



APRIL 2023

# From Census to Possibilities

Designing Pathways for Jewish Learners



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*The Jewish Education Project's vision is for Jewish youth and their families to engage in Jewish educational experiences that enable them to thrive as Jews and in the world. Our mission is to inspire and empower educators to create transformative Jewish experiences. Through leadership training, professional development, and other support and resources for Jewish educators, we empower them to help their students and families thrive. The educators we engage come from diverse Jewish backgrounds, and they work with students from ages 0 to 18 in early childhood centers, congregations, day schools and yeshivot, in youth programs, and emerging spaces.*





# BACKGROUND

Compared to other sectors of Jewish education, relatively little research has been conducted on part-time Jewish education—even though this setting (namely, supplemental congregational-based education) is where most North American Jewish youth primarily receive Jewish education.

The last comprehensive quantitative analysis of this sector was conducted in 2008 with the release of an AVI CHAI Foundation commissioned report by Dr. Jack Wertheimer, *A Census of Supplementary Schools in the United States: 2006-2007*.

This publication, ***From Census to Possibilities: Designing New Pathways for Jewish Learners***, and related reports include a census of part-time Jewish education in North America conducted with Rosov Consulting. Readers will see that changes in the sector have been significant over nearly two decades. The census data affirms the perception of many that congregational education declined during that time.

To contextualize the census data and offer a roadmap of possibility, The Jewish Education Project convened a group of prominent practitioners to articulate the desired outcomes for supplemental Jewish education in the 21st century. Additionally, we investigated and analyzed emerging and effective models of supplemental Jewish education.

The results of these efforts are shared here, providing an opportunity for all who care deeply about Jewish education. We recognize that many readers have preconceived ideas and biases about supplemental Jewish education. Such sentiments are natural given that many experienced this education themselves or through family members or others who attended “Hebrew School.” That said, we hope readers engage with this report—and the realities of supplemental Jewish education in 2023—with fresh eyes. Significant changes have occurred over the last 20 years, many of them positive, as have changes in how Jews identify, connect with each other, and engage in both individual and community Jewish experiences.

Despite innovations in some aspects of Jewish communal life that reflect these shifts, Jewish education is still largely organized as it was decades ago. As a result, and as this report shows, we are leaving thousands of children and families without the gift of a Jewish education.

**Maybe this report will challenge you to confront assumptions you hold about supplemental Jewish education, just as it did for us. While there are exciting developments in the field today, we hope the report serves as a call to action for us all. Together, we can envision and enact new models of part-time Jewish education that will enable us to count even more people in the next census.**



Keep exploring at

**[pathways.jewishedproject.org](https://pathways.jewishedproject.org)**

to access the full findings as well as details on all of the educational models mentioned in this publication.



# From the Leadership of The Jewish Education Project

For more than 100 years The Jewish Education Project, formerly the Board of Jewish Education of Greater New York, has been deeply committed to creating Jewish learning experiences that are meaningful for youth and families.

Many of the most effective experiences were built on the foundations of high-quality research and data that shed new light on an existing population or issue in Jewish education.

This report, *From Census to Possibilities: Designing New Pathways for Jewish Learners*, is another of these vital foundations. It is our attempt to move beyond the clichés and the rhetoric that often surround supplemental Jewish education. Hebrew Schools are so ubiquitous in American Jewry they are depicted in popular culture, often in negative ways. We want this research to illuminate a more objective reality around part-time Jewish education.

The first part of the report documents the stark reality of the percentage of Jewish families engaged in supplemental Jewish education. The data speak for themselves, especially when compared to past decades of greater involvement in these educational programs. We anticipated that some might digest the data and be disappointed, which is precisely why we present more than just the data alone. We also highlight the many success stories of supplemental Jewish education, and our vision for the future of this vital component of the Jewish educational ecosystem.

We are proud to lead an organization that conducts serious analysis while remaining committed and determined to continually improve and, where necessary, transform Jewish education. We express deep thanks to everyone who made this report possible and to the educators who work tirelessly every day to make Jewish education possible. This report shows that Jewish educators still have a major impact on people's lives and are vital to ensuring a positive Jewish future.

Most importantly, we hope you share what you're doing or seeing in the field that is working and making supplemental Jewish education all it can be, for as many as can be. We know that Jewish education, when done right, has much to offer to people's lives. Together, let's push the envelope, determine what works best, and make sure we engage everyone we can in excellent Jewish learning.

We hope you enjoy learning and thinking about the opportunities in front of us all as much as we benefited from being on this journey.



David Bryfman,

Chief Executive Officer,  
The Jewish Education Project



Lois Kohn-Claar,

Board President,  
The Jewish Education Project



# FOREWORD

**Hating on Hebrew school has been fashionable at least since Philip Roth published his short story “The Conversion of the Jews” in 1958. A more recent CASJE study of part-time Jewish schools (Benor et al. 2020) found that contrary to what the authors call the prevailing “discourse of failure,” the vast majority of children enrolled liked or loved their school (87 percent). The census data offered in this report moves us to ask a different question: what about the children not enrolled?**

We have long imagined part-time Jewish schooling as an easier, cheaper, perhaps less committed form of Jewish education (at least compared to formats like day school). In fact, part-time Jewish schooling is rarely cheap (particularly as it often requires synagogue membership as a prerequisite) and, as any parent who has had to pause in their own work day to cart an overscheduled child with looming homework can attest, it's not easy on family life either. Part-time Jewish school costs money, time, and, perhaps the scarcest commodity of all these days, attention. Still, for decades this model supported families seeking to prepare their children to become Bar/Bat Mitzvah in the context of a synagogue community. And for many families, no doubt, part-time Jewish schooling continues to perform this critical function. But what about all the other families?

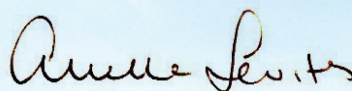
As this report outlines, American Jews may have changed in their patterns of institutional affiliation and in their preferred modes of expression of Jewishness. But they still look for meaning, still seek to clarify and express their highest values, and still look to communicate to their children what it means to be Jewish, with all its entanglements of family, tradition, stories, ritual, commitments, and communities. The vast majority of Jewish parents in the United States are choosing to raise their children Jewish in some way. But their vision of a laudable Jewish life may be different from those of generations past, and their social networks, frames of reference, and accounting of the resources they are able to expend, are likely different as well.

