who find themselves in a school with a poor working environment are encouraged by PEASP’s staff to move.

As the PEP alumni network has grown, so PEASP has begun to expand its work with veteran (four years +) teachers. The evaluation helped PEASP frame the focus of its work with veteran teachers from “retention” to helping the now confident teacher “become a master educator.” The role of PEASP for the veteran teacher is to enable PEP alumni to benefit from resources offered by the PEASP alumni network as they work to become leaders for positive change in their schools and the broader field of Jewish education.

3. Heads of school and experts in the field regard PEP alumni as high quality Judaic Studies teachers and confirm that there remains a need for such educators.

In interviews and a survey of PaRDeS, Schechter and RAVSAK day schools, contacts report that Pardes graduates are desirable and qualified teachers who stand out from those of other pre-service training programs because of their love and knowledge of OBM learning. They are more Jewishly knowledgeable than graduates of University or Teacher-College-based programs and better able than Orthodox Yeshiva graduates to teach in a manner appropriate for non-Orthodox students.

Heads of School and Judaic Studies Coordinators predict that there will be demand for the hiring of new Jewish studies faculty in Jewish day schools over the next five years. Forty-six percent of the schools surveyed report that it is difficult to find Judaic studies teachers with adequate Jewish knowledge. This finding closely matches the finding in the Educators in Jewish School Study (EJSS) indicating that 45% of day schools find it difficult to find qualified staff members.

4. The future success of PEP and PEASP depends on the ability to focus on OBM

In the broader field of teacher education there are currently two distinct types of institutions: 1) academic degree-granting programs, represented by university and teacher colleges, and 2) practice-oriented organizations represented by a diverse group of organizations, the most famous of which is *Teach for America*. Due to its OBM focus, Pardes has far greater similarity to the practice-oriented institutions in terms of its educational

“When Dr. Susan Wall visited me during my first year of teaching, I learned that she cared about me, believed in me and knew that I would succeed. I held onto that feeling throughout my years teaching and mentoring... As I face my biggest challenge yet as a new head of school, in my most difficult moments, I remember that there is an entire network of people – my teachers, colleagues and friends – who believe in me and know I will succeed. For this I am deeply grateful.”

Amanda Pogany, Head of School at Luria Academy in Brooklyn; PEP Graduate (2003).

goals and organizational development model. However, when it comes to training and supporting its educators, PEP initially adopted a mixed model, which incorporated both academic and practice-oriented elements that were not integrated in a systematic and focused manner. As a part of Pardes's recent restructuring and initial expansion of its educator training work, Pardes has already begun to bring a more integrated approach to all of its educator training programs. This shift which will enable more efficient use of organizational and human resources.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Continuity and Expansion

Given the success of PEP and PEASP and the continued need for qualified educators with OBM credentials, Pardes should continue to recruit, train and support Judaic Studies personnel. There is a need for the Pardes combination of intensive beit midrash studies plus pedagogical training in diverse settings that can move PEP and PEASP beyond a singular focus on day schools. These settings include Hillels on campus, camps, youth groups and other Jewish educational venues.

Given the success of PEASP, Pardes should work with partners to experiment with how its current alumni-support programming can expand to serve other talented Jewish educators. PEASP is the only alumni network focused on providing professional development and networking opportunities for Judaic studies day school teachers in North America. Over the past ten years, Pardes has developed expertise in serving this population and is well positioned to bring that expertise to Judaic studies teachers who are not graduates of PEP.

Focus on Core Expertise - OBM

In order for the newly created *Pardes Center for Jewish Educators* (PCJE) to succeed in expanding and diversifying Pardes's work with educators, Pardes should remain focused on its core added value to the field – OBM. The purely academic aspects of the program must either be integrated to clearly serve the OBM mission or be handed over to other institutions. The alternative is to face being stretched in too many directions.

To succeed Pardes needs to develop a clear set of intellectual and practical standards for connecting OBM to pre and in-service teacher education. To do so requires explicating principles and practices that enable participants to at once participate in the beit midrash experience and at the same time reflect on what is required to bring that experience to the day school classroom and other educational settings. While these principles and practices will draw on academic approaches to teacher education, they need to be guided by a fundamentally different, OBM-informed logic for the practice of Judaic Studies teaching.