



# Transitions in Jewish Education: Parents Reflect on the Process of Making Jewish Educational Decisions for their Children

December 1, 2016

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# Table of Contents

I.	<b>Executive Summary .....</b>	<b>2</b>
II.	<b>Rationale .....</b>	<b>2</b>
III.	<b>Methodology .....</b>	<b>2</b>
IV.	<b>Key Findings.....</b>	<b>3</b>
V.	<b>Suggestions and Implications .....</b>	<b>10</b>
VI.	<b>The Message .....</b>	<b>12</b>
VII.	<b>Appendix A: Detailed Methodology .....</b>	<b>13</b>
VIII.	<b>Appendix B: Interview Prompts &amp; Questions.....</b>	<b>14</b>
IX.	<b>Appendix C: Demographic Data.....</b>	<b>17</b>

## Executive Summary

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Parents are important stakeholders in Jewish education. Administrators, clergy, and educators often make decisions based on what they think parents and families need or want. But how can we know for sure? The best way is to talk to parents and find out how and why they make their decisions with regard to formal Jewish education.

The research, conducted by Dr. Danna Rose Livstone, was commissioned by The Jewish Education Project and funded by UJA-Federation. Dr. Livstone conducted in-depth interviews of twenty parents who had recently made one of two educational transitions for their children: either from 4 year old/Pre-K to Kindergarten (herein referred to simply as Pre-K to K) or from pre to post bar/bat mitzvah programming (teen). The interviews were recorded and summarized, and thirteen common themes were identified to help understand parents' thought processes when deciding on their children's educational paths.

Multiple parents referred to an expected course or natural next step when describing their options for Jewish education. The challenge for schools, community centers and synagogues is how to locate themselves along this expected course to continue to engage these children and their families in Jewish education.

## Rationale

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When we make recruitment, curricular, and policy decisions in our schools, we make them based on what we think we know about our students, faculty, parent body, and other stakeholders. But until we actually ask what stakeholders are thinking and why, we are in fact making educated guesses.

By asking a small sample of parents what the reasons were behind their educational decisions and what guided their thought process, we can begin to understand some of the key factors that influence parents. Although the sample is small, this research is a critical starting point that will allow Jewish institutions and educational centers to respond accordingly. In every school we encourage teachers, administrators, and other leaders to ask for direct feedback from parents and key stakeholders in order to encourage strategic growth, fine-tune educational methodologies and focus marketing and recruitment efforts.

## Methodology

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Dr. Livstone conducted twenty interviews of parents: eleven interviews of parents with children in the Pre-K to K group and nine in the teen group (for more on the selection process, please see Appendix A). She used in-depth interviews to garner details about parents who were close to specific decision points in the Jewish education of their children. When a family had more than one child, Dr. Livstone identified a target child, closest to having made one of the transitions, around whom the discussion would revolve (despite the fact that parents often referenced the experiences of siblings, especially when children were close in age). Dr. Livstone developed a standardized interview (see Appendix B), which could be completed in about 45 minutes.

## Key Findings

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After analyzing the interviews, there were several themes that recurred among participants that can shed light on the decision-making process, and thus the recruitment and promotion of educational program offerings.

*Influences on Decision Making: How do parents make the decision of where to send their child to school?*

### BIRTH ORDER

This decision can look different depending on the birth order of the child in question. Often, the first child sets the tone, blazing the trail for everyone who follows. While parents are aware that each child is an individual, they make their decision in reaction to the experiences of the first child – whether that means mirroring the choices made for the oldest or deliberately acting to fix a situation now perceived as a mistake. Some parents have identified older children they admire, either in their own families or in synagogues, and choose to educate their own children similarly to these role models. Like children, parents also change and grow over the years, and sometimes added wisdom or experience leads to a deliberately different choice for a third or fourth child.

### COMFORT LEVEL

Parents heavily consider preschools where their children are already comfortable because they have previously attended a program or a class at that location. Parents of Pre-K to K indicated that they prefer Jewish elementary programs that draw children from the same public school system their children attend so that they will have friends. This concern is actually reversed in the teen years where parents prefer diversity or programs that draw from many neighborhoods. For many families, choosing a Jewish preschool or Religious School and choosing a synagogue are intertwined experiences and they talk about them as a single decision because their feelings about school inform their feelings about the synagogue, and vice versa.