Most Jewish educators are more than familiar with the admonition in Proverbs to “educate a child according to their way.” In recent times this has often been interpreted through

the lens of the abilities and interests of the individual child. Certainly all children have their own unique paths and talents, but they are simultaneously a product of the environments and institutions that help form them. The family, schools, media, neighborhoods, all shape what we want, what we think is possible, and the cultural tools at our disposal to craft our lives. To educate children according to their way is to also take in to account the systems in which children are embedded.

For Jewish educational programs to “work” (leaving aside what that means!) they have to be given a chance to do their work. People have to participate. The programs’ basic design must be attuned to the rhythms of contemporary life. As stakeholders in Jewish education, we need to examine with our communities what our core values are, asking where it is appropriate to bend to the winds of contemporary life and where we must stand fixed in our commitments, so that we may imagine a Jewish education that is both attuned to the world of today and simultaneously a countercultural expression of the world as it might be at its best.

Jewish families come in all shapes, sizes, and shades. They are there for us to see, recognize, and celebrate. How will we demonstrate that the Jewish community is here to be their partner in designing Jewish educational opportunities that respond to who they actually are now, and to their ideas of how they want to grow?



**Arielle Levites, PhD**  
Managing Director, CASJE





# The Census

## The Jewish Educational Landscape Today

We conducted this census of supplementary schools to understand and analyze enrollment trends of the prior generation (2006-2007) to now. Despite the lack of precise available data, The Jewish Education Project wanted to determine how many of the estimated 528,000 (~ 44,000 per grade) non-Orthodox American Jewish children, according to Pew and AJPP, are receiving a Jewish education in supplementary schools. According to Prizmah data, 73,000 students are enrolled in Reform through Centrist Orthodox Jewish day schools (~ 6,000 per grade). This allows us to estimate the number of youth in consideration of this study to be 455,000 (~ 38,000 per grade).

This study did not consider tutoring experiences, homeschooling, or some community-based and other emergent programs. Only programs that enroll groups of children by age cohort for synchronous in-person learning were considered, such as congregational schools and some other programs.

**This current study found that total enrollment in supplementary schools has decreased at least 45 percent since 2006-2007. While not so different than in 2006, only 16 percent (less than 2,000 students annually) of those ever enrolled in a supplemental program remain in a formal educational environment by senior year in high school.**

Along with the 45 percent decrease in total enrollment in supplementary schools since 2006-2007, the number of schools has decreased at least 27 percent. Despite this, 31 percent of census respondents perceive their school to have grown in enrollment in the last five years. Similarly, over 83 percent of eligible census respondents participated in the census, demonstrating some level of commitment to being counted and to accurately documenting the landscape of the field of supplementary schooling. Of those who responded, nearly 100 percent agree on the importance of these schools to help students develop a sense of belonging to the Jewish people—demonstrating that fundamentally, there are unified priorities across different structures and affiliations within the field.

# 100%

*of responders believe in the importance of these schools to help students develop a sense of belonging to the Jewish people.*





## Enrollment in Day Schools, Congregational Schools, and Jewish Summer Camp

Jewish Population	US 1987	Canada 1989	US 2000	Canada 2001	US 2020	Canada 2019
Total	5,944,000	310,000	6,400,000	374,060	7,631,000	335,300
School Age (3-17)	950,000	57,000	1,350,000	73,000	1,583,000	79,000

### EDUCATIONAL OFFERINGS

Day Schools	800 schools; 120,000 participants	759 schools; 204,035 participants (2003-2004)	906 schools; 292,172 participants (2018-2019)
Supplementary Schools	1700 schools; 280,000 participants	2000 schools; 230,000 participants (2006-2007, does not include Canada)	1458 schools; 140,728 participants (2019-2020)
Camps	120,000 in day camps; 85,000 in residential	No day camp statistic. 83,000 in residential (2000)	75,500 in day camps; 77,000 in residential (2019)

See citations on pages 34-35 of this report.

This census shows a significant decline in the number of students enrolled in supplementary school in North America in the last decade.

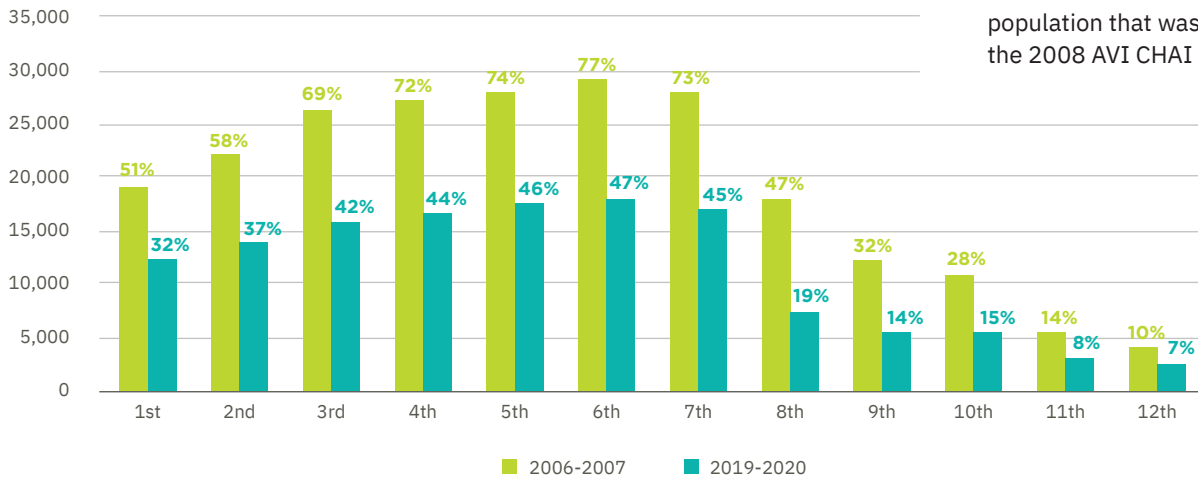
We estimate that in the 2019-2020 school year there were 1,458 supplementary schools across the United States and Canada, enrolling an estimated 140,728 students from pre-K through 12th grade. When using the criteria for The AVI CHAI Foundation census (removing Canada and pre-K/K), there were 1,398 schools in the United States, enrolling an estimated 135,087 students from 1st–12th grade.

Since the 2006-2007 AVI CHAI census, 761 schools that were open have closed. Of those, 556 closed completely; for the remaining 205, the school closed but the institution is still open. This is, in part, due to a growing number of institutions that merged their schools in the past 15 years, as well as other factors, including aging populations and suburbanization.

