

EDUCATORS IN JEWISH SCHOOLS STUDY (EJSS)



DISCUSSION GUIDE

JESNA Publications and Dissemination Project:
An Initiative of JESNA's Learnings & Consultation Center

IN PARTNERSHIP WITH

JESNA's Berman Center for Research
and Evaluation in Jewish Education



Who are the guardians of the city? The teachers and sages.

Talmud Yerushalmi, Chagiga, Chapter 1, 7

Dear Community Leader and Facilitator,

As you know, JESNA recently launched the publication of the Educators in Jewish Schools Study (EJSS). This report provides a detailed, statistical portrait of today's Jewish teachers – who they are, what led them to a position in Jewish education and what factors influence their decisions to remain in the field. The study confirmed and deepened our understanding about the cadre of Jewish educators in North America.

Of course, having empirical knowledge is only the first step. Research studies like EJSS only make a difference if they stimulate discussion and awareness and promote action.

With that in mind, we are pleased to introduce a discussion guide to accompany the EJSS report. The guide is meant to stimulate the discussions that need to be taking place in our Jewish communities around the issue of educators.

The EJSS report and discussion guide have been designed to engage key leaders such as Central Agency Boards, Federation Jewish Education Committees, Educators Councils and Rabbinic organizations, schools and congregations in deliberations about how the findings apply in local communities and how local challenges can be addressed more effectively. We hope that you will be arranging meetings with the key stakeholders in your educational community who “make things happen” regarding Jewish education.

The discussion guide approaches three main themes in “slices” of the report, the analysis of which in the micro will help examine the situation in the macro.

Keep in mind, as you delve into the more detailed issues, the overarching and overriding guide questions the data should raise for you:

- What are the implications of this report for your educational community or institution and what actions might it prompt?
- What can you provide to decision makers to help them make the best decisions for Jewish education?
- How do you, as an educational community, make sure that you have a sufficient number of optimal educator/teachers for effective Jewish education?

Finally, we at JESNA are eager to learn about the conversations taking place in your community. By reporting back on your meeting you become a part of the national conversation and enrich the research with anecdotal information from the field. Your feedback will help set the agenda for the next stages of research.

Note to facilitator:

Please keep in mind that as facilitator you will need to adapt or tailor the questions provided based on the particular venues and interests in your community. It is up to you to know whether you need to direct the conversation more heavily towards day or complementary school and which key issues to emphasize throughout the conversation.

For further information on the EJSS report, how to use the report or discussion guide, to arrange for a JESNA consultant to attend or facilitate your meeting, or to share results of your meeting, please contact **Andi Meiseles**, Education Consultant at JESNA's Learnings and Consultation Center, ameiseles@jesna.org.

I. "FROM GOOD TO GREAT"

According to EJSS, 78% of complementary and 61% of day school administrators indicated that they resorted to "suboptimal" strategies to address at least some of their hiring needs (p.26). Look at the items listed 1-8 at the bottom of page 25.

- Which "optimal" and/or "suboptimal" employment trends have you observed in your community?
- Which strategies does your community use to recruit educators?
- Under what conditions does your community resort to suboptimal situations?
- Are issues of money /benefits barriers to optimal recruitment and, consequently, to optimal teaching and learning?
- Why do you think it is problematic to find qualified teachers to take or remain in these jobs?

The complementary school world relies heavily on teachers who, while reporting high levels of satisfaction (p.23), have not made Jewish education their primary careers. Many of them are in the field for a limited time – while in high school or college, while their kids are in the school, or as retirees. These educators often come with a variety of backgrounds or preparation for their work – some have pedagogic experience without Judaic content or vice versa; some have a bit of each but lack depth in either (p.7-9). Furthermore, most of them work only a limited number of hours per week. (p.11)

- Does this "profile" of complementary school educators reflect your educational community?
- Given this situation, what can be done to improve the level, preparation and standards of teachers in complementary schools?
- What are the unique needs of complementary school teachers vis a vis professional development?

On pages 30-31, EJSS identifies factors likely to predict whether educators remain or leave the field:

- Do the experiences reflected in EJSS mirror those of your community?
- How do you define "work/life balance"? How might the teachers in your community respond to this question? Have they been surveyed on this topic?
- How can schools develop a culture that is more teacher friendly? (comp. time, prep time, recognition, recognition events/ opportunities for teamwork)
- What kinds of incentives in terms of compensation/benefits might aid the situation?
- If salaries were higher, how might survey respondent's ranking of retention factors be affected?
- Are schools and school administrators building a framework to allow for collaboration and reflective practice between faculty members?
- What percentage of time each week is allocated for team projects, collaborations, etc.?

