

INTRODUCTION BY THE EDITOR

Central agencies play a key role in part-time Jewish education. They are uniquely well positioned to both challenge and support schools to improve the education they provide, yet they operate under significant constraints as well. The following two articles describe different models of change driven and supported by central agencies for Jewish education. In each locale, the agency built on the strengths of its personnel to find a gateway to systemic, broad improvement for its community's congregational schools.

Emil Jacoby describes the ground-breaking accreditation process developed by the BJE of Los Angeles for its congregational schools. Modeled on regional independent and public school processes, the BJE's accreditation has been completed by over 70% of Los Angeles' congregational schools and has significantly spurred a variety of school improvement projects.

Nachama Moskowitz, of Cleveland's JECC, makes a compelling case for curriculum change as an instrument of organizational renewal. Project Curriculum Renewal utilizes the insights of *Understanding by Design* to coach and support schools through curriculum design and implementation, with a focus on the process of change and professional development.

These models of central agency intervention in part-time Jewish education will be thought-provoking for lay leaders and professionals involved in central agencies and interested in improving the quality of education provided by their agency-affiliated schools.

The Impact of the Accreditation Process on Congregational Education in Los Angeles

EMIL JACOBY

Over the last two decades, Los Angeles congregational schools have felt the impact of several trends affecting North American Jewish education as a whole. First, the proliferation of Jewish day schools has not only drawn enrollment from supplementary schools, but has also attracted many experienced teachers to more stable day school positions. Second, large numbers of families feel that children have less time to spend in their congregational schools due to changing family structures, lengthened public school schedules, and the increase in extracurricular activity options. These trends have led congregational schools to decrease weekly class time, revise instructional objectives, and provide special training for the less qualified teachers replacing experienced instructors.

Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, the Los Angeles Bureau of Jewish Education (BJE) responded to these

challenges with a variety of services designed to assist congregational schools and enhance the supplementary education system. The BJE provided direct consultation services, assisted with teacher placement and in-service training, offered family education programs, administered enrichment activities for youth, and created a Principals Council to facilitate networking among the schools. These initiatives laid the groundwork for what has become a most effective change management process.

In 1993 the BJE Board held a special daylong retreat to chart its course, identify goals, and establish priorities for achieving them. During the discussions, it became apparent that individual schools needed help with their planning and evaluation practices. The Board appointed a Task Force on Quality Jewish Education to recommend programs that would assist the schools in this area. The Task Force proposed the school accreditation process as an

effective approach for instituting and managing change through regular assessment, planning, and implementation.

Because several BJE affiliated day schools and yeshivot had already received accreditation for the general studies segments of their curricula from the Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC), or the California Association of Independent Schools (CAIS), the Bureau adopted their models for joint BJE/CAIS and BJE/WASC accreditation for the day schools. At the same time, the process was modified to create a unique protocol for congregational school accreditation. The BJE also initiated a joint accreditation program with NAEYC (The National Association for the Education of Young Children) for the early childhood centers.

The accreditation process utilized by WASC and CAIS in California's independent and public schools consists of three basic steps:

- Developing a clear vision of the school's mission followed by a systematic examination comparing existing facts with stated purposes;
- Planning activities that are based on the new priorities, developing standards that reflect the school community's goals and objectives, and implementing programs to achieve them; and
- Providing mechanisms for follow-up and maintenance of the standards, and ensuring a self-perpetuating continuation of the process.

Acting on the recommendations of the Task Force on Quality Jewish Education, the BJE Board:

- created a guided self-assessment program that would enable participating schools to qualify for Bureau accreditation;
- developed a set of standards against which the schools would assess their programs; and
- made grants available to support programs that were identified and approved through the self-study process.

The procedures that were used in the secular school accred-

itation system were applied to the Jewish schools, and a select committee of senior educators was entrusted with the responsibility for drafting the standards. The committee based its recommendations on the guidelines of the respective national ideological movements, as well as the local educational realities. BJE requirements of affiliation and personnel practices were incorporated into the procedures.¹

Unlike some other accreditation processes, which are often limited to administrative functions, accreditation by the Los Angeles BJE involves fuller institutional participation and has fiscal implications. Schools that fulfill the BJE requirements are entitled to subsidies, consultant services and other assistance. As an additional bonus, the accredited schools qualify for BJE/federation grants to fund accreditation-related projects. This specially designed accreditation process and the resultant close BJE/school relationship enabled the BJE – as a community agency – to significantly improve the quality of education provided by the schools.²

The impact of the accreditation process was most evident in the areas of educational programming, relationships between the synagogue and school, and integration with the community at large. The schools assessed their programs relative to standards in the following areas:

- Articulation of curricular and extra-curricular goals
- Promotion of summer camping, the Israel experience and enrichment activities
- Availability of library services and other resources
- Provision of special education and Jewish family life programs
- Provision of professional in-service opportunities for educators
- Involvement of teachers in the decision-making process
- Cooperation between the school and synagogue governance and administration
- Well-functioning school boards and efficient school administrations
- Educational continuity in the congregational community

¹ A description of the various phases of the process, including the entire list of standards, was published as *The Accreditation Manual for Jewish Schools* (Emil Jacoby, Los Angeles: Bureau of Jewish Education, 1998).

² The list of school improvement grants was published as *School Accreditation Grants for Program Enhancement* (Emil Jacoby, Los Angeles: Bureau of Jewish Education, 2000).

- Coordination of activities with the day school and supporting youth programs
- Participation in the Principals Council of the Religious Schools
- Serving on accreditation visiting teams and commissions
- Collaboration with the ideological movements.

