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Series B: Commission on Jewish Education in North America (CJENA). 1980–1993.
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Bieler, Jack, 1988-1989.

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COMMISSIONER CONTACT SHEET

Name Jack Bieler Assigned to _____
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2010 Linden Lane
Silver Spring, MD 20910 Home phone _____
 Fax _____ Telex _____
 Comments _____

Date	Nature of Contact/Status	Next Steps/Action Needed

bieler/2MN-W

MI-NA: TOWARDS THE FIRST COMMISSION MEETING

INTERVIEW OF COMMISSIONER

Commissioner: RABBI JACK BIELER
Interviewer: Annette Hochstein
Date: July 5, 1988
Place: Greener Pastures, NY
Duration: 2 hours
Focus: Content

Anticipated Participation: Active. All Commission meetings and role in task force. Will help spread the word of the Commission among orthodox educators. Will help build bridges between educators of the various denominations.

First Meeting Arrangements: Arriving from Silver Springs, Maryland where he will have moved to two days before.

Category: Educator. Long-time Talmut teacher at Raman, moving to Hebrew Academy of Silver Springs, Maryland where he will be teaching and will be responsible for the curriculum development. Orthodox. Jerusalem Fellow.

Atmosphere: eager, interested, hopeful, anticipating both the process and the outcome of the work of the Commission. Extremely eager to be allowed to try out and implement some of the many initiatives he would like to undertake.

Summary

The focus of the discussion was on the status of the teachers and the problems involving teacher training. Rabbi Bieler does not believe that salary is the main issue. He does believe that status is. Teachers must be given more enrichment and professional development opportunities. They should be able to visit schools and other institutions. Given opportunities for conferences. They should be given things such as free education for their own children in the schools where they teach. Summer retreats should be organized. Enrichment opportunities should be developed for a number of reasons: to increase teacher effectiveness but also to break the teacher's isolation.

Rabbi Bieler was a recipient of a Gruse grant of \$10,000 for the best teacher in his school. However, there was never any networking between the recipients of the grants from the various schools. He said that this was typical of the isolation in which teachers work.

Rabbi Bieler believes that the concept of lead teacher, which he to some extent exemplifies without the title--would be extremely valuable for Jewish education.

Training

There is essentially no training available today for teachers in the United States. Rabbi Bieler believes that training should be done in the schools by lead teachers. He would love to set up a training program or to see one being set up whereby "teachers will be the best teachers of teachers." Trainees will have to get some formal learning but the main training should take place in the schools.

Rabbi Bieler expressed the fact that principals and administrators and boards might have opportunities for visiting institutions other than their own. This right is never given to teachers and yet it would be an important source of networking and of enrichment. He believes inter-denominational visiting should be important and might be done by the Commission.

Like a number of the other commissioners, Rabbi Bieler believes that the supplementary schools have failed and are not to be dealt with.

He believes adult education must be dealt with seriously. Inroads have to be made into adult education. This is the only way to hope to reach out to more of the children in a more effective way. There is room to study the good experiments that are happening. One could identify ten successful adult programs, evaluate them, and then decide on reputations. The reason is very simple. Adult culture must be supportive of what their children learn or else the children's education will fail.

Rabbi Bieler believes that most synagogues don't do their job of educational centers. Rabbis see themselves more as social workers than as educators. Yet the synagogue is the one single institution where most Jews are affiliated with. If one wants to get to the masses of Jews, it has to go through the synagogue.

We discussed Rabbi Bieler's participation in task forces. He is very eager to be an active member. We discussed four task forces. The four task forces mentioned were:

1. Building the profession
2. Adult education
3. Senior personnel
4. The climate

He would prefer building the profession but would be willing to be active in more than one.

As a last point, Rabbi Bieler suggested that encouraging competition and giving incentives for quality programs would encourage the best people to come forth and have useful initiatives.

1. Commissioner: Jack Bieler
2. Interviewer: Joseph Reimer
3. Date: 12/7/88
4. Duration: 1/2 hour by telephone

Rabbi Bieler really enjoyed the October meeting in Boston and found it very stimulating. He would look forward to future meetings of that quality.

Jack felt the meeting gave him a good understanding of the method used to develop the option papers and the distinction between programmatic and enabling options. He finds the distinction valid and the focus on the preconditions of personnel and community as almost self-evident.

His concern is that in reading the option papers, they were so general as to not take the reader to the hub of the issues. He offered the example of the paper on day schools where some of the finer points on how to establish quality education (that he suggested), were not in the paper. His concern is that commissioners get enough detail to be able to make informed decisions.