II "INTERVENTION"

According to the EJSS study, personal attention and support – whether at the recruitment stage or in terms of recognition from supervisors, employing institutions and communities – make a big difference in who enters the field and whether or not they stay.

Almost half of all respondents in the EJSS study were inspired and/or motivated to enter the field because of one influential person. A total of ninety-two percent (92%) of respondents had both some formal and informal Jewish education; a total of forty-four percent (44%) of Jewish respondents credited their formal or informal Jewish educational experiences with influencing their entry into the field of Jewish education (p.19-22).

- In what ways, if any, do you “plant the seed” among your students to increase the likelihood that they will consider careers in Jewish education?
- What information would you need in order to be most effective in “tapping” current students for future roles in Jewish education? To whom or where can you refer them?
- What are the implications for the camping and youth movements and their role as “feeders” into the field? How can communities work with local informal educational entities on the “tapping” issue?
- If it is true that “the more the more,” what programs or strategies exist (or should be developed) to enhance the likelihood of young people considering future careers in Jewish education?

The EJSS data confirm the importance of a continuum of on-going, sustained professional development (PD) as opposed to opportunities of shorter duration. EJSS also demonstrates that PD is an important area of intervention in the proper preparation and retention of educators (p.41).

- What types of PD opportunities are currently available to teachers in your community?
- What types of opportunities would be desirable that are not available? (e.g., study opportunities at local universities or in Israel, distance learning course, ongoing mentoring relationships from induction onward)
- In what ways could the existing PD opportunities be deepened and intensified to ensure greater impact and effectiveness?
- What are the specific needs for PD in your community that are not currently being met? How might they be met?
- To what extent is PD an integral and organic piece of the culture of the schools in your community?
- Are teachers and principals currently solicited for ideas about the types of PD they need or want? What mechanisms might be put in place to collect their input?

Almost all (92%) of respondents reported that they had participated in some kind of professional development experience in the last 12 months, although many teachers paid for their experiences out of their own pockets (p. 15-17).

- What support does your community provide for teacher participation in PD (i.e., tuition subsidies, paid time for participation in PD, PD opportunities?)
- What incentives do you provide for teachers' participation in professional development (e.g., requirements, salary increases, subsidies, recognition etc?)
- What plans for professional development might be implemented to help build an attractive career ladder for Jewish educators (e.g., training to develop master teachers, coaches and mentors, position of Directors of PD established as part of school faculty?)

III "THE GRAYING OF THE AMERICAN JEWISH EDUCATOR"

The signs of an aging Jewish population are obvious: it is hard to miss community-wide efforts to attract young adults into Jewish life. EJSS reveals that almost half of teachers in day and complementary schools are over 50 (p.6). This progressive "graying" of Jewish educators mirrors national trends among public school educators.

- Do these findings resonate for your community?
- What implications, if any, does the graying of the teacher corps have for your community?
- What methods, if any, have you implemented to capitalize on the availability of more seasoned teachers (e.g., mentoring, recruiting second career people?) What kinds of structures and supports are needed to best make use of this population?
- What implications does long-term retention have for "salary creep" – both in terms of compensation of older staff and in terms of replacement costs?
- What plans/measures have you considered to replace older teachers as they retire?
- Will this "graying" of educators necessarily lead to a teacher shortage (i.e., is this the typical age span when individuals are available to teach in your setting?)
- To what extent does your setting rely on "revolving" cohorts of college students, parents of students in the school, etc.? In what ways, if any, do you capitalize on/support these cadres of teachers?

IV. SUMMARY QUESTIONS FOR YOUR CONSIDERATION::

- Which of these topics – and any others you may have noted in your reading of the report – deserve further attention?
- What might be the next steps for your community?
- Who might you approach to sit at the table the next time you convene on this topic?
- How do you determine what is OPTIMAL for your community and how do you get there?

Note to facilitator:

The following set of quotes/ questions can be used here as a part of a reflective summary question, but could be equally effective at the start of the meeting, as an induction piece which sets the stage for the conversation. It is up to the facilitator to gauge how best to utilize it.

“Who are the guardians of the city? The teachers and sages.”

(Talmud Yerushalmi, Chagiga, Chapter 1, 7)

“Teaching is not a lost art, but the regard for it is a lost tradition.”

(Jacques Barzun)

- How are teachers the guardians of the city?
- Are the thoughts represented by these quotes reflected in the attitudes towards teachers in your community? Are teachers accorded the respect and stature they once were? Why or why not?
- If not, how might these perceptions be changed?
- How are perceptions of and actions towards teachers in a community important to the values of a community and its learners?