

GOODMAN RESEARCH GROUP, INC.
Program Evaluation • Consultation • Market Research

Evaluation of the B'Yadenu Demonstration Project:

Executive Summary of Final Report of Phase 1

Prepared by

Irene F. Goodman, Ed.D.

Grace Bachman, B.A.

Colleen Manning, M.A.

Submitted to

The Jim Joseph Foundation

November 2016



Introduction

The B'Yadenu ("In our Hands") Demonstration Project was created because, historically, students with special learning needs (SLNs) have had difficulty succeeding in Jewish day schools (JDSs). Under-enrollment has been due to a variety of school conditions such as lack of skills, strategies, and resources to serve these students, resistance to change, insufficient professional development (PD), and limited experience addressing SLNs. The five-year model demonstration project (Phase 1), funded by the Jim Joseph Foundation (JJF) and the Ruderman Family Foundation, was designed and implemented by a team from Combined Jewish Philanthropies (CJP), Gateways Access to Jewish Education, and Yeshiva University. Five Boston area JDSs participated in two cohorts: two schools in Cohort 1 (a third dropped out) and three schools in Cohort 2.

Project Goals

The two primary goals articulated in the B'Yadenu Logic Model were to:

- Create and deliver an effective, sustainable, and adaptable model for JDS education to serve an increased number and range of students with SLNs in the Boston area.
- Document and disseminate the model for adaptation in other communities.

To address those goals, the primary "intervention" of B'Yadenu was professional development (PD) at each school, tailored to each school's plans and overseen by the school leadership team.

Project Evaluation

From 2012 through 2016, Goodman Research Group, Inc. (GRG) conducted an external evaluation of the project, funded by the Jim Joseph Foundation. Primary evaluation data collection occurred at both Time 1 (fall 2013 in 4 schools and early 2014 in the fifth school) and Time 2 (spring 2016). Methods included online surveys of educators, students, and parents, plus interviews with School Leadership Teams and timed classroom observations. Furthermore, GRG observed PD sessions in years 3 and 4 and annual discussions with school leadership teams, and conducted final interviews with nine PD consultants and five Project Team members in summer 2016.

Approximately two-thirds of educators responded to the faculty/staff survey, with somewhat lower response rates at Time 2 than at Time 1. Response rates on the student survey varied at Time 1 and then were significantly higher overall (over 90%) at Time 2 because of improved compliance and support by B'Yadenu administrators. In contrast, at both time points only one-third to one-half of parents responded to the parent survey; collected responses are likely not representative and therefore findings about parent perceptions are not widely generalizable. GRG observed 124 academic subject classrooms across the five schools at Time 1; the number doubled to 255 observations at Time 2 in the five schools, which included the overwhelming majority of academic classes.

Evaluation Results

Results are discussed in response to the following five evaluation questions.

1)

To what extent has the B'Yadenu model built schools' professional development (PD) capacity to improve learning outcomes?

The model was most successful in the provision of PD in the five schools. All schools offered at least some PD over two academic years, with variable participation among teachers. All schools were exposed to teaching by a lead consultant, primarily about growth mindset; he set the stage for why the B'Yadenu model was important. At each school, an additional coach or coaches were hired to focus on topics and strategies identified by the B'Yadenu school team. The topics addressed were: growth mindset (71% of responding teachers participated in PD on that topic), differentiated instruction (53%), teaching strategies (47%), executive functioning (40%), behavior support (38%), using data (33%), and anxiety (26%). Educators found PD in small groups or one-on-one to be most helpful and large whole-school sessions least helpful. Coaches were pleased with the progress schools made, yet they also faced challenges (e.g., resistance to suggestions, lack of consistent commitment, lack of time, etc.).

2)

To what extent has the B'Yadenu model shifted school culture to a more integrated approach where each staff member feels responsible and well equipped to address the learning needs of all students, including those with special learning needs?

There was some evidence of a positive shift among individual teachers who participated in PD. At some schools, PD topic (e.g. growth mindset) and frequency of educator participation in PD predicted increased educator buy-in and capacity (as reported by teachers) to differentiate instruction and meet student learning needs. There were small gains in teacher beliefs and their own preparedness to serve students of all abilities in a classroom, while they were less likely to believe that their school's culture or capacity had improved. At Time 2, educators believed that both students and they themselves can change their effort and behavior, but believed that intelligence and talent are more 'fixed' traits, which indicates that there is more PD work to be done around growth mindset.

The timed classroom observations showed the following moderate positive gains over time:

- There were fewer disengaged and disruptive students.
- The ratio of both student and teacher questions to statements increased.
- Revision of student work was increasingly a part of classroom culture.
- Teachers checked for student understanding more frequently.
- Additional adults were more frequently either co-teaching or assisting individual students.
- Fewer teachers were perceived as positioning themselves as the sole subject expert.
- A very modest amount of Growth Mindset language was used by students and teachers in some classes.

