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Appendix 2

FEDERATION-LED COMMUNITY PLANNING FOR
JEWISH EDUCATION, IDENTITY AND CONTINUITY

by

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Prepared for

COMMISSION ON JEWISH EDUCATION IN NORTH AMERICA

Meeting of June 14, 1989

MG checking J.F. re re-write

May 31, 1989

For the last few years, local North American Jewish community planning agendas have been shifting, evolving to a point of much more concentration on issues related to Jewish survival and continuity. While traditional community planning for special subpopulations such as the disabled and aging continues, many communities have rearranged their planning priorities to focus more resources and attention on questions about the nature of our North American Jewish community in the 21st century.

The national planning agenda has provided the impetus for this change, with major national agencies including the JAFI Jewish Education Committee (North America), JESNA, CAJE, JWB and the CJF all raising the visibility of Jewish education and continuity as an issue of primary concern requiring extraordinary community efforts.

A second impetus for change has come from research. Within both academic and communal circles a number of influential studies have recently been published which have given support to concerns about Jewish continuity and pointed towards possible solutions for problems faced in the field. These include the work done by Perry London and his colleagues at Harvard on Jewish identity formation¹, by Alvin Schiff and his colleagues in New York on supplementary schools², and by Barry Shrage in Cleveland on experimentation leading to institutional change³. These studies, along with many others, suggest the need for changes in our communal funding priorities, in our basic educational approaches and in the breadth of players involved in Jewish education. This article will explore the implications of this knowledge as a guide to federations entering this field.

CHANGING ROLES FOR FEDERATIONS

Jonathan Woocher's concept of the "communalization" of Jewish education sets the stage for a new role for federations to be directly involved in broad-based community planning for Jewish education and continuity. We have learned from the national efforts that community-wide collaborative efforts are necessary for Jewish education planning to be meaningful in the 1990s. It is clear that many institutions have long played and will continue to play essential roles in the delivery of educational services, creation of educational materials, the training and support of educational personnel, and evaluation. What is newly emerging is the realization that federations can serve a key role in the communalization of Jewish education by facilitating and coordinating the community's efforts at improving its educational systems. Federations will not replace the work of BJE's, synagogues or JCC's, but they can add a vital new dimension to the field of Jewish education by addressing changing norms in communal life, involving the highest level of leadership and accessing new levels of funding.

Top community leadership is, of course, federations' most valuable asset. These are the people who are able to focus others on an issue and generate and move funding towards a particular goal. The leadership is also best able to reestablish community norms and address the dissonance between family practices and Jewish customs as learned in school. There are many national leaders from

CJF, JWB, JESNA and elsewhere getting deeply involved in this issue and working with their peers to get them involved.

Access to funding is another major reason to have federations at the center of the new movement towards the primacy of Jewish education and Jewish continuity on the communal agenda. Federations will be called upon to raise more money to address these issues, manage the difficult process of rearranging existing community priorities, and work with people who are capable of establishing special purpose funds to assure this activity in perpetuity. Federations can bring to bear endowment and ongoing operating support to leverage other money for this purpose. The new program concepts are big, expensive and broad-based enough to require the communities' "central address" to be the key player and coordinator and to work alongside other communal and religious organizations to bring about the desired changes.

Partnering with the synagogues is another role for federations. After all, about 80 percent of our young people who get some Jewish education get it in a synagogue school. These key service providers can neither do the whole job alone, nor should they be asked to give up their autonomy. Rather, we have started to see incredible strength in the joint-venture approach--since everyone will win if we are successful.

MODELS OF COMMUNITY ORGANIZATION

Is this True? Many federations have already engaged in Federation-led community planning for Jewish identity and continuity. Commissions, committees and task forces are already well advanced in Baltimore, Cleveland, Columbus, Dallas, Denver, Detroit, Los Angeles, New York, Pittsburgh, Richmond and Washington. Others are at earlier stages of organization.

"Communalization" of the effort is the key to placing continuity issues high on the community planning agenda. Developing an all encompassing planning process is working. The federations have assumed a leadership role but have been sure to involve all the key players in the community and especially the synagogues.

Professional leadership teams, led by federation planners but including rabbis, school directors, JCC and BJE professionals and academics, are working together to define problems, sort out priorities and develop options to be considered by lay leadership. Most of these 11 communities report that lay involvement on the commission was originally representative of the various institutions. But, once people got involved in consideration of issues that affect everyone, the planning effort gelled into a unified approach. That in itself was of value in ensuring a broad commitment to program recommendations and appropriate use of financial resources to deal with community-wide issues.