Peer pressure seems to have some sway with parents as well. Several parents described a similar phenomenon in different ways: going along the “expected” route or taking the “natural next step” or “going with the flow.” It is not clear who created the expectation—the parents themselves, their extended family (usually grandparents) or some sort of community norm the parents understand exists. For example, after the initial decision to choose public school/Religious School over Jewish Day School, parents felt it became much easier to just follow that road. Very little soul searching was done to determine if there might be a better choice for their particular family.

*If these routes comprise the infrastructure of either a synagogue or neighborhood community, then perhaps the question schools and synagogues must ask themselves is, “How do we purposefully locate our educational programs along this ‘expected’ route?”*

## LOCATION

Location is an important factor for parents. Schools that are in walking distance are a plus, both for families with very young children, who may be looking to avoid loading up the car, and for teens who are more independent, coming and going on their own. Parents also prefer local programs, either religious or secular, which allow for stronger communal ties where neighbors can also be friends.

*Jewish Day School Families: Is being a Jewish Day School family purely a matter of enrollment, or is it more an issue of how you envision the ideal Jewish education for your children?*

## THE IDEAL DAY SCHOOL FAMILY

The results of these interviews surprisingly revealed that the answer lies somewhere in between. Some Day School families surprised themselves by discovering that they *are* Day School families, even if that was not their original plan. Some families had a parent who attended Day School and always wanted Day School for their children. Some families always imagined Day School would be their path, then found it was too expensive to send multiple children and needed to find an alternative. These parents expressed that it still hurt that their children were not receiving the deep Jewish education that they received as a child. This might be a Day School family in theory, but not in practice. One mom explained that her child went to public school for a year after attending a Jewish Pre-K, until they realized that “their lives were too entwined with Jewishness to do Judaism part-time, after school, as an extra-curricular.” Having attended public school herself, she had not realized that the public school would be in conflict with their lives and their values.

Families that opt for secular private school or public school rather than Day School have their own reasons for this decision. Some “don’t feel religious enough” for Day School. Some cite cost, convenience, and the commute as factors against it. Some mourn the loss of the arts as part of what gets sacrificed in Day Schools, and they aren’t willing to give it up. Some are paying large amounts for private school and never considered Jewish Day School. And some are using Hebrew charter schools as a medium ground between public and Jewish Day School education.

*Recruiters at Day Schools should consider what a typical Day School family looks like, and where they are seeking out potential new recruits. Jewish Day Schools should also consider how the definition of potential Day School families can be expanded to include families that would blossom in the Day School environment, but haven’t yet seen themselves as candidates for the Day School community. If any preconceptions of Jewish Day Schools can be challenged, it would behoove the schools to address these issues head on in order to increase recruitment to Jewish Day Schools.*

## FRIENDS AND COMMUNITY

The social aspect of Jewish education, in both elementary and middle school, is a key concern. One parent who made a successful transition from the synagogue Pre-K to K Religious School explained that in Nursery School, “I like how involved the parents are. You feel very welcomed, you feel that your child is very safe and very nurtured the whole time. It’s a very warm environment... The parent body is wonderful, I’ve made some good

friends. It is a very welcoming school, which I really like.” When reflecting on her daughter’s transition to the Religious School, she noted that, “If you ever have a question for the teacher, if you wanted to be involved, there is plenty to be involved in. Bake sales, baking hamentashen, I did. They want you there, which is a nice feeling.” Her daughter now looks forward to Mondays, when she has Religious School.

That sense of feeling at home in a synagogue and preschool (a feeling that often seems to combine the preschool and synagogue into a single, welcoming entity), can be such a strong pull that a family does not even consider going anywhere else after Pre-K. Alternatively, tweens and teens may be lacking the very sense of community that adults find at the synagogue. Can the synagogue be seen as successful if it lacks a teen community? Parents regarded friends – whether in class or carpool – as a significant reason for selecting one venue over another. These same parents worry that if their children’s friends stop coming, it will be more difficult, and less pleasant, for their own children to continue in Hebrew High School.\*

The dynamic of seeing Hebrew High School friends only once a week made it different from elementary Religious School (K through Bar/Bat Mitzvah). Hebrew High often puts tweens and teens together with others they don’t see the rest of the week, and some parents report that their tweens/teens are closer with their Hebrew High School friends than they were with Religious School friends. Interestingly, parents who went to Day School as children sometimes looked longingly on the social connections available to Religious School students who had created their own community and felt this feeling of home at their synagogue. This is an interesting aspect for synagogues and Day Schools to consider: How do we fully integrate our Day School students into both the school and synagogue communities?