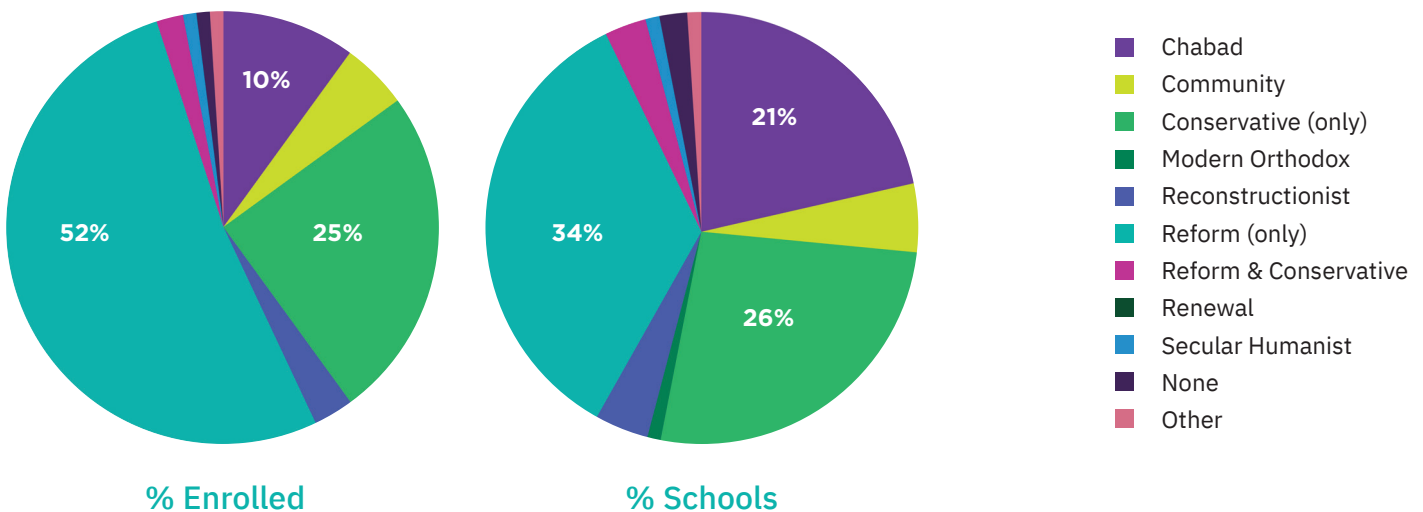


## Comparison of Enrollment by Grade Including Estimated Enrolled Percent of Eligible Students

Enrollment is overall clustered in the grades leading up to B’nai Mitzvah, with 6th grade having the highest enrollment. At this “graduation point,” the data demonstrate that just under 50 percent of the available population is enrolled in supplementary schools, compared to the more than three-quarters of the population that was enrolled at the time of the 2008 AVI CHAI census.



## Proportion of Schools and Students Enrolled by Movement/Denominational Affiliation



*The two variables most predictive of school size are **geography** and **denomination**.*

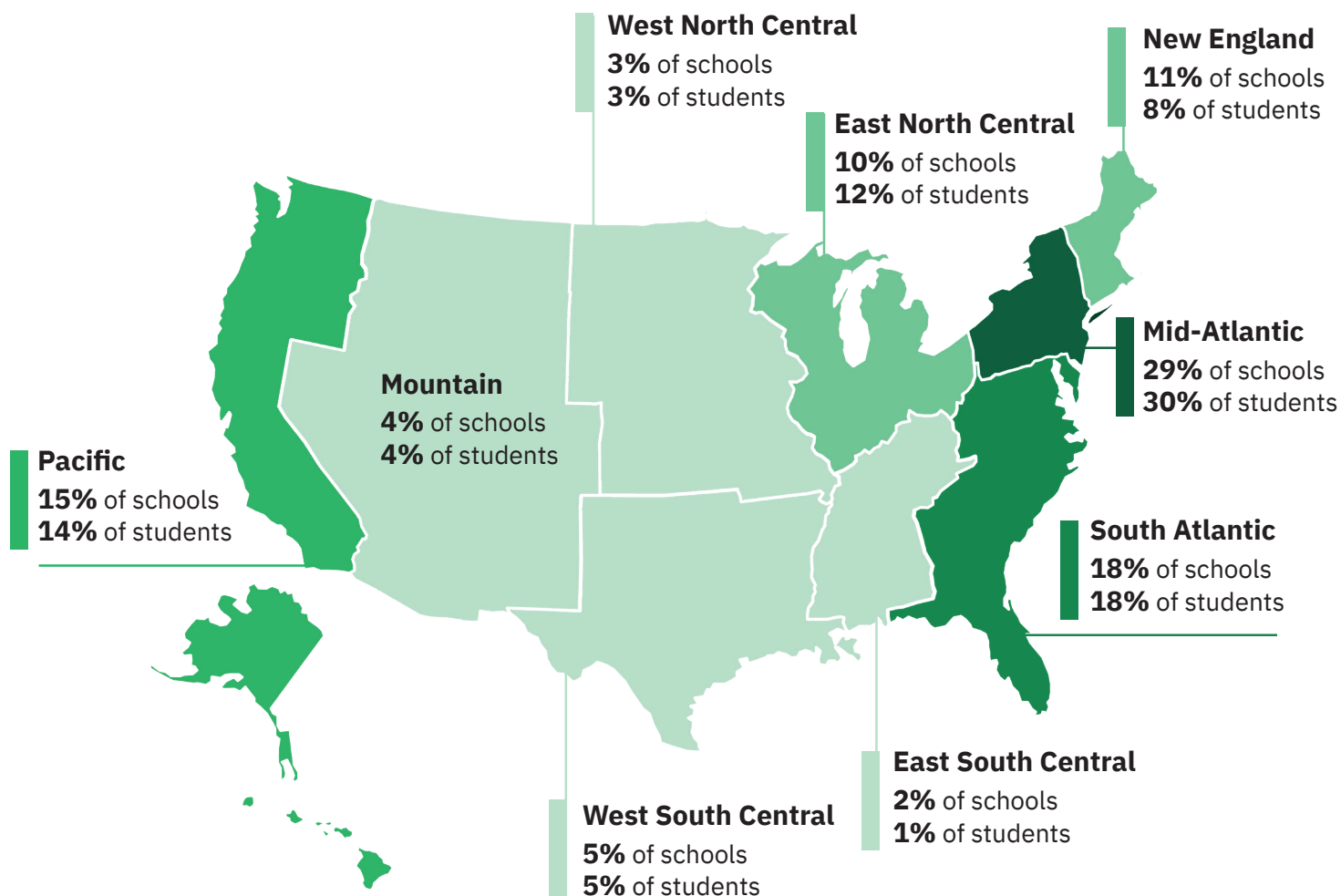
Chabad has increased its proportion of the market from 13 percent to 21 percent of schools, and from 4 percent to 10 percent of enrollment. They generally have the smallest average school sizes. The Reform Movement continues to educate over 50 percent of the students enrolled in supplementary schools and they have, by far, the largest average school size.



