



2015 / 5774

FOCUS ON EXCELLENCE IN
EARLY CHILDHOOD JEWISH
EDUCATION
WORKBOOK

Focus on Excellence in Early Childhood Jewish Education is a partnership between Jewish LearningWorks and the Early Childhood Education Initiative of the Jewish Community Federation.



ABOUT JEWISH LEARNINGWORKS' FOCUS ON EXCELLENCE PROGRAM

Focus on Excellence was created in 2008 as part of the strategic plan of the Early Childhood Education (ECE) Initiative, a program led by Jewish LearningWorks (then the Bureau of Jewish Education). Over twenty early childhood leaders from diverse community programs contributed to the tool.

Designed for directors, staff and lay leaders at sites of all sizes and philosophies, this self-study resource will assist with school assessment, reflection, and planning for change in the following areas:

- Designing Curriculum
- Creating a System of Communication
- Providing Professional Development
- Connecting with Families
- Connecting with the Host Institution

The goals of the tool are:

- Understand and demonstrate acknowledged best practices in Jewish ECE
- Support staff and lay leaders as they become reflective practitioners
- Enhance practitioners' ability to be articulate representatives for best practice in Jewish ECE.

We encourage you to make time to use this tool with staff, parents, and leadership. Schools may choose to focus on one area of concentration per school year or portion out multiple areas over the course of one year.

Individual consultation services are available for schools undertaking this project. For support and information, contact ebrosbe@jewishlearningworks.org.

Enjoy!

Element:
DESIGNING CURRICULUM

ENVIRONMENT

How do you know the school is a Jewish School?

Best Practice:

The school has an environment that is rich in Jewish language and visual content and materials.

- Jewish experiences include Hebrew language (and possibly Ladino, Yiddish) in vocabulary, song, prayer, stories, and games throughout the year.
- Written Hebrew is found in the classroom in signage or art.
- Jewish books are rotated based on children's interests and the time of year.
- Jewish books are found on teachers' bookshelves.
- Ritual objects are available for appropriate play.

Evidence and Comments:

Element:
DESIGNING CURRICULUM

Jewish Values

How are Jewish values implemented throughout the life of the school?

Best Practice:

Jewish ethical values (ethical mitzvot) are integrated into all aspects of the program.*

- The directors (leadership) and staff model use of the Jewish value concepts in interactions with other adults and children.
- Children develop and exhibit behaviors that express these values in their everyday interactions.
- There is an intentional effort to use Jewish values language throughout the curriculum.
- Curriculum based on explicit Jewish values is prevalent.

**Ethical mitzvot are those mitzvot (Jewish obligations) pertaining to relationships between people, and people and the world around them.*

Evidence and Comments:

Element:
DESIGNING CURRICULUM

Jewish Experiences

How do Jewish Experiences promote questions and explorations about Jewish life?

Best Practice:

Judaic content is explored through developmentally-appropriate activities (DAP) based on individual needs and interests of the children.*

- Jewish content is explored daily through a variety of materials (natural and found).
- Observation, documentation and reflection guide the Jewish curriculum through Jewish holidays and life cycles.

**Developmentally-appropriate practice, or DAP, simply means doing the right thing for each child at the right time (Handelman, Jewish Every Day).*

Evidence and Comments:

Element:
DESIGNING CURRICULUM

Resources

Are resources accessible to parents, teachers, and directors to sustain further learning?

Best Practice:

The school provides a variety of Judaic and general resources and materials for each curriculum area based on developmentally appropriate practice.

- A collection of Jewish and general resources are created with input from all staff.
- The school is open to researching and updating curriculum resources.
- Colleagues have the opportunity for dialogue and exchange regarding Judaic resources.
- Parents have access to resources for Jewish life during and post preschool.

Evidence and Comments:

Element:

CREATING A SYSTEM OF COMMUNICATION

Child

How is language development encouraged and nurtured?

Best Practice:

Children are encouraged to communicate in a pro-social manner.*

- Teachers engage in conversations with individual children and small groups modeling sharing, caring, and helping.
- Children exhibit these concerns for others.

**Pro-social behavior occurs when someone acts to help another person; usually part of social and emotional development in young children. Children are encouraged to use language to problem-solve.*

Evidence and Comments:

Element:
**CREATING A SYSTEM OF
COMMUNICATION**

Parent

How do parents find out about what is going on in the ECE program?

Best Practice:

There is a system in place for parents to communicate their concerns to the directors (leadership) and the teachers. There is a system for teachers and directors (leadership) to communicate to parents, and parents to communicate with each other.

- The guidelines for school-wide communication among parents, teachers, and directors (leadership) are clearly-defined and followed.
- There are varied means and opportunities to invite open dialogue among members of the school community.
- Communication with parents includes meaningful discussions about their child's development and Jewish education.