Many parents remarked on the importance of community. One mom praised a program saying, “There was a social component as well... They were building community in addition to learning.” A New York City mom explained that they wanted to find and settle into a community as a center for their Jewish lives, finding a sense of belonging despite the transitory nature of New York City communities.

Hebrew Charter Schools also present an opportunity for community building. One charter school mom who has not yet joined a synagogue explained, “I like best the structure and the sense of community. What I lack in a Jewish community in a synagogue, I gain in a Jewish community at (our Hebrew language charter school). Even though it isn’t a Jewish school, there’s a lot of really nice Jewish families, and that’s a very nice sense of community to have until we have a synagogue.”

*Enrollment: When is the Right Time to Start? What lies behind the decision to start Religious School in K or grade 1, rather than waiting until later?*

#### ENROLLMENT

There were various personal reasons that determined when parents enrolled their children in formal Jewish education. A child’s academic success, love of school and exposure to the synagogue all factor in to this

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\* I have used the term Hebrew High to include all programs for post-bar/bat mitzvah children, whether they are traditional academic programs or programs that also include music, volunteering, and trips as legitimate ways for teens to stay involved Jewishly.

decision. Some parents described having a younger child who loves being in school or who has a lot of exposure to the synagogue start their synagogue Religious School education in Pre-K. These same parents had waited until second grade or later with an older sibling who struggled academically or who was less involved with the synagogue. One mom talked about enrolling in Kindergarten at his (Catholic) father's request, since dad didn't want a break between what they learn in Pre-K and in elementary Religious School. Another mom was asked by a friend if her child was being consecrated on Simchat Torah. It was at this point that she suddenly realized they were not doing anything for her son's Jewish education, and they joined a synagogue shortly thereafter where he started Hebrew School. Parents have different philosophies about "taking a break" between Pre-K and Religious School while schools have varying recommendations for when Hebrew School begins in a given synagogue.

*It would behoove all Hebrew Schools to come up with an express philosophy for when children should ideally enroll and why, and make sure to share this with parents so they can factor it into their decisions.*

*Why Wait: What are some of the factors that lie behind the decision to wait to enroll?*

Financial considerations prevent some parents from enrolling in elementary Religious School. Parents may wait until 2<sup>nd</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> grade to begin to enroll their children. When parents have a younger child enrolled in a Jewish preschool, it seems they feel the family is still connected to that preschool community, which makes it easier to wait to join a synagogue.

*Of course, this decision is made easier when synagogue membership is included free with payment of the Pre-K tuition.*

When a parent was raised without strong religion, or is a Jew by Choice, they don't always have their own experiences to call on, or a sense of what might make Religious School important to their children.

*These parents would benefit from more direction and more information.*

#### TRANSITION POINTS AND TRANSITION TEAMS

The points in time when families are looking at a change in school, program, or synagogue are liminal moments when families are often receptive to suggestions, information, and encouragement, but our schools and synagogue are doing an inadequate or overly partisan job. Parents talked about Jewish Pre-Ks that made a big push for families to join *their* Religious Schools, but never mentioned any other options. This presents a challenge when a Reform setting hosts an excellent preschool, but the families are more in the market for a Conservative synagogue or even Day School, yet these options are ignored.

When transition teams, especially those involving clergy, make a concerted effort to recruit, they often meet with great success. A mom explained that she enrolled her child at the preschool, then received advertisements for a supplementary preschool program in the synagogue, and enrollment there came with free synagogue membership. However, there was no similar push for elementary religious school. Jewish Community Centers (JCCs), which aren't linked to a particular synagogue or movement, have opportunities and

responsibilities which they may be ignoring. A parent described her JCC's process: "exmissions counselors" (those assigned to help with the transition out of preschool and into Kindergarten) worked with families to determine where they would attend post-JCC. These counselors met with parents and advised them to visit local public schools, counseled on how many schools to apply to, and in what variation, but access to Jewish Day School was very underwhelming. The JCC wouldn't recommend one Day School over another, and wasn't fully informed about Day Schools in the area.

