



# Independent Evaluation of the **Jim Joseph Foundation's Education Initiative**

## Year 4 Report—Executive Summary

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Submitted to the Jim Joseph Foundation

**AUGUST 2015**

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# Executive Summary

## BACKGROUND

Research indicates that well-prepared educators help produce strong learning outcomes for students. For the continued health of Jewish education, higher education institutions should have the capacity to prepare sufficient numbers of highly qualified educators and education leaders for careers in Jewish education. Teachers, division heads, and school heads represent a substantial segment of the educator population in Jewish day schools. More than 5,000 educators enter new positions in Jewish day schools every year and are in need of adequate preparation. The most frequent obstacle to instructional quality in Jewish day schools is the difficulty in recruiting qualified teachers (Ben-Avie & Kress, 2006; Jewish Education Service of North America, 2008; Kidron et al., in press; Krakowski, 2011; Sales, 2007).

A similar problem has been observed in supplementary schools in congregational or communal settings. These schools enroll the majority of Jewish children and adolescents receiving a Jewish education in the United States (Wertheimer, 2008). In recent years, congregations have begun to replace traditional educational programs with new approaches that aim to raise the quality of instruction and the level of parent and student satisfaction relative to their programs. These new approaches may include greater integration of experiential Jewish education and community service, family learning, and the integration of all aspects of congregational learning under the leadership of one director (Rechtschaffen, 2011; Sales, Samuel, Koren, & Shain, 2010). High-quality programs that are updated or reconstructed across time to meet the needs of the Jewish community require well-prepared directors and educators. However, many directors and educators in congregational schools have not participated in teacher preparation programs, and the depth of Jewish content knowledge among these teachers is highly variable (Stodolsky, Dorph, & Rosov, 2008).

***For the continued health of Jewish education, higher education institutions should have the capacity to prepare sufficient numbers of highly qualified educators and education leaders for careers in Jewish education.***

Producing and sustaining a high level of innovation in other Jewish educational settings, including Jewish community centers (JCCs), Hillels, camps, and entrepreneurial businesses, calls for relevant advanced training and professional development that enable educational leaders to design, lead, and provide both community education and direct service activities. These leaders and their staff members may perform needs or assets assessments, strategic planning, community visioning, parenting training, youth education and recreation, and many other community education activities. Ideally, educational leaders also should serve as a bridge between knowledge generated by researchers and the needs of their organizations and the communities they serve.

The Jim Joseph Foundation's Education Initiative addressed these issues in two ways. First, through scholarships, the initiative directly supported the preparation of early- and mid-career professionals across the spectrum of Jewish education settings. Second, by developing new advanced degree and professional development programs, the initiative expanded the capacity of three institutions—the

Jewish Theological Seminary (JTS), Hebrew Union College–Jewish Institute of Religion (HUC-JIR), and Yeshiva University (YU)—to offer a wider selection of programs to an expanded pool of prospective students.

American Institutes for Research (AIR) examined the work and outcomes of the programs funded by the Education Initiative. This independent evaluation focused on the five goals for the Education Initiative. Exhibit A summarizes these goals: three relate to educator preparation and support and two to capacity building.

**Exhibit A. The Five Goals of the Jim Joseph Foundation’s Education Initiative**

| Educator Preparation and Professional Development   | Capacity Building   |
|---|---|
| Goal 1. Increase the number of highly qualified individuals who enroll in Jewish education advanced degree, certificate, and leadership programs.   | Goal 4. Develop the infrastructure that will enable financial sustainability of the programs supported by the Education Initiative.             |
| Goal 2. Provide programs that prepare educators and education leaders to teach, inspire, and enrich education experiences in a variety of settings. | Goal 5. Identify areas of programmatic and interinstitutional collaboration that can improve program quality and make improvements sustainable. |
| Goal 3. Increase the number of educators and education leaders placed, retained, and promoted in a variety of settings.                             |   |

**KEY OUTCOMES ACHIEVED**

The evaluation of the Education Initiative demonstrates that the initiative succeeded in promoting grantees’ ability to (1) develop new courses in new formats to dramatically increase the number of qualified individuals who enroll in Jewish education degree and professional development programs, (2) support the growth of educational leadership skills of individuals working in diverse Jewish education settings, and (3) build interinstitutional collaborations.