Three different community organization approaches have been taken by the communities that are more advanced in the planning process: 1) traditional planning, 2) request for proposals, and 3) seed money. Before detailing the approaches, it is important to note that all three have as a prerequisite active experimentation with individual program ideas prior to the communal approach. Whether it be family education in Detroit, synagogue-based

teacher training in Baltimore or outreach programs in Denver, in all cases program experimentation has set the stage for people's willingness to believe that change in the educational system is possible and can have a positive impact on Jewish continuity.

Briefly, the three community organization models look like this:

Traditional Planning --

Cleveland and Baltimore have convened all the players in the community to go through the exercise of defining problems; sorting out priorities; developing and considering action plans; developing full program, implementation, funding and evaluation plans, and then publishing blueprints for broad-based community action. This process is closely linked to the traditional planning activity in these and many other communities. However, in both cases, the intensity of effort, commitment and excitement was unusually high. The broad-based partnership with the synagogues appears to be one of the most important keys to these successes.

"Request for Proposals" --

Detroit's process was initially similar to the Cleveland and Baltimore experience. However, after establishing priorities, Detroit published an inventory of issues the community wanted addressed through innovative program proposals. This "request for proposals" approach caused agencies, synagogues, and individuals to begin to think and plan together around the newly established community directives. This type of planning process should be possible in any size community and under almost any set of circumstances in the schools and other community institutions. Once a community establishes its goals and priorities, then it can begin determining who should be responsible for any new program initiatives and how they will be funded.

Seed Money Approach --

Columbus put its resources out front as an incentive for cooperative planning and creative thinking in dealing with identified community problems. The Federation's Board of Trustees set aside \$250,000 of campaign money and then initiated a federation-led process to decide how best to spend it.

For all the differences between approaches, the planning processes had much in common. They all demonstrated that federation-led efforts can quickly go public with new priorities and be quite flexible in moving ahead with the planning process. They came to similar conclusions in identifying three elements that are basic to improving the effectiveness of the educational system. They are 1) the need to professionalize the personnel in Jewish education, 2) the need for involving parents in the Jewish identity formation of their children, and 3) the need for more and better informal educational experiences for building the Jewish identity of our youth. We will review each of these in greater detail.

PERSONNEL

North American Jewry is suffering from the lack of a profession in Jewish education. We have many people working in the field, but most in part-time, poorly compensated, low status positions. We have yet to create the conditions for working in this field which will attract highly qualified people, adequately compensate and support them, and offer them a challenging ladder of opportunity for a professional career.

Creating a profession of Jewish education is an idea whose time has come. The day school movement has made the most progress in offering full-time work, opportunities to advance oneself up a career ladder and, in some cases, competitive salaries and benefits. In supplementary schools and in many informal educational contexts, the professional opportunities have been far more limited, and we are seeing an increased reliance on avocational personnel. There have been urgent calls to find ways to creatively combine positions and offer educators full-time employment that is challenging, long-term and well compensated.

There are communities which have begun to take up the challenge of improving the quality of personnel in supplementary schools by helping part-time teachers acquire the skills and knowledge needed to be more effective in classrooms. In Baltimore schools have been given incentives to engage a majority of their teachers in skill training. In Cleveland a "personal growth plan" has been developed which provides individualized training programs, recognizing different backgrounds in content knowledge and pedagogic skills. Several communities are providing teachers with the opportunity to study in Israel and many sponsor participation in professional conferences such as those run by CAJE. These and other approaches will need to be developed to build a profession of Jewish educators.

INFORMAL EXPERIENCES

Research in Jewish identity formation and in Jewish professional career choices offers support to a long-held theory that informal educational experiences can play a significant role in influencing one's commitment to Jewish life. For example, Cleveland's demographic study of Jews from 18-29 years old found that many people cite summer camp, a trip to Israel or a youth group experience as most positively enhancing their current Jewish identity.

Even were everyone to agree to grant informal education a key role in Jewish education, from a planning perspective, it could not stand alone. Informal education is inherently connected to the other pieces of the puzzle. We do not have a cohort of professionals who combine strong Jewish knowledge with group work skills, so enhanced training of personnel is an immediate prerequisite. Second, for meaningful Jewish experiences to be properly understood, students need formal education to interpret them. Third, since informal education relies heavily on "artificial environments" such as summer camps and weekend retreats, there need to be bridges built to connect the "high" of these beyond the classroom experiences to the daily life of the community. In all cases, the informal experience needs to be expanded upon to be most truly effective.