*This would seem like a prime opportunity to invite all the interested Day Schools in to the JCC and allow them access to parents who might consider a Day School education if they knew more about it.*

One parent, describing her Pre-K experience, explained that the synagogue's rabbi addressed a group of parents with graduating children to connect them with elementary Religious School. The result? Most of the children continued on from the preschool into the elementary religious school. Similarly, a parent of a tween talked about how her Temple made a big marketing push to parents and children to continue into the 8<sup>th</sup> grade program, and it worked—lots of children, including her daughter, signed up. It was entirely the daughter's decision, and was a surprise to her parents, albeit a pleasant one.

*Jewish vs. Secular Preschool: What drives parents to pick a Jewish Pre-K over a secular program?*

#### VARYING RATIONALES

A parent's own religious school experience may influence this decision. While some parents seem predisposed to Jewish Pre-K because of their own Jewish preschool experience, parents without a Jewish preschool education feel it is too early to introduce religion. One mother expressed that she didn't see the point of a Hebrew and would prefer that her child learn more math. However, she began to understand that children should feel comfortable and know something about their religion. Because religion plays a role in most people's upbringing, even couples in mixed marriages choose a religion. Consequently this couple chose to send their daughter to a Jewish Pre-K where she is learning more about Judaism. Her husband was grateful, saying he just couldn't deal with one more question about why they didn't have a Christmas tree!

Some parents prefer Jewish preschool, but find the cost prohibitive. Some chose JCC preschools based primarily on location, but describe the Jewish content as "Jewish lite." Some of the parents expressed regret that while they sent their younger child to a Jewish Pre-K, they had sent the older children elsewhere.

It was interesting to note that a JCC might be described as "Jewish lite," appealing to many beyond the Jewish community, while a Reform preschool was described as very consciously and particularly Jewish because it did not allow celebrations of Valentine's Day or Halloween while it encouraged Purim and Shabbat. This raises an important question with regard to Jewish programs: Must Jewish preschools be ambivalent about the Jewish environment they provide so that they don't appear "too" Jewish? Whose interests does this serve?

*Continuing Education: What makes a family decide to send a teen to Hebrew High to continue his or her Jewish education post-bar/bat mitzvah?*



## EXPECTATIONS AND INFLUENCES

Hebrew High involvement doesn't happen without the cooperation of the child in question, but creating a family expectation can make a difference. Sometimes that expectation comes from older siblings who have attended Hebrew High. Some come from an explicit understanding with the parents, such as one mom who had an agreement with all her children that a large bar or bat mitzvah party meant a commitment to see bar/t mitzvah as a midpoint, not an end, in their Jewish education. (The alternative was a simpler Kiddush after services.)

Hebrew High offers the possibility of alternative education, beyond the simple classroom experience. In some locations, the expressed goal of the program is to keep teens walking in the door, be it for helping out in the Religious School, cooking classes, conversational Hebrew, or taking trips with or without parents. Of course, there is no one size fits all in education, and some teens prefer the conventional classes and opt to skip the more out of the box offerings. When parents see Hebrew High as "the progression... a piece of the journey," believe that children benefit from the deeper connection with the clergy and education directors and that continuing education makes sense because our thoughts and questions change as we mature, then teens are likely to remain enrolled. Similar to the Pre-K experience, the involvement of clergy who take an interest and make a special push for children to participate post bar/t mitzvah is of value. Parents also cite the opportunity for teens to have friends from multiple synagogues as a clear plus, in a way they don't necessarily see it for elementary school. A positive experience in elementary Religious School also makes it more likely that a child will continue his or her formal Jewish education beyond bar/t mitzvah.

As one parent explained, their family assumption was that their son *would* continue post-bar mitzvah, and the question was *what* he would be doing, not *whether* he will be continuing his educational route. Parents also felt positively about programs that recognize that teens have busy lives and allow them to make room for Judaism. Parents felt it cannot be "all or nothing" in terms of teen involvement with Hebrew High if we want to keep them engaged.