Evidence and Comments:

Element:
**CREATING A SYSTEM OF
COMMUNICATION**

Staff

How does staff communicate?

Best Practice:

There is a clear system in place for staff communication, including directors (leadership)-to-staff, staff-to-staff, and staff with the host institution.

Staff meetings, team meetings and one-on-one meetings are used to address ways to enhance communication and address conflicts among all personnel (directors/leadership, staff, host institution).

Evidence and Comments:

Element:
**CREATING A SYSTEM OF
COMMUNICATION**

Staff

How does staff communicate?

Best Practice:

Staff has an opportunity to provide feedback for performance of the director/leadership team.

- Ongoing opportunities and systems exist to provide feedback for the performance of the director/leadership team.
- Problem-solving is part of the comprehensive evaluation process.
- There is an evaluation form for staff to complete about the performance of the director/leadership team.
- Staff can give feedback about issues relevant to the work between the director/leadership team and the host institution.

Evidence and Comments:

Element:
COMMUNICATION

Community

What is the relationship between the ECE program and the greater community?

Best Practice:

The school has established communication between Jewish and secular schools, Jewish institutions, and community initiatives.

- The director/leadership communicates with local Jewish day, public, and private schools.
- Leadership meets to discuss school choice, transition to kindergarten, and recommendations.

Evidence and Comments:

Element:
**PROVIDING PROFESSIONAL
DEVELOPMENT**

Leadership Development

How do teachers and directors develop their leadership potential?

Best Practice:

Director/Leadership is Jewishly knowledgeable and models behaviors including Jewish values, learning and living.

Teachers and director/leader engage in ongoing high-level, up-to-date/refreshed Jewish learning on a regular basis with educators/rabbis of the host institution or larger Jewish community.

Evidence and Comments:

Element:
**PROVIDING PROFESSIONAL
DEVELOPMENT**

Opportunities for Learning

How do teachers learn about Jewish early childhood education?

Best Practice:

The school has a strategic plan for ongoing professional development.

- The director/leadership team works with staff to develop a short, mid and long-term plan for Jewish and early childhood professional growth within the program, locally, on-line, and nationally.
- There is Jewish adult learning for staff appropriate for novice and veteran teachers.
- Plans include supporting staff for advanced degrees and certificates.
- Schools learn about learning opportunities in the Jewish community.

Evidence and Comments:

Element:
CONNECTING WITH FAMILIES

Opportunities for Jewish Learning

How are families engaged in Jewish learning?

Best Practice:

The school mission statement recognizes the family, including children, as the primary client. There are many different ways to engage families.

- Jewish learning is part of the mission statement of the school and host institution, as reflected by a strategic plan for adult learning.
- Director/leadership understands principals of adult learning.
- Director/leadership builds relationships with individual families, and understand the interests and questions each family may have about Jewish learning.
- The school sees itself as a connector to next steps in Jewish learning, and assists the family in finding their place in the Jewish community.

Evidence and Comments:

Element:
CONNECTING WITH FAMILIES

Creating Community

How do families connect with one another and form lasting relationships?

Best Practice:

There are many opportunities for families to become involved in the school, including holiday and social events, volunteer and board participation, and adult and family Jewish education.

- The school takes family engagement seriously.
- Programs from online social networking to Jewish study are part of a comprehensive program calendar.
- Programs emerge from the needs and interests of families.

Evidence and Comments:

Element:
**CONNECTING WITH THE HOST
INSTITUTION**

Relationships

What is the relationship between the ECE program and the host institution?

Best Practice:

The program reflects a positive relationship with the sponsoring school, the synagogue or the community center.

Rabbi, Jewish educator or leaders from the host institution actively participate in early childhood program events, and support excellence in the field.

Evidence and Comments:

Element:
**CONNECTING WITH THE HOST
INSTITUTION**

Mission and Vision

How do the mission and vision of the ECE program and the host institution align?

Best Practice:

Early childhood education leaders and leaders of the host institution align vision and mission statements rooted in Jewish ethical values.

The vision and mission statements reflect the changing nature of Jewish life and the diversity of the Jewish community.

Evidence and Comments:

Element:
**CONNECTING WITH THE HOST
INSTITUTION**

Communication

How do the host institution and ECE communicate with each other?

Best Practice:

There is a system in place for host institution and ECE center communication, including leadership, staff, and families. If the host institution is part of a “campus,” the communication is extended into the larger campus community.

- Participants are clear on guidelines for quantity and quality of communication.

Evidence and Comments:

Element:
**CONNECTING WITH THE HOST
INSTITUTION**

Working Conditions

How do we treat ECE professionals?

Best Practice:

All personnel are treated with “kavod” (honor) and are able to earn a worthy wage.

- There is a system in place for advancement in the field of early childhood Jewish education.
- Staff feel supported and honored.
- Professional compensation is a goal of the institution.

Evidence and Comments: