

Jewish Day School Educator Working Group Summary Report



PRIZMAH
Center for Jewish Day Schools

JEIC
Jewish Education
Innovation Challenge

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Executive Summary

A teacher pipeline issue is emerging, not only in the world at large, but in the yeshiva and Jewish day school field. School and field leaders are struggling with recruiting, training and retaining talented educators. This is not just anecdotal evidence—it is confirmed by [the CASJE \(Collaborative for Applied Studies in Jewish Education\) Jewish educators research](#) data and analysis.

In response, Prizmah and the Jewish Education Innovation Challenge (JEIC) created the Jewish Day School (Jewish Day School) Pipeline Working Group to investigate current and previous initiatives, explore new ideas, and plan for the future. We invited 25 participants and created six subgroups, each addressing a different aspect of the recruitment, training, and retention of educators in Jewish day schools and yeshivas in North America. The entire initiative was based on a [design thinking process](#), in which we first investigated the issue from inside and outside the field, then brainstormed new opportunities that we might develop to address the surfaced issues, and finally, narrowed the many suggestions down to a few that we explored and developed in depth.

We have completed the Working Groups, which was stage one, and we are now embarking on stage two, looking at the potential of piloting of one or more of the suggested initiatives so that we can determine whether these can serve to ease the teacher shortage that we are experiencing in the Jewish day school world. We are putting out a call to action for funders to financially support one or more of the programs and to operating partners to help us actualize the programs in pilot schools across North America.

Why Did We Undertake This Initiative?

We know from school and field leaders anecdotally—and it has been confirmed by the data and knowledge emerging from [the CASJE Jewish educators research](#)—that Jewish day schools have a growing concern when it comes to recruiting, training, and retaining talented teachers to inspire Jewish children.

Prizmah and the JEIC therefore created the Jewish Day School Pipeline Working Group, which was a facilitated, virtual, nine-month-long process to address the crucial issue of the Jewish day school and yeshiva educator pipeline. We developed a working group of 25 leading educators, organization and community leaders, scholars, lay leaders, and foundation professionals, to investigate current and previous initiatives, explore new ideas, and plan for the future, creating the following deliverables in order to begin to address the teacher shortage.

- We are publishing a playbook containing a long list of new and creative initiatives, including a deep dive into six of these initiatives that we believe may have more significant impact; and
- We are producing several pieces on thought leadership to raise the visibility of the issue, including an entire edition of Hayidion, the Prizmah journal.
- We are creating a searchable, open-access field map of both previous and current teacher recruitment and retention initiatives and programs;

We officially launched our joint initiative at the Prizmah Conference in January 2023, and commenced with our first working group session at the beginning of March 2023, concluding our sessions in November 2023.

What Were the Working Groups that We Convened?

To approach the issue from a number of different angles, we developed six different “pillars” representing diverse issues in recruitment and retention and created a discrete working group to address each one. The working groups consisted of a team lead who is a staff member at either Prizmah or JEIC, together with 4-5 members representing the different aspects in the Jewish day school ecosystem: funders, heads of school, leaders from Jewish higher educational organizations, training programs, other educational sectors, and professional development providers. As we began our work, it was clear that although we developed six different working groups to address the various pillars, there was some overlap between the pillars. For clarity’s sake, we kept the working groups separate with participants visiting other groups to reflect and comment on their work.

Below is a description of the six working groups that we created:

1. **Early Pipeline: Identifying and encouraging young people to pursue a career in Jewish day school education**

From an early age emerging adults should see Jewish education as a career choice and be encouraged to pursue Jewish day school education.

2. **Elevating the profile of Jewish educator**

Jewish education should be a valued profession of the Jewish community in terms of compensation, training, and appreciation.

3. **Recruiting and training qualified educators into the system**

We need to invest in programs that train in pedagogy and content, for both Jewish and secular studies teachers.

4. **Creating the environment in schools where teachers can succeed**

We need to invest in the environment in schools where teachers can “fail forward,” and where schools support the development of new teachers.

5. **Ongoing development and learning**

Professional development in content and pedagogy for educators to work on their craft must be easily accessible, together with the guidance of master teachers and coaching to help them become better educators.

6. **Investing in the arc of the career of an educator**

We need to identify additional opportunities for leadership in the classroom, as well as departments, and the school community, supporting educators as they become school leaders.

HIGHLIGHTS OF DISCUSSIONS

Some of the areas specific to each pillar emerged and are listed below:

Early Pipeline

- Recruit from:
 - Youth Groups, Camps, High School Students
 - Junior Year Abroad Students
 - Gap Year, Yeshiva/Seminary Students
 - Camp Counselors, Eidah Leaders
 - Hillel Student Leadership
- Jewish Professionals and Parents Advocate for Jewish Day School Career
- Students:
 - See Models of Excellent Educators
 - View Jewish Day School Education as a Compelling Career
 - Get access to Excellent and Deep Jewish Content
 - Understand the importance of Jewish values, Jewish community, Jewish education

Elevating the profile of Jewish educator

- Give Communal Support to Jewish Day School Educators
- Create Partnerships with Youth Organizations, Camps, Gap Year Programs
- Develop a Philanthropic Approach that Recognizes the Importance of Educators
- Offer Competitive Compensation and Benefits
- Elevate the Meaning, Purpose, Fulfillment as Drivers to the Career
- Formulate a Method of National Recognition of Jewish Educators
- Stop Lashon Ha'ra (gossip) about Schools and Teachers
- Assure Rabbinic Advocacy and Support of Schools and Educators
- Envision the Arc of the Career of an Educator

Recruiting and training qualified educators into the system

- Make Graduate Schools of Jewish Education Accessible for Students
- Give Training in Pedagogy and Content Knowledge
- Develop Non-degree Certificate and Training Programs
- Support College Students, and MA Students in Jewish Studies
- Recruit
 - Expat Israelis and Other Potential Audiences
 - Current and Former Public/Private School Teachers
- Investigate:
 - Successful Models of Recruitment
 - Local Models Recruiting New Teachers

HIGHLIGHTS OF DISCUSSIONS

Creating the environment in schools where teachers can succeed

- Institute Hiring Practices that Promote Success
- Promote Healthy School Culture that Includes Teachers
- Include New Teacher Induction Programs
- Assure Professional Leadership and Parent Collaboration
- Create a Shared Sense of Community and Mission
- Develop a School-Specific Curricula Built on Strong Content and Pedagogy
- Make Explicit the Jewish Outcomes of Jewish Education
- Define and Measure Outcome Standards for Jewish Education
- Incorporate Mentorship, Supervision, Observation, and Commitment to Growth
- Offer Mental Health Support for Teachers and Administrators

Ongoing development and learning

- Embed High-Quality Professional Development
- Give Ongoing Exposure to and Learning of Compelling Content
- Offer One-to-One Coaching
- Create Clear Expectations and Evaluation: Develop Professional Learning Goals
- Mentor and Supervise Teachers

Investing in the arc of the career of an educator

- Focus on Capacities and Dispositions of Leaders
- Coordinate Field-Level Leadership Programs
- Identify and Invest in Teacher-Leaders
- Develop a Sustainability Plan for School Leadership
- Offer Leadership Development for Expanding Roles
- Retain Top Talent and Mentor Upcoming Leaders
- Create a Cadre of Master Teachers

Who Were the Members of the Jewish Day School Pipeline Working Group?

We owe a huge debt of gratitude to the three funders who enabled this project:

- Mayberg Foundation
- Dr. Shmuel and Evelyn Katz
- Melissa Kushner and Jeremy Kaplan

We engaged Third Plateau consulting firm to facilitate our meetings and are grateful to Jonathan Kaufman and Katy Lardaro for working so closely with us.

Our working groups included:

- Lauren Applebaum, DeLeT Director, Hebrew Union College: Jewish Institute of Religion
- Jonathan Berger, Head of School, Solomon Schechter Day School, Greater Hartford
- Nina Bruder, Executive Director, Jewish New Teacher Project
- Aharoni Carmel, Founding CEO, TalentEducators
- Rafi Cashman, Head of School, Netivot HaTorah Day School
- Yehuda Chanales, Chinuch Incubator, RIETS, Yeshiva University
- Dan Glass, Head of School, The Brandeis School
- Dammara Markowitz, Graduate and Board Member, Pardes
- Miriam Heller Stern, National Director, School of Education, HUC-JIR
- Rebecca Hindin, Director, Jewish Federation, Greater MetroWest Day School Initiative
- Lisa Klein, Managing Director, Jewish Education, Jewish Federation of Greater Houston
- Sarena Koschitzky, Board Member, Prizmah, Co-chair, Generations Trust, Toronto Federation
- Aviva Lauer, Director, Pardes Center for Jewish Educators
- Arielle Levites, Managing Director, CASJE
- Cheryl Maayan, Director, Day School Leadership Training Institute
- Nicole Nash, Head of School, Hannah Senesh Community Day School
- Rona Novick, Dean, Azrieli Graduate School of Jewish Education and Administration
- Avi Orlow, Vice President of Program and Innovation Foundation for Jewish Camp
- Mordechai Raizman, Executive Director, Associated Talmud Torahs, Chicago
- Rebecca Ritter, Head of Teaching and Learning, The Shefa School
- Ariela Rosenberg Brafman, President and Executive Director, Reinvention Foundation
- Lisa Stroll, Head of School, Denver Academy of Torah
- Efrat Zarren-Zohar, Executive Director, Center for the Advancement of Education, Miami
- Todd Zeff, Director, The Nachshon Project

Our team leads were:

- Rachel Mohl Abrahams, *Senior Advisor for Education Grants and Programs, Mayberg Foundation*
- Aimee Close, *Director, Stronger Together, Prizmah: Center for Jewish Day Schools*
- Rachel Dratch, *Director, Educational Innovation, Prizmah: Center for Jewish Day Schools*
- Sharon Freundel, *Managing Director, Jewish Education Innovation Challenge*
- Amy Wasser, *Senior Director, School Services, Prizmah: Center for Jewish Day Schools*
- Marc Wolf, *Chief Program and Strategy Officer, Prizmah: Center for Jewish Day Schools*

How Did the Process Unfold?