## BUSING

Transportation was an unexpected finding in the interviews. Parents in multiple communities described arrangements where students could be dropped off at Religious School by a school bus, or where buses provided transportation between various branches of community Hebrew High Schools. In one Day School family, busing became the deciding factor with regard to their choice of Pre-K. Because busing is not offered to children under five years of age, this family chose to send their child to a local Pre-K rather than the Day School's Pre-K. They plan to return to Day School for Kindergarten because it will include transportation.

## JEWISH CAMPING

Parents who attended Jewish summer camps are often proponents of Jewish camps for their own children. One mom described her childhood camp experience as the "foundation for my entire Jewish identity" and she is not alone. Parents described longstanding friendships made at camp. One family described a sort of compromise—when they pulled the children out of Day School for financial reasons, they committed to

sending them to Jewish camp for one month every summer. The connection to camp is not exclusive to one particular camping program. Parents seemed happy to have a combination of day and sleep away camps and were willing to send to multiple Jewish camps if necessary.

## COST

Jewish education is very expensive. One Day School parent said she pays over \$80,000 per year in tuition for her children, plus the cost of summer camp. Families, even those who are very wealthy, are aware of the cost of Jewish education, whether or not it guides their choices. Some families economize by selecting lower cost preschool programs for 2 and 3 year olds while moving to pricier schools for Pre-K. One mom described how she wishes that the whole synagogue/school endeavor was less expensive. She said she has many friends who have gone to Chabad based solely on cost, and it bothers her that religion has become something to shop for. Parents described sacrifices they are making in order to stay in a beloved Day School, including getting help from grandparents and staying in tiny apartments in order to make attending the school geographically possible. Even parents who did not need to make financial sacrifices in order to afford Day School spoke of the need to build the costs into their budgets. Pre-K tuitions that included synagogue membership were appreciated, while some parents waited until after they finished paying for Pre-K before joining synagogues. One mom talked about her husband's initial resistance to how much synagogue membership costs and the pressure this created. Once he came to see membership as having great value, his attitude changed and the feeling of financial pressure went away.

Scholarships and aid, especially for Day School, were also mentioned. Some Day Schools cannot offer enough funding to truly make a difference when the tuition is so expensive. *But sometimes, even when the amount is modest, a scholarship sends the message that we want you here, and that feels important to Day School families.*

### *Hebrew Charter Schools: A Class by Themselves*

If Jewish education can be said to have an expected course, whether that entails Day School, synagogue schools, Pre-K or even dropping out, then Hebrew Charter schools represented a completely uncharted course—a complete departure from any expected path. Since the language acquisition is already being addressed, parents in these schools must think creatively about the religious aspect of educating their children. Some search for programs geared towards Israeli children or seek out tutors to work independently with their children. The schools themselves have thought about this issue and are trying different models of programming for Jewish after school enrichment. The opportunities and challenges surrounding Hebrew Charter schools are so many and so specific that it is difficult to include them under the traditional Jewish Education umbrella. Future research should consider the options available to students at these schools.

# Suggestions and Implications

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*This research suggests that schools and synagogues can take action to improve retention rates and encourage earlier enrollment in Jewish schooling.*

## START RECRUITING YOUNGER

Since parents often make their most deliberate decision about their first child and subsequent decisions in reaction to that child's experiences, it makes sense to target new parents as early as possible. This could include everything from a Jewish parenting class to Jewish Lamaze to very early music, rhythm, and "Mommy and Me" experiences for infants. Anything that provides an opportunity to speak to new parents and to acclimate them to a space in a Jewish nursery or synagogue can help pave the way to feeling comfortable and welcome in that setting, which may make it easier to get them to return later.

## BETTER HANDOFFS BETWEEN PRESCHOOLS AND WHATEVER COMES NEXT

Successful Jewish preschools should be encouraged to see their mission as propelling families into the Jewish community, not necessarily one specific synagogue or temple. Their populations would be better served by being presented with a plethora of options, including schools housed in other synagogues or even other movements. Day Schools should be invited to explain what they can offer, and programs geared towards young children, even before traditional Hebrew School begins in second or third grade, should be encouraged and advertised. It also helps to keep in mind that these early years are expensive years for families, and incentives like free membership can be very useful in helping families stay connected to an institution.

## CHALLENGE THE COMMUNITY NORMS

Parents figure out what "most" children in their community do: sports, music lessons, standardized test prep or private tutoring. If "most" children don't go to Day School or "most" children don't start their Jewish education until second or third grade, that becomes the norm. These norms need to be challenged! Talk about *when – not if* – a child starts the Kindergarten program at the synagogue. Hearing that your friends or neighbors will be attending can make Jewish Pre-K, elementary and Hebrew High programs more attractive.