For Federation planning, there is a need for a comprehensive approach, integrating BJE, JCC and school personnel. This approach provides an opportunity for people who care about these issues to talk and learn from each other. Program models like Columbus' Discovery Program which integrates preparation for an Israel trip into school curricula and JCC family retreats provide great food for thought in the Federation planning arena.

Suggestions for integrating formal and informal educational experiences can be found in the supplementary school study done by the New York BJE. Although it may seem to the leadership like a radical step, a number of planners and educators are now considering shifting supplementary school hours in some years from the mid-week program to more experiential weekend retreats. That these major shifts can even be contemplated represents a significant belief in the power of providing a Jewish life experience to students whose families may otherwise not provide it and whose formal Jewish education is otherwise not linked to their daily lives.

JEWISH FAMILY EDUCATION

It has long been recognized in general education that schools cannot educate children in a vacuum. If issues studied in the classroom, or even experienced in informal settings, are not supported at home, much of the educational advantage is lost. This idea was given empirical support in the work of Harold Himmelfarb⁴ and others. In recent years a number of Jewish educators have begun to close the gap between the Jewish classroom and home by more extensively involving the family in classroom activities.

As with informal experiences, family education cannot be seen as an adjunct to the existing program but rather needs to become part of the program itself. We need to think of ourselves as educating families and not just individual students.

An outstanding example of this is to be found in Detroit's Jewish Education for Families ("JEFF"). Schools are invited to participate in informal family educational programs on the condition that they set up an internal committee structure made up of educators and parents who jointly plan the program and ensure its connection to the curriculum of the formal classroom. This "community organization" concept within the school seems to work well for Detroit schools, and in different forms, has been tried in other communities such as Boston and Los Angeles.

Cleveland is considering a model built on the social work case management approach. Around the lifecycle events, families are open to more extensive connections to the community. At these times, families can be approached to build a program involving their own commitment to learning, Israel experiences and various Jewish schooling options. Each school will learn how to sit down with parents and children to discuss this comprehensive Jewish activity. The federations can support the synagogue schools by bringing to bear communal resources to give the schools the ability to carry out these plans in an effective way.

CONCLUSION

Reviewing the work of the federation-led planning for Jewish education ongoing in the 11 cities cited above, we find their most important success has been to raise the ante, to involve the top tier of communal leadership in issues of Jewish education and continuity. From their involvement can follow a rearrangement of financial allocations to more fully address the building of a more effective Jewish educational system that will help each provider of services--synagogues and agencies--to fulfill their educational missions.

Those communities which are furthest in their thinking and planning are now dealing with very complex funding, control and governance issues. They must sort out the extent to which community resources can be expended in schools and settings over which the federations have no financial control. For the most part, the top leadership involved in these efforts have come to see that the federations' and synagogues' futures are so inextricably bound that we have no choice but to share control and influence if all of us are to be successful in ensuring Jewish continuity.

Another broad challenge will be the need for evaluation of programs. Studies will have to be commissioned to determine whether newly funded programs are accomplishing their immediate objectives and whether, in the long term, better education leads to more commitment in the next generation. Through JESNA and academic institutions we will need to build adequate facilities to conduct reliable evaluation studies.

Over time we will have to measure the degree of determination that exists on the local level to reorder funding priorities to allow these changes to happen. Unquestionably, important and difficult discussions over priorities will need to be held. Hopefully national initiatives--from JESNA, JWB, CJF and the denominations--will spur change on the local level. The existence of family foundations interested in funding initiatives and the creation of the Commission on Jewish Education in North America should add significant incentives for communal change.

We are fortunate that a number of positive influences converge at this time which help the federations to proceed. The general American return to traditional values and religious life helps. The fact that we have less worry about our physical and social needs in this generation helps. Our massive national resources both from the campaigns and in the foundations will help. Our emerging national cadre of new Jewish education professionals will help. Our mature community planning approaches and relationships with the synagogues help. And, of course, the extensive research and writing related to "what works" in Jewish education helps tremendously, although much more needs to be done.

As the federation-led comprehensive approaches to Jewish education planning continue, we will all need to continue to learn from each other and share successes. The door is wide open, and with hard work and determination we should be ready to take advantage of the many opportunities.

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Special thanks to Dr. Joseph Reimer, Assistant Professor, Benjamin S. Hornstein Program in Jewish Communal Service, Brandeis University, and Staff Consultant, North American Commission on Jewish Education, for his assistance with this article.