3) *To what extent has the B'Yadenu model shifted school culture so that students with SLNs participate, feel engaged and motivated, with their learning needs met by each teacher?*

There was no evidence that the B'Yadenu model shifted school culture in a way that made a difference for students with SLNs, according to teacher, student, and parent reports. There is still some uncertainty among teachers about their preparedness to differentiate instruction for both students with and students without special learning needs.

Students reported on academic struggling, that is, how often they struggle in five primary subject areas: math, writing, reading, Judaic Studies, and Hebrew. In four of the five schools, there was no change in the frequency of academic struggling from Time 1 to Time 2. Across the five schools, parents and students agreed that students were struggling least with Reading, relative to other subject areas. However, parents believed that their children struggle most with writing, while students actually reported struggling more with both Math and learning Hebrew than with Writing. This indicates a disconnect between experiences of students and parents. Another key finding was that academic struggling predicts school experience; in particular, Judaic Studies was the most prevalent academic predictor of a less positive school experience, occurring in three of the five schools.

At four of the schools, parent experiences did not significantly change over time. This is not surprising, since parent outcomes were not reflected in the B'Yadenu model. On average, parents believed that “most” teachers spend adequate time with their child. However, parents of students with identified or suspected SLNs (compared to parents of children without SLNs) believed that their child does not get enough time, help, or support from teachers. Parents of students with SLNs also reported that their child struggles significantly more in academic subjects than did parents of children without SLNs.

4) *To what extent has the B'Yadenu model increased enrollment and retention of students with special learning needs?*

The goal of increasing enrollment is a much longer-term goal, rather than an intermediate one. It was unrealistic to expect widespread increase in enrollment within a three-year period. Schools have indicated that their present focus must be on retaining and better serving current students. Some of the schools were more open to the possibility of increased enrollment of students with SLNs once they believe they are appropriately addressing the learning needs of current students. School administrators acknowledged that there are still students who their school cannot adequately support and serve. They believed they must be careful during the admissions selection process to minimize the need to counsel out students.

Nonetheless, school teams were learning to work on reaching a broader range of learners. This is evident from leadership discussions, coaches' reports, and GRG's observations. At least two of the schools indicated they have just started to accept students from schools they previously would not have considered (e.g., school that focus on serving students with academic challenges) because they now have better supports in place, in large part due to their B'Yadenu work.

B'Yadenu appears to be sustainable in most of the schools, as the B'Yadenu philosophy and practices are beginning to be incorporated into schools' culture. School leadership teams expressed positive changes they expect to continue in their schools. Examples of ways in which schools are sustaining B'Yadenu practices include:

- Curricular and structural changes (e.g., longer blocks to increase modalities per session)
- Co-teaching of classroom teachers and Learning Center specialists, and of general studies and Judaic studies teachers
- Team approach to reinforce collaborative relationship between faculty and administrators
- Shared language for talking about Growth Mindset with students, parents, and on report cards
- Teachers engaging with each other and with students differently, with a focus on learning and on what students can do
- Adoption of Positive Behavioral Supports, with the aim of consistency across teachers/grades
- Teachers engaging in experiments regarding their own teaching practice
- Teachers using ongoing formative assessment, explicit instruction, and student metacognition in writing instruction
- Staff using Individual Case Study process to better meet the needs of diverse learners
- Daily planning time built into teachers' schedules

Following are examples of how educators' perceptions changed as a result of B'Yadenu.

Before	Intervention	Now
Whether students with SLNs belong in these schools: "These kids shouldn't be here" was a common initial reaction.	Coach breaks down what creates resistance and how to make strategies relevant to teachers.	Teachers have begun to take ownership re: teaching a range of learners. Focus on what students CAN do, not what they can't do.
Resistance: "That's not how we do this"; teachers don't want to show they are struggling; "I'm fine on my own."	Coach creates conditions in which teachers have ownership of the practice they want to identify.	Teachers are authentically engaged and giving the process time to enable them to integrate the work product into their practice.
Student Behavioral Challenges: Teachers frustrated that students "still don't know how to behave" because "we need to focus on academics;" timing of schedule was off so there wasn't orderly transition between classes, causing disruption.	Coach demonstrates consistent strategies, the notion of antecedent strategies rather than consequences or punishment, then observes and meets with teacher afterward. More structured planning time for teachers is added.	School personnel see a calmer school; more seamless transitions; class-wide systems put into place and now teachers can focus on the 20% who need support.
Challenges adapting curriculum: Teachers unable to accurately assess student knowledge in real time.	Coach shows teachers how to diversify their strategies and resources in helping students learn.	Teachers immediately started using the resources and saw a difference in their classes.
Challenges with Executive Functioning (EF): Teachers had difficulty working on EF with students.	Coach helps map out a clear path for what they wanted to achieve – using action research model; gives teachers a choice of what to work on; observes and gives feedback; uses grade level meetings with a protocol.	Elementary teachers now have a vision and a plan for problem solving around EF. Started using Critical Friends Group model and had people trained as facilitators about how the inquiries were working.

5) *To what extent is the B'Yadenu model ready for scalability to other communities?*

The original dissemination plan was to bring six additional communities together to attend a workshop together about the B'Yadenu model. As the Project Team worked with the five pilot schools, they realized it was more appropriate to start dissemination more modestly and began to work on scaling the model. They began development of a comprehensive online toolkit, which is intended to lead educators in JDSs to understand which of their practices need to improve to better serve diverse learners. They invited JDS representatives from Detroit and Miami to attend a 2.5-day workshop in December 2014. The project team shared a draft of a toolkit with attendees and then continued to develop the resource in a way that frames and operationalizes the B'Yadenu model and process more tightly.

The toolkit maps out a process across four phases—initiate, assess, plan, and implement/refine—to discern key needs, to set goals in how those needs will be met, and measure progress toward those goals. It includes a number of tools and meeting agendas that structure the process. From this understanding, educators can then organize the professional development in ways that optimize its impact. The toolkit also will help school teams carefully measure the impact of these professional development activities.

The primary responsibility for B'Yadenu has shifted to Gateways to continue the three-year follow-on phase in the five schools and with additional communities. Gateways has redesigned its business model to serve as the Center for Professional Learning at Gateways. Even as it lays out a step-by-step process, however, the toolkit cannot take the place of having an expert in the room and, thus, is designed to be used with a local facilitator together with consultation available from Gateways. As the team works with more schools and consortia, the toolkit will be revised and expanded as needed.

Conclusions

The overall answer to the five evaluation questions above is “not yet” because all facets of this project need more time for results to be more than tentative. Nonetheless, the findings indicate that, overall, the B'Yadenu Demonstration Project was a successful endeavor in that it started five schools on the road to learning about and incorporating teaching practices that better serve a range of learners. The work of the B'Yadenu Project Team, the school leadership teams, and the coaches led to some observed changes in teacher practice in the classroom, and an improvement in some educators' attitudes and practices. These results underscore the importance of continuing the work the schools have begun.

The project was originally going to focus on helping schools become more effective, particularly in serving students with learning challenges. In order to accomplish that, teachers would need to teach differently and learn how to differentiate their instruction to meet the needs of a wider range of learners than they had been comfortable serving. It became clear to the project team and to the lead consultant that B'Yadenu would need to shift its perspective to be more systems oriented and to understand that school conditions had to be taken into account. Thus, a prerequisite was helping

teachers understand their own beliefs both about student capacity to learn and grow and about their own capacity to serve a variety of learners.

Each school began and ended in very different places from each other. What is important is that they each experienced growth within their own schools – in some schools, fairly large gains – from where they started. Each school had at least some successes (and frustrations) in embracing the B'Yadenu philosophy and integrating the project work into their school.

- Each of the participating schools had **similar initial motivations for participating in the initiative**: being more responsive to and better equipped to support more diverse learners. Some schools specifically wanted to build teacher capacity (to lead to better student outcomes), while some had specifically student centered goals, but all were in pursuit of the larger goal of better serving diverse learners.
- **School leadership teams evolved** with variable success. The most successful teams worked on building both overall school and individual teacher capacity.
- A major challenge schools faced was defining the goal of B'Yadenu clearly and engagingly enough to ensure **teacher buy-in**. One school had far fewer competing initiatives, thus it was easier to try this out. However, in all schools, teacher buy-in was both a challenge and very critical for success. Teacher-Leaders were an essential component of the model, as they helped their colleagues 'buy in' to the initiative.
- Each school had a **similar shift in goals over the course of the 3-year initiative**, such that they began with very theoretical, non-tangible goals (e.g., building institutional capacity). As the initiative moved forward, they created more concrete goals during the second year of implementation. During the third year, most schools drilled down even further, choosing the one or two goals on which to continue focusing on which they had made the most progress in year 2.
- **Educators demonstrated greater change** over the grant period than did students or parents; the two later groups have not yet fully experienced the impact of educators' PD training.
- Each school ultimately landed on **PD that was appropriate for that school**. This was due to their being helped by the coach or coaches with whom they engaged. Some schools needed to try out different coaches before a good match was achieved.
- School teams began to **see mistakes as positive** because they are trying to do something complex and difficult in their schools. The **trial and error approach**, particularly in the first year (e.g., finding which modalities/theories worked best for each school) was critical for success.
- For schools with multiple academic levels (e.g., elementary, middle, and high school), the initiative had varying levels of success across each division. In general, the **initiative was more successful in elementary schools** and at lower grade levels of multi-level schools.
- Schools that **shifted their focus from whole school change to department, division, or grade level** change tended to see their efforts as more successful than those that did not make this shift.
- Accepting that this was really **the first step in a multi-year journey** towards more inclusive education was also crucial.

Looking toward expansion, a school's readiness for school change cannot be underestimated; lack of readiness is one of the largest barriers to embarking on an initiative such as B'Yadenu. Tackling school improvement requires readiness on various levels, and some schools did not actually know whether or not they were ready to begin the intensive process. At the beginning of B'Yadenu, most schools were not yet prepared for 'whole school' or even 'whole division' change. Based on findings from B'Yadenu, we conclude that prerequisites for readiness include:

- The Head of School (HOS) has a vision for the school, demonstrates commitment to the process and commitment to ensuring full participation, is thoroughly invested through strong leadership, can delegate authority, and has the respect of staff.
- Work must be done by the HOS to foster receptivity among staff and so they can imagine the benefits to them as well as to their students.
- There must be consistent, regular communication across all parties.
- Much planning work is necessary to get schools ready, and tailoring the planning work within a school is critical.
- Requiring participation of all teachers in an endeavor such as this is crucial. If all teachers are participating in the same learning cycle, there is more likely to be consistency in teaching students.

The B'Yadenu Demonstration Project Team receives high marks for its success in facilitating and guiding each of the five schools to plan for, implement, revise, and examine the impact of tailored professional development approaches. The work with Cohort 1 was difficult, as they were learning by doing; neither the project team nor those first three schools fully appreciated at the beginning the scope of what they were attempting to accomplish. Learning from these experiences, the team streamlined how they worked with Cohort 2 schools, for example, how they developed the logic model together. As a result, Cohort 2 schools reported feeling successful more quickly in their start-up work than did Cohort 1 schools. Moving forward, we conclude that two cohorts are likely not needed.

Recommendations

Based on the evaluation results and conclusions, we provide the following recommendations for current demonstration schools, new schools contemplating participation in a B'Yadenu initiative, and for the B'Yadenu project team and PD coaches.

Recommendations for Participating Demonstration Schools and for New Schools

- Schools are advised to continue providing PD support that empowers educators to serve a wide range of learners (e.g., growth mindset theory applied to students' and teachers' capacity for growth).
- The Project Team should set standards for continuing schools: (1) mandatory participation in PD, (2) continually update their strategic plan with defined outcomes, (3) place emphasis on systematically collecting and analyzing data to measure gains in teacher and student

progress, since a weakness in all schools was lack of measurement. There is a significant need for schools to quantify through assessment the growth they discussed anecdotally.

- Schools must turn attention to communicating with parents about the B'Yadenu philosophy and how the school is working to improve its capacity to serve the range of students enrolled.
- For schools contemplating the B'Yadenu model, before getting started, conduct a school readiness assessment/survey.

Recommendations for working with PD Coaches

- New schools and new PD coaches (as well as existing demonstration schools and coaches) will benefit from more advance preparation. We recommend that schools do the following: find a coach who can build rapport with staff and administration **prior** to providing support and strategies to teachers, provide orientation to PD coaches, designate a “connector” person in each school to interface with the coach, and hold an introductory session for the whole school (not just for school leadership team) about B'Yadenu and role of PD coaching.

Recommendations for Best Practices in Professional Development

- We recommend the following practices be followed when schools develop and implement school-based PD: Mandate participation in professional development; no “one shot deals” and no solely whole-school sessions; differentiate the PD based on faculty knowledge, tailor interventions within school divisions, work with one coach over an extended period of time rather than with several different coaches for short periods of time.

Recommendations for Disseminating the B'Yadenu Model

We recommend the project team disseminate lessons learned as part of the toolkit and also through conferences, articles, and webinars to the Jewish day school community, nationally.

Final Thoughts

The lessons learned from the B'Yadenu Demonstration Project mirror lessons learned in many whole-school change initiatives:

- Implementing real change takes time. It is a very slow process and requires multiple iterative cycles: Learn → Practice → Tweak → Learn more → Practice more → Tweak more... etc.
- Changing teacher behavior is difficult, given the nature of the profession (“an expert operating solo in the classroom”). Providing them with ongoing support is a crucial PD component.
- The tipping point in some B'Yadenu demonstration schools occurred with the convergence of strong school leadership, faculty buy-in, and strategic planning for on-going PD.
- School personnel becoming more reflective about their intentions, practice, and outcomes will strengthen schools' chances of achieving long-lasting change in their efforts to serve diverse learners.

Goodman Research Group, Inc.

929 Massachusetts Avenue, Suite 2A
Cambridge, Massachusetts 02139

Tel: (617) 491-7033
Fax: (617) 864-2399

info@grginc.com
www.grginc.com

© 2016 Goodman Research Group, Inc.