For tweens and teens, make Hebrew High School a place for them to learn, but also socialize and give back to the community. Create programs that will be résumé builders for college, so it makes it easier to justify choosing this extracurricular over another. Talk to the students to figure out what would appeal to them, and offer a wide variety of ways for them to engage with each other, with the clergy, and with the sense of being part of the community. It helps when younger children and their parents see teens they admire involved in the synagogue – helping in Religious School, participating in synagogue activities or being a part of the youth groups or Hebrew High experiences. This kind of role modeling can help create expectation that everyone should continue on to Hebrew High, since there will be something there for everyone.

## ADVERTISE AND SUBSIDIZE

Word of mouth can be a great thing, but you can't assume families entering their first child in a Religious School, Day School, or Hebrew High School will always know who to talk to. Organized programs, especially those that include clergy, can be very helpful in getting people to at least try a given program. These presentations should not only introduce the school but explain the philosophy of *why* you should attend/send your child. Advertise programs as giving children a leg up by learning more when they are young, and make sure they offer something unique to children coming from Jewish Pre-K so that they can feel that they are continuing, rather than repeating, their Jewish learning. These recruitment sessions can help dispel notions that programs are too expensive (is aid available?) too religious (is there room at your Day School for less observant Jews?) or too demanding in some other way. It is also important to realize the power of making people feel wanted. Sometimes this just means having a conversation, sometimes a modest scholarship sends the message that "we want you." The interpersonal aspect of dealing with families is one that must not be ignored.

## DON'T FORGET THE SOCIAL COMPONENT!

For teens and tweens, friends are everything. If you run a great program, but none of their friends are there, they won't come. Even when they enjoy the learning aspect of a program, having their friends there too is essential. Synagogues should remember that their teen programming must contain elements of community building specific to the teen community. It is wonderful when adults find their friends at synagogue, but special effort must be made so that teens can find their friends there too.

For preschools, this community building is also important. Preschools have a unique opportunity to educate both the parents and the children at a time when both groups are open to meeting new people and exploring new ideas. A Jewish preschool that makes entire family units feel welcome and accepted can offer the first Jewish community for these families as well as providing a conduit to the wider organized Jewish community, its houses of worship, communal institutions, and community programs.

## MAKE IT EASY TO ATTEND!

Providing transportation to synagogue programs or Day Schools can be the deciding factor in selecting one synagogue or school over another. Communities should evaluate what the obstacles are for families considering their synagogues or schools and see if there are creative ways to overcome these obstacles.

## SUMMER IS IMPORTANT

Jewish overnight and day camps have amazing staying power. Institutions should weight the potential for creating lasting, positive Jewish associations at Jewish summer camp. The financial costs of these camps should be considered as well when planning what an ideal Jewish education might include and deciding how to make that accessible to all families.

## The Message

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There is no “one size fits all” solution to Jewish education. While the participants in this study reflect the diverse nature of the community, they have begun to weave a common tapestry that expresses their similar needs. Jewish educational institutions should begin taking these critical steps to increase enrollment and engagement and recruit and retain students into their programs, particularly at points of entry and transition.

## Appendix A: Detailed Methodology

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- Dr. Danna Rose Livstone was provided with a list of 31 parents (30 mothers and one father), 16 of whom had children in the Pre-K group (4s/Pre-K to K), and 15 in the teen (post bar/bat mitzvah) group.
- These names were gathered from team members and consultants at the Jewish Education Project. The team members asked cooperating principals and directors of preschools and synagogue schools to share the names of parents who might be interested in being interviewed. They also included the names of people personally known to them who might be interested in participating.
- Thirty parents were contacted via email with a request to participate and inviting them to fill out a brief survey to collect their informed consent, contact information, some very basic information about their children, and an idea of their schedules. (One parent was not able to be reached.)
- 12/16 of the Pre-K group filled out surveys, and 12/15 of the teen group.
- After answering questions and coordinating schedules, Dr. Livstone conducted 11 interviews in the Pre-K group and 9 in the teen group. For basic demographic details on interview participants, please see Appendix C.
- The interviews, with one exception, were conducted in one session that ranged from 37-105 minutes with more than half of the interviews falling in the 50-70 minute range. One outlier, a 135-minute interview, was conducted over three sessions.
- All interviews were recorded and summarized, then prominent themes were identified and classified. These common themes serve as the primary findings of this research, with the understanding that more could be gleaned from the interviews, depending on the particular lens used to analyze the data.