To date, 36 of Los Angeles' 51 congregational schools have completed the accreditation process. According to educators and community leaders, the overall impact of the process on the enhanced image of the supplementary school, the excitement generated within the school community, and the degree of empowerment achieved by the professionals and lay leadership of the accredited schools may be equal to or greater than the benefits of achieving any specific standard.

According to several of the educators whose schools completed the process, accreditation requirements served as both the catalyst and the guide for significant school improvement efforts in their schools and in the broader Jewish education community. The process heightened the educators' awareness that their student populations were comprised of children and families from a variety of religious and cultural heritages and levels of education. This led them to re-think what they teach and how they teach it. The initial process of (re-)articulating their goals provided a framework for designing streamlined curricula to achieve realistic goals for their student populations in the reduced class time that was available. As a corollary, the process led the educators to produce more focused materials tailored to these goals and time constraints. The educators also identified areas for ongoing professional development to enable the teachers to achieve these goals. In addition, the reduction of class meeting time allowed (and motivated) educators to create innovative programs such as *Shabbatonim* and family education programs. The accreditation process itself created a culture that encouraged the schools to take advantage of consultation from the BJE staff, the Visiting Teams and other experts to design appropriate educational programs for their students and parents, including students with special needs and other populations within their settings.

Educators said that the accreditation process enabled them to:

- focus their goals more clearly;

"[It was] a wonderful process that called us to focus on our educational goals - to develop a more formal vision and direction."

- assess their performance relative to their goals;

"It afforded us an opportunity to evaluate, revise, and expand our educational policies. It helped us to look at whether we, in fact, were accomplishing our goals."

"I have found the accreditation process to be quite revealing in a positive manner. It allowed the administration of the school to not only see areas which could be improved in its structure but, equally as important, to feel a sense of validation on the job they and their teaching staff have been doing."

"It was gratifying to review our first self-study and Visiting Team report and note how much we had successfully dealt with the areas we identified as requiring attention, as well as the recommendations made by the Team. It became very apparent how much we had accomplished in the intervening years, and I/we felt a great sense of accomplishment."

- and engage stakeholders more actively.

"When lay leaders are involved at this level of study and decision-making, a sense of ownership evolves which inspires interest and involvement in the school's programs."

"An awareness of the oneness of all participants becomes apparent; the visiting educators, the home school's educator, the BJE, and the members of the steering committee, which represents the synagogue, its parents, its students. All are working toward creating excellence in the Jewish educational setting."

There is a general consensus in the community that the accreditation process has significantly contributed to the improvement of congregational education in Los Angeles.

- It has served as an instrument for positive change and as an ideal tool for assessment and planning by incorporating the Bureau requirements.
- The process has solidified the partnership between the Bureau and the individual schools.

- It has created a culture of accountability in Jewish education. Schools are required to report to the BJE on the implementation of their plans through written progress reports. Principals are also able to share their schools' accomplishments with their colleagues through the Principals Council.
- It has helped move congregational schools out of a "stepchild" role. Creating an accreditation system for supplemental schooling that is similar to the one employed for day schools has raised the status of supplemental schooling.
- It has transformed the culture by bringing lay leadership into meaningful involvement with the schools.

School improvement must be an ongoing process. The

school accreditation process has built-in features to address this need. Schools are accredited for a period of six years, after which the schools must reapply and demonstrate that they have made the improvements mandated in the previous cycle. By the end of this year, six of the 36 accredited schools will have participated in such a re-accreditation process. The procedures and standards established with the guidance of the community agency are also under periodic review. Thus, Los Angeles' accreditation process is a model that combines stability with opportunities for innovation.

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Curriculum Change: An Instrument of Organizational Renewal

NACHAMA SKOLNIK MOSKOWITZ

For the last 15 years, Project Curriculum Renewal (PCR) has played a key role in shaping the teaching and learning processes in Cleveland's Jewish schools. Developed by the Bureau of Jewish Education¹ in 1987, PCR became one of the original initiatives funded by the Commission on Jewish Continuity in 1988.² It has been nationally recognized for the partnership it forges between Cleveland's Jewish Community Federation and local synagogues and was one of the innovative programs featured in JESNA's *Visions of Jewish Education*. This article will first offer a brief description of Project Curriculum Renewal and its role in the Curriculum Department of the Jewish Education Center of Cleveland (JECC). It will then outline the operating principles that guide PCR's strategy and reflect upon the challenges inherent in the JECC's efforts to engender educational change.

THE STRUCTURE OF PCR

Project Curriculum Renewal, the focal point of the JECC's Curriculum Department, offers four avenues of engagement with local schools and Jewish educators: a three-year

process of curriculum renewal, a three-semester curriculum practicum for educational leaders (in conjunction with the JECC and the Laura and Alvin Siegal College of Judaic Studies),³ an annual short-term curriculum writing grant, and miscellaneous consultations.

The three-year curriculum process is PCR's centerpiece. The application process involves a school's director and education committee tentatively identifying the curricular change they are seeking, typically targeting a department or set of grade levels needing attention. Once accepted, the school's leadership team engages with the assigned PCR professional to begin an intensive study process aimed at refining the focus of its curricular request. Stakeholders (including professional and lay leadership, clergy, faculty, and sometimes students) meet a total of eight to 10 hours to further develop the educational framework from which the curriculum shift will grow. After the faculty has refined the framework, curriculum is written during the early part of the summer so that it is ready for implementation at the beginning of year two.

¹ Cleveland's Bureau of Jewish Education joined with its Commission on Jewish Continuity in 1993 to become the Jewish Education Center of Cleveland (JECC).

² For the last dozen years, PCR has been funded by the Fund for the Jewish Future, administered by the JECC.

³ Formerly the Cleveland College of Jewish Studies.