Jack's hope is that the task force structure get underway in a way that allows some commissioners, like himself, who have the time and interest to get involved in the details of an issue, to meet more frequently and really interact over the issues. He currently finds the issues of personnel and community too broadly defined and predicts that once commissioners begin to work on them in detail, differences of perspective will emerge that will need to be worked out.

His own interest is in working on the issue of personnel. He is anxious to contribute from what he is learning on the subject and to gain for himself a broader picture.

Jack's level of involvement and enthusiasm is high. He will attend the meeting on December 13. He wanted us as a staff to think about whether or not current tensions over the issue of "Who is a Jew?" might spill-over into the meeting and create a less harmonious atmosphere.

JOSEPH REIMER

9/25/89

INTERVIEW WITH JACK BIELER

1. Jack suggests that the upcoming meeting focus more on issues of action than research. Commissioners, he believes, care most about what concretely will happen as a result of the Commission and less about what the report will say. Therefore, he believes the focus on Community Action Sites should be continued: what they will look like, how they will be selected, how many should be started, what timetable should be employed, what results may be expected, etc. He wonders if these CAS will all be general centers for Jewish education or whether some will specialize in one area and some in other areas of Jewish education.
2. As to the papers commissioned, Jack hopes they will be written as popular pieces that break new ground; that lay people will feel about them, "we have to read these"; that they will generate a sense of excitement about possibilities. He also hopes they will not be blandly transdenominational, but will be multi-faceted and include different denominational perspectives. (He notes an absence of an Orthodox perspective among the authors and is concerned about it).
3. As to the format of the meeting, Jack was disappointed to be in the small group whose time was dominated by a few members. He thinks that small groups are a good idea if they have stronger leadership and an ethic of fair play.
4. Jack feels that as a Commissioner, he would like to have more input into the process. He thinks the idea of creating work groups or other smaller formats between meetings is a good one and still should be considered. He'd like to receive more regular literature on what is going on between Commission meetings.
5. Rabbi Bieler plans to attend on October 23.

J. Reimer

Interview with Rabbi Jack Bieler (4/24/89)
2 hours in his home

1. Rabbi Bieler began by reacting to the 4/5 meeting of the educators saying he was taken aback by the direction taken. He did not anticipate that direction as a result of the December meeting, thought the focus would be on the content of the enabling options and found the current focus on implementation to be very abstract; the processing of process. That worries him.

2. I asked what he'd recommend for the June 14th meeting, Jack wants us to get back to the enabling options in a more concrete way and spell out what we'd like to create. What is the vision? What are the best cases and the scenarios for their creation and replication? What is the process for selecting community sites? What about task forces? He's concerned that time will run out and these issues won't be tackled sufficiently by the Commission.

3. A question Jack would like raised is whether public education should be seen as a model for Jewish education. He'd prefer using private education as model in particular to stress the issue of excellence in education. He believes that what most threatens the upgrading of the field are low expectations. If no one expects you to be excellent, why become excellent? Let us study what allows for the expectation of excellence in certain private schools and learn from their successes. Let's study our own successes and learn from them. Jack believes we need to assemble a traveling team (of teachers and other professionals) who can visit, observe and write up "best practices".

4. Rabbi Bieler's other concern about the proposal for implementation is the degree to which it involves partnership with existing institutions - such as BJE's - whom he sees as being committed to non-change. He believes in the power of demonstration projects implemented by the best people working together, and does not believe that the power of such a demonstration can be disseminated by the normal channels. It is rather a matter of setting an example and a standard and inspiring others to join in the pursuit of excellence.

5. Rabbi Bieler plans to attend on 6/14.



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October 16, 1988

Dr. Arthur J. Naparstek
c/o Mandel Associated Foundations
1750 Euclid Avenue
Cleveland, OH 44115

Dear Dr. Naparstek,

I am very glad that I had the opportunity to come to Boston and meet with you and other members of the Commission. I find these occasions most stimulating and become ever-more optimistic about what may result from the deliberations and decisions of the Commissioners.

I am enclosing receipts of my travel expenses for October 14th.

Sincerely,

Jack Bieler

P.S. During the course of Friday's discussion, it appeared that you wished to dispute my contention that the "group mentality" that may have informed Alvin Schiff's experiences during his association with Shomer HaTzair and other youth organizations several decades ago, may no longer be extent and therefore cannot be assumed as a realistic goal of at least formal if not also informal Jewish educational experiences. I would welcome any sort of bibliography that would help me get a fuller and more accurate picture of current thinking on this matter.

AD