## Proportion of Schools and Students Enrolled by US Census Bureau Division

Most students and schools are in the mid-Atlantic subregion, which includes New York, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania. In the AVI CHAI census, seven states enrolled more than 10,000 American students: NY, CA, NJ, FL, MA, PA, and IL. Among those states, all had fewer schools in the 2019-2020 census counting.

Three states had net school count growth by more than one school: **Washington**, which increased by four schools, **Georgia** by three schools, and **Utah** by more than one school (and by 226 students in Utah). There was also net enrollment growth in **Louisiana** (357 students) and **Hawaii** (256 students) and a few others by less than 200 students.







# Contextualizing the Research within Society



## Six Features of Jewish Life Today

North American Jewry today looks vastly different from the time when Talmud Torahs were first conceived in the Lower East Side in the 19th century and since the first supplementary school was launched in Philadelphia by Rebecca Gratz in 1838.

As we look to develop Jewish learning experiences that are meaningful and relevant for Jewish youth and their families, we must recognize that today's Jewish community is significantly different from the one that conceptualized supplementary and congregational Jewish education in the 20th century. Six features of Jewish life today showcase important differences.

*Based on these considerable changes, it is only logical that the Jewish community of today should conceive of Jewish education in ways that differ from the prior century.*

# Religion in America

“The secularizing shifts evident in American society so far in the 21st century show no signs of slowing.”<sup>1</sup> Religion in America has changed for all, including for Jewish families. “Overall, about a quarter of U.S. adults who identify as being Jewish (27%) do not identify with the Jewish religion: They consider themselves to be Jewish ethnically, culturally, or by family background and have a Jewish parent or were raised Jewish, but they answer a question about their current religion by describing themselves as atheist, agnostic, or ‘nothing in particular’ rather than as Jewish.” Despite this, a majority of Jewish families engage in cultural expressions of Jewish identity. They cook and eat Jewish food, read Jewish literature, watch Jewish TV shows, and visit Jewish historical sites when they travel. Jewish Americans feel great pride in their Jewish identity and embrace cultural aspects of their Jewishness as primary forms of expression.

*Religion in America has changed for all, including Jewish families.*

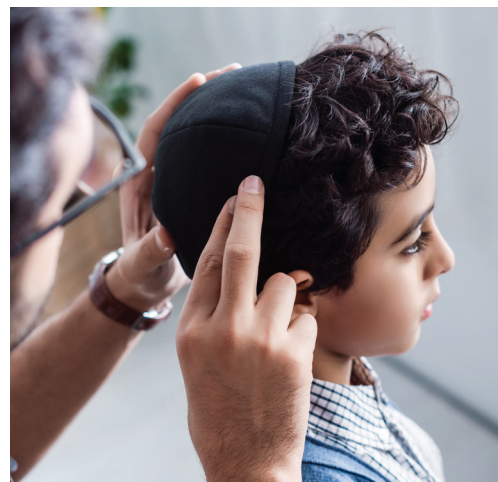
Jewish education, when presented as religious education, does not speak to the majority of today’s families that identify as being Jewish.

## The Jewish Family

Though parents increasingly invest (perhaps sometimes too much) in the development and education of their children, they often do not pay such close attention to their children’s Jewish upbringing. Even the many families that still express pride in being Jewish are likely to outsource any formal learning for their children to educational settings such as Jewish day schools, congregational schools, or summer camps. Anecdotal data here is important because it helped create some pervasive narratives about Jewish education, including a deep regard for day schools, a love of summer camp, and an all too commonly heard trope, “Even though I didn’t enjoy Hebrew school, my children still must have this experience themselves.”

In and of itself, the outsourcing of Jewish education is nothing new for American Jewry. What has changed from previous generations is the increased gap and often dissonance between the children’s experiences in these educational settings relative to what is reinforced in the home. Though often comfortable perpetuating family rituals at home—most notably Shabbat traditions and those of certain holidays (Passover and Hannukah being two prime examples)—as well as attending synagogue on High Holidays, parents are often removed from the Jewish education of their children. As these parents drift from religious life themselves, and congregations become less a part of this equation, the role of the parent in any Jewish learning is becoming even more tenuous.

Jewish education must take into account a wide range of parental engagement in children’s Jewish learning.





# Jewish Diversity

Today's Jewish families are more diverse than ever before and reflect the diverse nature of our larger society. "Fully 42% of all currently married Jewish respondents indicate they have a non-Jewish spouse. Among those who have gotten married since 2010, 61% are intermarried."<sup>2</sup> It is not surprising then that young people today embrace their intersectional identities and seek diverse communities. They welcome a more universalistic orientation and seek spaces where they can be accepted as their whole self while interacting with others who are different from them.

**Evolving attitudes toward assimilation, and even intermarriage, in the non-orthodox Jewish world provide new opportunities to engage families in Jewish practices that speak to their values and demonstrate how meaningful Jewish experiences can be in their lives.** Despite efforts by many congregations to embrace this diversity, Jewish education has been slow to make this shift—sometimes due to insensitivity, but far more often simply because the Jewish education field itself is not diverse. The Jewish educator pool largely resembles the Jewish demography of the mid-20th century, and not the evolving diversity of 21st century Jewry.

**Jewish education must account for young people's embrace of a diverse world and their own diverse identity.**



# Jewish Pride and Identity

The initial purpose of part-time Jewish education was described by many as a deep-rooted desire to perpetuate Jewish life—what later became known as “Jewish continuity.” Many even suggest that Jewish education was described as an endeavor to “make one more Jewish.” **While Jews today continue to assimilate into broader American society, they continue to defy many predictions and remain staunchly proud of their Jewishness.**<sup>2</sup> However, this sense of pride is no longer displayed primarily, if at all, through connections to a geographic community or a particular organization’s building. Young people today more often express this pride on social media, in the clothing they wear, and the brands that they promote. Young people also express pride in multiple aspects of their identity—sometimes all at once. This intersectionality often does not align with a single organizational building—and possibly with no buildings at all.<sup>3</sup>

Moreover, pride in their identity does not often drive a single set of actions for a single purpose. The purpose of Jewish education can—and must—match the nature of young people’s identities today, which are connected to the ways they want to make a difference in this world and be valuable citizens.


Jewish education needs to be propelled by its capacity to cultivate this new manifestation of pride, and to help a person be whole and make a difference in the world.

## Resurgence of Antisemitism

As antisemitism has risen throughout the United States and around the world, American Jews report feeling less secure and more concerned.<sup>4</sup> They choose when and how to show up Jewishly. Some have questions about their physical safety in Jewish environments, which, without satisfactory answers, keep them away from these environments. **For many others, however, antisemitism is a catalyst for Jewish engagement and causes them to prioritize Jewish actions for their families.** As in the 20th century, when antisemitism may have been one of the factors that spurred supplementary school education, antisemitism today is also inspiring new means of Jewish involvement. However, responses to antisemitism are no longer exclusively in the realm of traditional educational offerings, but instead incorporate online activism, advocacy programs, and social media. In 2023 one must also acknowledge that issues surrounding antisemitism are sometimes conflated with issues relating to Israel, and this complex relationship is certainly on the radar of many Jewish educators.

Jewish education cannot shy away from antisemitism that young people see and experience, and their desire to respond to it in myriad ways.



A photograph of two young women with long hair, wearing sunglasses and smiling. They are both making peace signs with their hands. The woman in the foreground is wearing a pink floral top and a colorful beaded bracelet. The background is bright and slightly out of focus, suggesting an outdoor setting.

*The purpose of Jewish education must match  
the nature of young people's identities ...  
how they want to make a difference in this world.*

## Democratization of Knowledge

Education and technology in America have changed and, by extension, families as consumers of education have different expectations. Technology has radically altered how people “consume” goods and services and how the marketplace impacts decision making. With the ability to Google anything, more and more people access bespoke content, seek to purchase anything from anywhere, and have it delivered to their doorstep. **Moreover, with the ubiquitous nature of technology in general—and Google (and Wikipedia) specifically—education has shifted from content as the driver to skill development as the driver.** In other words, education has transitioned from “a sage on the stage” to a “guide at your side,” with people visiting multiple spaces to access knowledge they seek.

Jewish education thus must foster skills for personal meaning-making as much, if not more, as it focuses on content and knowledge and delivery.





# Design Principles of Jewish Education

With our understanding of the American Jewish milieu, how can supplemental Jewish education attract families and succeed?

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At The Jewish Education Project we stand at the forefront of enabling synagogues to adapt to these realities while simultaneously promoting new models of learning to emerge in this context. We believe that the gift of a strong Jewish education positively impacts the health and well-being of learners, along with the Jewish community and society as a whole. What are the big takeaways from educational models that are enrolling increasing numbers of learners that appear to speak to today's children and families?

**In 2012, Dr. Jonathan Woocher, PhD, z"l, outlined three design principles for placing learners at the center.<sup>5</sup>**

- Learners (and their families) should have an active role in shaping their own learning.
- Learning should be relevant to learners' lives, reflecting their life circumstances, the society we live in, and responding to their authentic needs, questions, and aspirations.
- Learning should be designed to be readily accessible to learners and to encourage them to move along personal trajectories of growth.





**In 2013, The Jewish Education Project adapted and built on Dr. Woocher's foundation, producing a set of principles that have guided educational innovation for the past decade.**

- Learning will be anchored in caring, purposeful relationships.
- Learning will seek the answers to the questions, challenges, and meaning of everyday life.
- Learning will enable individuals to construct their own meaning through inquiry, problem solving, and discovery.
- Learning will be content rich and accessible.


*These design principles are a precursor to the new principles we propose in this report.*







# Reimagined Design Principles for Part-Time Jewish Education in 2023



Now, we introduce new design principles that expand on those from a decade ago. They can inform the creation of successful<sup>i</sup> educational models that meet the needs of today's Jewish families—and provide a path for the Jewish education landscape of tomorrow.

01

**Putting Family at  
the Center**

02

**Adding Value  
to a Family's Life**

03

**Affirming  
Diverse People  
and Families**

04

**Elevating  
Cultural  
Identities**

05

**Prioritizing  
Caring, Purposeful  
Relationships**

06

**Redefining the  
Roles of Teacher  
and Learner**

# 01

## Putting Family at the Center

*As the Covid pandemic progressed, more and more families engaged in multigenerational Jewish experiences in their homes. In some cases, grandparents were increasingly able to connect with their grandchildren through Jewish learning.*

As the Covid pandemic progressed, more and more families engaged in multigenerational Jewish experiences in their homes. In some cases, grandparents were increasingly able to connect with their grandchildren through Jewish learning. While families were already often pursuing home-based Jewish experiences around Hanukkah and Passover, the pandemic also increased these types of experiences at other times of the year.

**Reflecting this trend, successful educational programs create learning that supports Jewish experiences that are primarily home-and family-based. Not only do these programs acknowledge the family connection; they also strengthen it by providing options for home-based and home-connected learning.**

Many programs also create learning specifically for grandparents and grandchildren to experience together.





# 02

## Adding Value to a Family's Life

Like all families, today's Jewish families face increasing financial pressures. At the same time, they navigate childcare challenges and societal pressures for high academic and extracurricular performance.

**These factors lead to busy lives that force Jewish educational programs to make a compelling case that participation in their programs adds value to a family's life.**

Many families still believe that Jewish education is intended to ensure continuity, to provide training for B'nai Mitzvah, or to equip children with the skills needed to participate in Jewish ritual life. Yet many of today's Jewish educational programs deliver so much more. In particular, as young people experience an unprecedented mental health crisis, they need help managing emotions, overcoming challenges, building in-person relationships, and developing grit and resilience. Research in the field of positive psychology and spiritual development shows that Jewish learning can help young people live happier, healthier lives. The most successful Jewish educational programs effectively communicate to parents that Jewish education helps develop children into caring, responsible, and resilient adults.



*Programs that provide childcare, transportation, snacks, outdoor playtime, and homework help, for example, signal an awareness of the challenges of family life today.*

Programs also are successful when they respond to the pain points in a family's life. Programs that provide childcare, transportation, snacks, outdoor playtime, and homework help, for example, signal an awareness of the challenges of family life today. Often, these programs are hyper-local, offering convenience and accessibility for families. Some offer flexibility of schedule, allowing children to attend different days of the week at different times of the year. Some provide on-demand content or customize the learning content in response to the interests of the child or family. And some create opportunities for one-on-one learning so that children can explore content that interests them through modalities that align with how they learn.

# 03

## Affirming Diverse People and Families

The Pew Research Center reports that the Jewish community is growing more racially and ethnically diverse. Overall, 92 percent of the American Jewish community identifies as non-Hispanic White, while 8 percent identify with other racial and ethnic groups. However, 15 percent of Jews under 30 identify with a race or ethnicity other than non-Hispanic White. The intermarriage rate is also increasing among younger Jews, which means that more Jewish American families with school-aged children are diverse in myriad ways.<sup>2</sup>

**Successful educational programs welcome Jews of color, all family members from homes where more than one religion is practiced, and all who wish to be part of the community regardless of gender identity, sexual orientation, class, or ability.**

Some successful programs even create space for those who do not identify as Jewish but are eager to be part of a diverse community. Programs also make space for non-Jewish teachers who have skills and wisdom that align with the programs' goals. These programs create environments that accept and welcome children with a variety of marginalized identities in a proudly Jewish manner.





# 04

## Elevating Cultural Identities

According to Pew Research Center's 2020 study of American Jews, 27 percent identify as Jews of no religion. The percentage is significantly higher among younger Jews. Pew also reports that while younger Jews increasingly identify as not religious, they continue to engage in cultural expressions of Jewish identity at the same high rate as older members of the Jewish community. Families often choose educational programs that align with their values, beliefs, and/or approach to practicing Judaism.

**Today's Jewish families seek experiences that support a cultural approach to Jewish identity, exploring shared history, language, and peoplehood as foundational curricular components.**

In some cases, this means shifting the focus of educational content away from prayer and worship, perhaps instead focusing on modern Hebrew. Some families opt for Jewish education that is separate from the synagogue, which they may view as a religious symbol of Jewish expression. A cultural approach to Jewish education might also focus more on Jewish pride and peoplehood, perhaps nurturing learners' interest in connecting to contemporary Jewish heroes. This approach can explore Jewish art, music, literature, and food as essential components of Jewish identity and legitimate forms of Jewish expression, comparable to engaging in regular worship or observing Shabbat.





# 05

## Prioritizing Caring, Purposeful Relationships

*These programs take inspiration from Jewish camp communities where relationships are fostered between older and younger children. In that setting, older children take on leadership roles with increasing responsibility for nurturing relationships with younger campers.*

One design feature that The Jewish Education Project has advanced since 2012 is that learning should be anchored in caring, purposeful relationships. This orientation holds true today. The physical separation imposed by the pandemic caused many educational programs to focus on relationship-building as their primary concern.

Now, the most successful programs use relationship-based pedagogies to create authentic interpersonal connections around Jewish learning experiences. They deliver learning that nurtures friendships within classrooms and across the entirety of the community.

These programs take inspiration from Jewish camp communities where relationships are fostered between older and younger children. In that setting, older children take on leadership roles with increasing responsibility for nurturing relationships with younger campers. Educational programs do the same, while also devoting time to develop connections between learners and teachers, and to explore what it means to be part of and responsible for the Jewish community.





# 06

## Redefining the Roles of Teacher and Learner

Since 2012, Dr. Jonathan Woocher's findings on the importance of putting the learner at the center of the learning experience have guided The Jewish Education Project. Programs are most successful when they focus on the learners' everyday questions and challenges. These programs give learners choice and agency in determining what and how they are going to learn. In these settings, the learning is hands-on and authentic, often taking place in real-life settings. When learning does take place in the organization's setting, the physical space is often designed with the learners' perspectives in mind.

**Learner-led approaches require teachers to become facilitators or guides instead of content experts.**

*Programs are most successful when they focus on learners' everyday questions and challenges.*

In fact, teachers can be culled from anywhere in the community; often the most powerful teachers are peers, older children, people with a particular expertise who may join learners for short periods of time, or community members who take a stance of curiosity about learners and their interests.



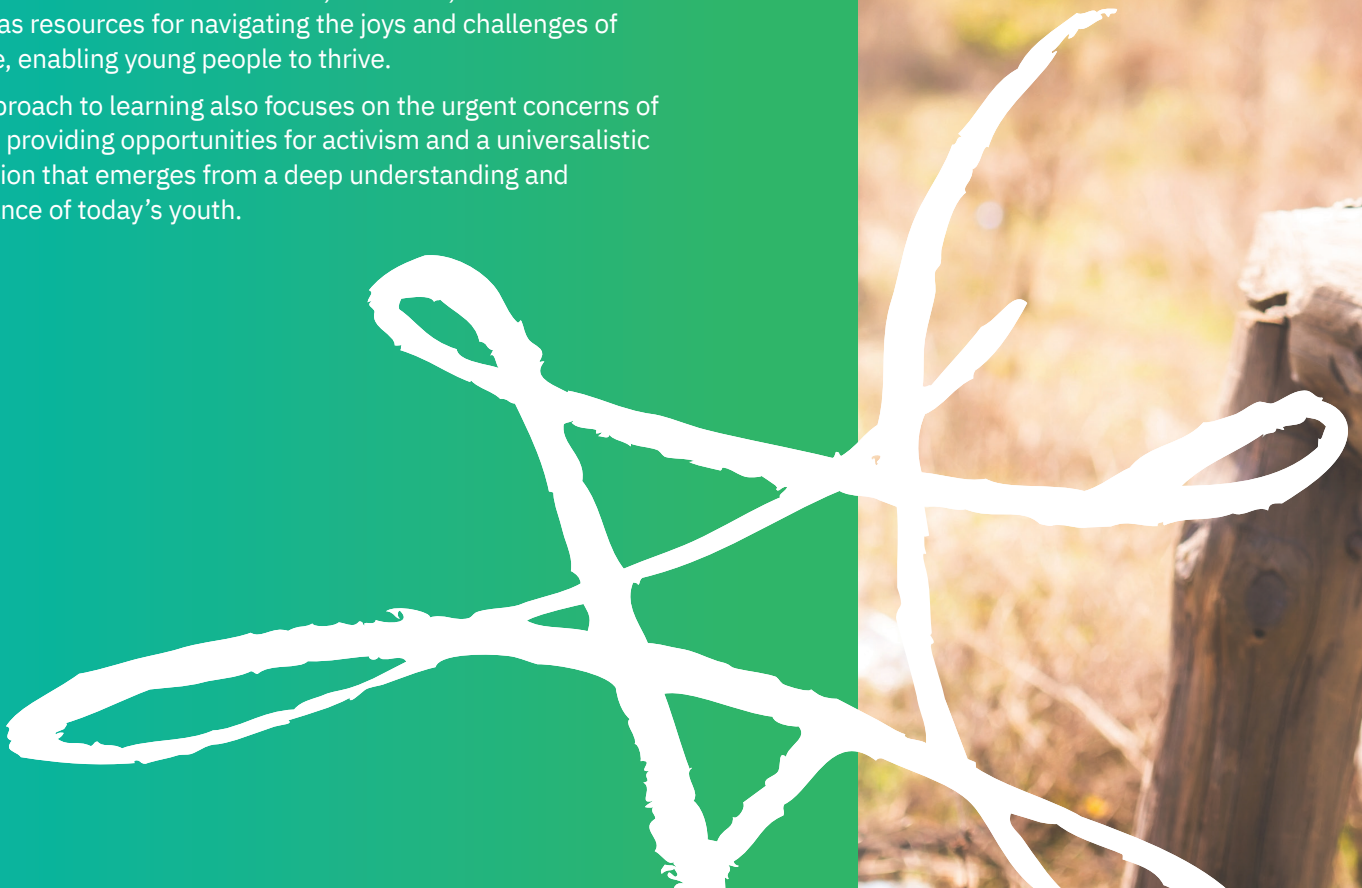
# A Thriving Orientation to Jewish Education

Taken together, the six design features presented here comprise an orientation to Jewish education centered on meaningfulness and relevance. Jewish wisdom, tradition, and values has the power to transform young people, to give them a sense of purpose, and equip them for living in a challenging and complex world. For today's educational programs to be successful, they must deliver on this promise.

*Successful programs ensure that learning is content-rich and accessible. They consider the whole child and incorporate wellness and social and emotional learning to help learners develop life skills, resilience, and grit in a Jewish context.*

These programs offer Jewish learning that is intended to help learners understand themselves, their communities, and the world around them. Jewish wisdom, traditions, and culture are viewed as resources for navigating the joys and challenges of daily life, enabling young people to thrive.

This approach to learning also focuses on the urgent concerns of the day, providing opportunities for activism and a universalistic orientation that emerges from a deep understanding and acceptance of today's youth.











# My Aspirations Playbook

## for Jewish Learning & Living

MAP, our vision of Jewish learning, empowers today's youth to explore, challenge, and grow with the support of Jewish educators, families, and communal stakeholders. Both detailed and far-reaching, this framework is designed for each educational community to lift from it what resonates with its beliefs. MAP allows parents and educators to reflect on what their children can achieve through a rich Jewish education during their most formative years, and enables learners to understand why their Jewish education is important and relevant to who they are and how they can grow.

In this complex and challenging world, the work of Jewish education is more urgent than ever. MAP enables Jewish children to wrestle with all facets of Jewish wisdom, tradition, and values, helping them live a life of meaning and purpose.

### Dimension 1:

## Who am I?

- A.** Appreciate that I am created b'tzelem Elohim (in the image of God/a higher power) and therefore, I, and all humanity, are important and holy.
- B.** Make a difference in the world through my existence, interactions with others, and purpose in life.
- C.** Find relevance, value, and belonging in the distinctive traits of my Jewish identity and play a crucial role in honoring the 3,000-year history of the Jewish people.
- D.** Ask questions and grow from challenges, as an inherent part of my Jewish identity.
- E.** Discover meaning in Jewish texts, cultural/religious traditions, and history, so that they inform my values, decisions, and actions.



**Dimension 2:**  
**How do I  
navigate  
my spiritual  
journey?**

- A.** Develop an understanding of, and language for, my evolving Jewish spirituality and the many ways to travel on this journey.
- B.** Am inspired by Jewish liturgy, meditation, and/or other forms of spiritual practice.
- C.** Wrestle with my relationship with God/a higher power.
- D.** Explore the concepts of obligation and choice as they relate to Jewish ideas about commandedness.
- E.** Feel interconnected with the earth and its creatures.

**Dimension 3:**  
**How do I  
belong to my  
communities?**

- A.** Feel proud of and responsible for my expansive Jewish/Jewish+ community and beyond, and advocate on its behalf.
- B.** Connect with Jewish friends, mentors, and family members to discover shared values, identities, and aspirations.
- C.** Participate in, contribute to, and find value in being part of the Jewish people.
- D.** Celebrate the history, language, and people of Israel, while engaging with the Jewish homeland in all of its beauty and complexity.
- E.** Encounter Hebrew as the historical and living language of the Jewish people.

**Dimension 4:**  
**How do I  
participate in  
the world?**

- A.** Make the world a better place by caring for myself, others, and all of creation.
- B.** Create a community—inspired by Jewish tradition—that’s inclusive and empowering for all people.
- C.** Act upon Jewish prophetic calls for justice by contributing to movements for social change.
- D.** Engage in difficult yet thoughtful conversations rooted in the Jewish tradition of questioning and debate, recognizing that no one person has an exclusive claim on the truth.
- E.** Explore Jewish history, and act on the privilege of being an upstanding Jewish citizen in a democracy.



You can explore MAP in more detail and find many accompanying resources at

**[pathways.jewishedproject.org](https://pathways.jewishedproject.org)**

## SNAPSHOT

# Supplemental Programs Attracting Families



### Our Village at Beth Adam

Our Village takes a learner-centered approach (**Design Principle 6**) to everything they do. Learners' questions and concerns are the starting place for every lesson, and faculty engage in comprehensive training to support this approach. An essential component is the development of deep relationships throughout the learning community (**Design Principle 5**). This community unabashedly welcomes all learners and families (**Design Principle 3**). As a result, students develop life skills to become change-makers and social justice advocates through the lens of Jewish history, thought, and practice.



### Fig Tree

Fig Tree is an independent Jewish education program for children ages 3-13. It provides a rich and accessible Jewish education to children from interfaith, interracial, and/or secular backgrounds, along with all families looking for an alternative and inclusive approach to Jewish education (**Design Principle 3**). Fig Tree instills pride and encourages growth of Jewish identity in its students, rooted in a strong foundation of Jewish religion, culture, and heritage (**Design Principle 4**). Fig Tree offers flexibility to busy families, including options to sign up by trimester, change location or day of the week, and opt-in to pick up at school for those who need it (**Design Principle 2**).