*In all, the Education Initiative engaged more than 1,400 Jewish education professionals from 34 states and internationally and supported 26 new and existing programs in three higher education institutions.*

- To date, 1,412 individuals participated in the degree and professional development programs covered by the Education Initiative. Only one third (35 percent) of these individuals would have obtained advanced degrees and professional development if the Education Initiative had not existed.
  - One half (705 people) work in Jewish day schools.
  - One fifth (306 people) work in congregations, temples, and synagogues.
  - One third (401 people) work in organizations that implement or consult on less traditional programs (e.g., Hillel, JCCs, camps, youth groups, and entrepreneurial Jewish education programs).
  - Compared with the year before the Education Initiative (2009), the 1,412 individuals represent a sharp increase in enrollment in educator preparation programs.

- The degree and professional development programs under the Education Initiative promoted leadership development through improved management skills and content knowledge.
  - Across programs, two thirds of the participants brought into their workplaces both newly acquired content expertise (e.g., the ability to examine practice through Jewish lenses; the ability to assess gaps in pedagogical practice) and new management skills (e.g., the ability to form and implement a plan or systemic change; the ability to leverage professional networking for improved professional practice).
  - Only 4 percent of the participants experienced little change in their use of content knowledge or management and organizational skills. Most of these participants were not in job positions that enabled them to practice the new skills.
- The degree programs supported entry into Jewish day school teaching and the professional growth of experienced Jewish day school teachers and school leaders.
  - About 60 percent of the participants entered new careers following completion of their master's or doctoral degrees in Jewish education: 51 percent entered careers as Jewish day school teachers, and 9 percent entered careers as Jewish day school administrators.
  - The remainder of the participants (40 percent) did not change their job positions, including 30 percent who worked as teachers and 10 percent who worked as school administrators.
- The Education Initiative had an important role in retaining professionals in Jewish education careers in congregational settings.
  - Program participants, especially professionals 40 years old or younger, may not have pursued a master's degree in Jewish education if they had not been accepted into their current programs.
  - Nearly one fifth of the participants (nearly all between 25 and 30 years old) would have considered career changes if they had not been accepted into their current programs.
- The Education Initiative encouraged JTS, HUC-JIR, and YU to offer online and blended learning courses despite a low level of faculty comfort with technology.
  - The Education Initiative enabled the development of 10 online or blended professional development programs and master's degree tracks, which together enrolled 650 students.
  - The eLearning Faculty Fellowship promoted faculty members' proficiency in a wide variety of technology tools and allowed them to deploy new teaching tools consistent with course and program goals.
- The Education Initiative promoted both intra-institutional and interinstitutional collaboration among presidents, deans, and faculty members.
  - New program design and faculty professional development opportunities encouraged greater collaboration within the grantee institutions.
  - The leaders of HUC-JIR, JTS, and YU have been meeting regularly and have jointly presented public lectures on various topics.
  - Faculty members reported relatively high levels of willingness to collaborate both within and across institutions.

- Participation in cross-institutional professional development—the eLearning Faculty Fellowship—promoted faculty members’ interest in cross-institutional collaboration.
- HUC-JIR, YU, and JTS launched formal collaboration to enable networking, professional development, and continuing education for Jewish experiential educators.

The Education Initiative accomplished its goals. The three grantees increased the number of well-prepared Jewish education professionals placed, retained, or advanced in Jewish education settings. Participants reported a high level of usefulness and applicability of their programs, and employers reported high levels of satisfaction with the professional growth of their employees. The Education Initiative helped the grantees develop several important assets, including (1) curricula, publications, and other intellectual property (e.g., new materials written as part of building the experiential Jewish education field); (2) human capital and tools for course delivery (e.g., establishing mentoring systems); and (3) reputation in the field (e.g., enhanced reputation as experts in delivering leadership institutes and online professional modules). To sustain these accomplishments means the grantees are continuing to update their programs and explore the design of additional programs that address the interests of prospective students. The lessons learned through the Education Initiative have already been applied to various other programs outside the initiative, including fee-for-service programs in experiential Jewish education and revised courses within master’s in Jewish education degree programs.

## THE PATH FORWARD

The three grantees raised and reallocated funds to support and sustain programs created under the Education Initiative and have created financial sustainability plans. Building on the momentum created by the Education Initiative, all three grantees are continuing to refine current programs and pilot new programs to accommodate the needs of the field of Jewish education and Jewish communities across the United States and the world. Some funders have expressed interest in tailoring the Certificate Program in Experiential Jewish Education and the Jewish Early Childhood Education Leadership Institute to local communities. The grantees are in conversation with associations and local Jewish communities about adapting the programs developed under the Education Initiative to the needs of these communities.



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