## Appendix B: Interview Prompts and Questions

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Thank you for agreeing to be interviewed for this project. I am looking to learn about what parents are thinking about when they make their decisions for the Jewish education of their children. If at any point you want to add a thought or go back to a question we already discussed, please don't hesitate to let me know.

Please tell me who is in your family and the names and ages of your children. (Determine which child is under discussion.)

Please describe the religious affiliations of the people in your family. (Jewish/not Jewish/strongly some other religion/more than one religion/ denominational identity if applicable)

Please tell me about some of the Jewish aspects of your home life.

(Prompt for holidays, language, synagogue affiliation, cultural identity, Judaica, Israel)

Please describe your connection and your family's connection, if any, to the wider Jewish community. (Prompt for formal and informal connections, synagogue membership/affiliation, JCC, PJ library, etc.)

Where are your children being educated? (grades and types of school) How long have they been there? (prompt for whether school is full time, part time, secular, Jewish, public, private, charter)

Where did (child under discussion) attend prior to now?

Please share some of your hopes and dreams for (name of your child)'s education, both Jewish and General.

Please describe your involvement in the various activities of your child.

What factors went into choosing (the earlier experience) for your child?

What other choices did you consider? What made you select your choice over these other possibilities?

Who was the main decider in choosing where to send (child's name?)

Did you ask anyone else for advice or input? Who? Why? What did they suggest? Was there any unsolicited advice? Did you ultimately follow the advice?

Please describe the schedule for a typical week in your child's life. What activities fill your child's days? (school and what else?)

Relative to your home, where are these various activities located?

Who does the transporting?

How important is location in selecting these various activities? Please be specific.

Let's focus only on Jewish experiences for this section. (and only for target child)

What are the Jewish experiences in your child's life? (prompt for grandparents, pre-school, Religious School, synagogues, JCCs, youth groups depending on age)

Is your child involved in any formal Jewish education? Why/why not? Please describe.

Do you anticipate any changes to this in the next 5 years? Please explain.

Was there any connection between your child's school and a synagogue, JCC, or other larger organization? (Prompt for membership in any of these and the order in which it happened.)

What factors would you say went into the choice to send (child's name) to (the current Jewish experience)?

What other choices did you consider? What made you select your choice over these other possibilities?

Who was the main decider in choosing this (Jewish experience)?

Did you ask anyone else for advice or input? Who? Why? What did they suggest? Was there any unsolicited advice? Did you ultimately follow the advice?

At any point were you approached by anyone to try and counsel you in your decision? (school director, principal, clergy)

Now that (child's name) has been at \_\_\_\_\_ for X years, how do you feel about (name of the school)? Any surprises? Anything you know now that you wish you had known back then?

Please describe a memorable incident from both (the earlier) and (the current Jewish) school/experience.

What things do/did you like best about (the earlier) and (the current Jewish) school/experience?

What aspects do you wish you could change about? (the earlier) and (the current Jewish) school/experience.

How long do you expect (child's name) to be at this school/experience? Why? What do you anticipate will be next?

Did financial concerns play into any part of your decision making? Please explain.



Did anything about the previous school/day care experience influence your choice of the next school/experience? (prompt for teachers and administrators)

Did gender come into your decision at all?

What Jewish concerns, if any, factored in to your decision? Please explain?

Do you supplement your child's Jewish educational experiences in some way? Why/why not? Please explain.

We all live in multiple communities. Did any of your communities play a role in supporting, influencing, or discouraging your decision?

How do you think your spouse would describe the decision making process?

Was your child's thoughts or feelings part of the process?

What are some of your concerns or worries about your child's Jewish and secular education?

Did you make the same choices for the education of your other children? Why/why not?

With the benefit of hindsight, how do you think you might approach this decision if you had it to do again. Why?

Is there anything that you wish to add, or any area which feels incomplete?

THANK YOU!

# Appendix C: Demographic Data