### Jewish Kids Groups

Jewish Kids Groups (JKG) meets the realities of contemporary families by combining childcare with fun, experiential Jewish education (**Design Principle 2**). JKG prioritizes relationship-building, structuring the program so that students across all grades share their joys and challenges with the community (**Design Principle 5**). JKG lessons are designed to offer learners the option to choose their learning modality (**Design Principle 6**). The program offers an immersive, cultural experience that enables learners to proudly embrace their Jewish identity (**Design Principle 4**).





## Open Tent Be Mitzvah

### at Judaism Your Way

Open Tent Be Mitzvah is a two-year experience focused on a student's coming-of-age journey within a Jewish context. The highly personalized learning experience invites students to pursue their interests as they develop and grow (**Design Principle 6**). Open Tent Be Mitzvah includes the family in the co-creation of their experience (**Design Principle 1**). This program is designed to honor individuals and families for all their identities (**Design Principle 3**).



## Mayim

### at Temple Beth Shalom

Mayim offers experiential and project-based Jewish learning and community-building for children in grades K-5. Their commitment to project-based learning places the student at the center of the learning, with the teacher acting as a facilitator (**Design Principle 6**). Project-based learning also means that students collaborate regularly, creating deep and meaningful relationships (**Design Principle 5**). Mayim provides options for transportation, early drop-off, and elective activities preceding the start of the program. They also offer daily Jewish afterschool care (**Design Principle 2**).

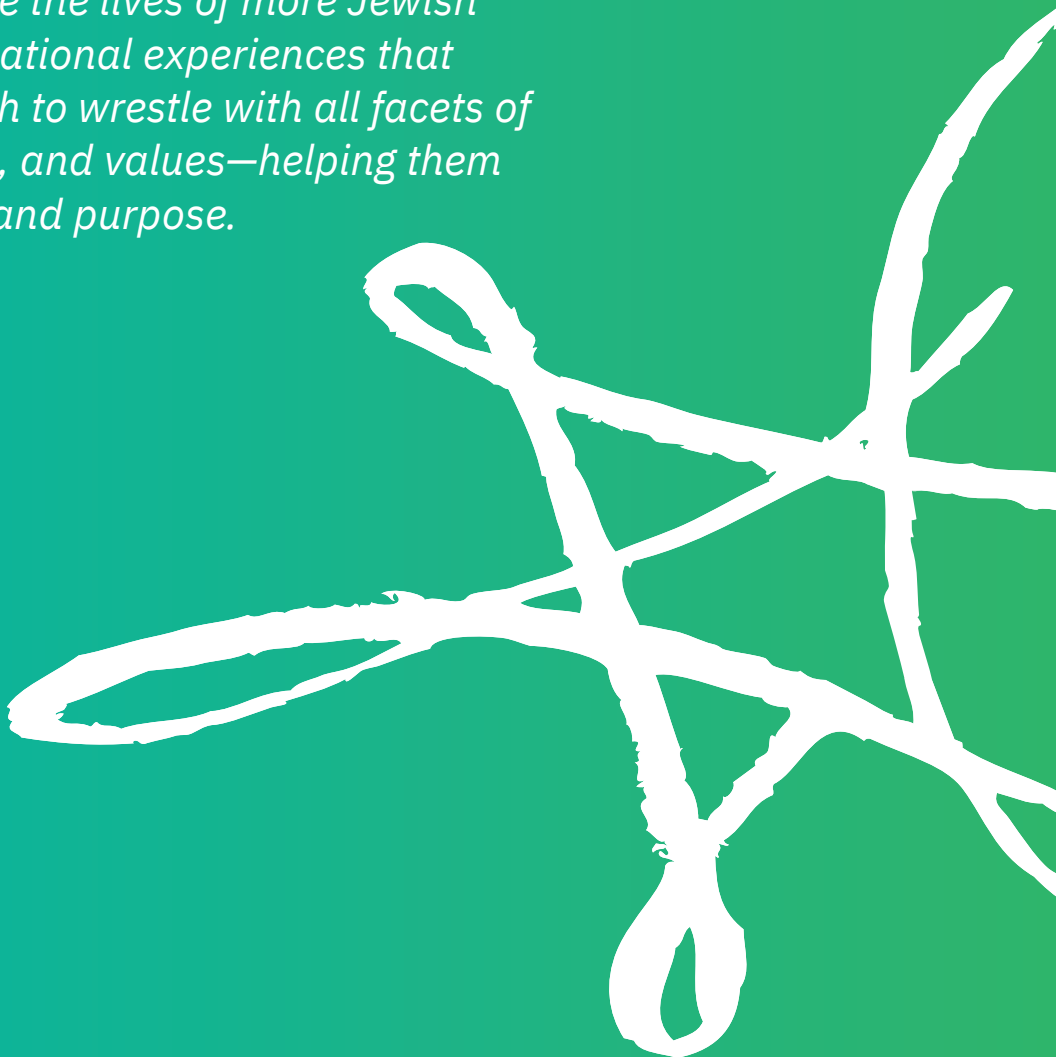
*For more on these and other innovative models incorporating these design principles, visit [pathways.jewishedproject.org](https://pathways.jewishedproject.org)*

## CONCLUSION

*In this complex and challenging world, Jewish education feels more urgent than ever. Families across North America are searching for meaningful, relevant experiences that honor their unique identities and support them through pivotal life experiences. Jewish educators are rising to meet the call and, at the same time, are transforming the paradigm of learning.*

***The Jewish Education Project is committed to collaborating with synagogues, JCCs, and independent organizations seeking to engage in this process of transformation.***

*Visit [pathways.jewishedproject.org](https://pathways.jewishedproject.org) to join the movement and change the lives of more Jewish families through educational experiences that empower Jewish youth to wrestle with all facets of our wisdom, tradition, and values—helping them live a life of meaning and purpose.*





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# From Census to Possibilities

Designing Pathways for Jewish Learners



Explore Further at  
[pathways.jewishedproject.org](https://pathways.jewishedproject.org)



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At The Jewish Education Project, we embrace the power of community and bold innovation to meet the need for relevant and meaningful Jewish education. Together, we work to ensure a vibrant Jewish educational landscape for all.

For questions email [pathways@jewishedproject.org](mailto:pathways@jewishedproject.org)  
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visit us at [jewishedproject.org](https://jewishedproject.org)