Based on a design thinking process, we divided the process into three phases:

1. Assessment Phase

To understand the field's current reality through [SWOT](#) (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats) conversations and field mapping.

2. Exploration Phase

To review past and existing efforts and brainstorm new opportunities.

3. Planning Phase

To vet and determine ideas worth pursuing, and create an action plan to bring them to life.

We opted for this process as we have witnessed multiple attempts at addressing the educator shortage without first doing a deep analysis of the reasons and an evaluation of what might have an impact on the issue. These attempts, to date, have yielded little or no fruitful results. We, therefore, decided that a more systematic approach was the way to proceed in order to develop initiatives that might create more impactful outcomes.

Below is a detailed description of what we accomplished at each working group session:

1. Assessment Phase:

Session 1: Trend and SWOT Analysis 1

- We surfaced the ideas and thoughts that we all have been sharing in different forums and recognized that many of the issues are shared across denominational, demographic, and geographic lines.

Session 2: SWOT Analysis 2 and Draft Pillar Goals

- We linked the SWOT analysis to each pipeline pillar to draft ambitious goals. Goals were a “hot take” of what each working group imagined they could accomplish by the end of the process.

Session 3: Pillar Goals and Field Mapping

- We updated – without finalizing – goals for each pipeline pillar. We identified organizations, initiatives, funders, and leaders that are doing important work in the sector in order to create a holistic picture of current efforts and a shared understanding of gaps.

Session 4: Field Mapping 2

- We conducted a deeper dive into mapping the field to serve as the landscape on which we will build any future initiatives. We clarified both gaps and opportunities in the field.

Session 5: Define Problem Statements

- We made a final determination of what kind of solutions we would develop through the rest of our process and created a shared understanding of unsuccessful past efforts and hypotheses as to why these efforts did not work.

HIGHLIGHTS OF DISCUSSIONS

These are the problem statements that emerged from our discussions:

Early Pipeline

- Young people with potential do not know that becoming a Jewish Day School educator is a viable career path.
- They are not afforded opportunities to experience the expanse of teaching for themselves, nor have they been inspired or encouraged to pursue a career in Jewish education.
- Future teachers do not have access to the information or training pathways to effectively pursue a career as a Jewish Day School educator.

Elevating the profile of Jewish educator

- Discourse in the Jewish community (especially in private conversations) is often critical of education as a career path, dismissive of the professionalism it requires, and mean-spirited toward individual educators.
- Current teacher recognition efforts, while they may contribute to individual teacher job satisfaction, do not broadly elevate the profile of the field.
- Compensation and benefits do not reflect the value that Jewish Day School educators provide to their communities.

Recruiting and training qualified educators into the system

- Most current recruitment efforts have a narrow focus: young professionals.
- Many potential future teachers are not aware of training and support that is available to effectively pursue a career as a Jewish Day School educator.
- Most current pathways are traditional pre-service MA programs. There is a need for varied training options.

Ongoing development and learning

- Schools do not have (and/or do not allocate) money to support meaningful educator growth and learning.
- Schools do not have the needed structures and mindsets to enable a culture of learning and growth.

Creating the environment in schools where teachers can succeed

- Educators do not feel that they have the right conditions to grow, develop, and thrive in their roles.
- Teachers do not feel that they have the time/capacity to take advantage of mentoring and professional development opportunities that are available to them.
- Teachers are negatively impacted by problematic school and community cultures that can at times be toxic, and sometimes develop fraught relationships with parents and lay leaders.

HIGHLIGHTS OF DISCUSSIONS

Investing in the arc of the career of an educator

- School leadership does not prioritize nor invest enough time and resources in creating healthy cultures to ensure teacher retention. (Note: this is shared with “environment for success”)
- Teachers are not given meaningful avenues or access to resources for their own professional growth.
- Teachers who may prefer to remain in the classroom often opt for administrative roles or specialist positions due to higher compensation or less stressful engagement.
- Compensation (salary and benefits) is not sustainable for recruitment or long-term retention.
- Demands on educators are growing faster than the resources available to address them.

Exploration Phase

Session 6: Changing Problem Statements into “How Might We” Statements

We brainstormed solutions related to the problems we identified in the Assessment Phase, and we explored the anticipated impact of these ideas, characterizing each idea in terms of how difficult it might be to operationalize. Out of this, we developed “How Might We” questions to come up with various solutions for each essential question. These are the ones we focused on, leading into the planning phase of the process.

- Early pipeline: How might we ensure that young people with potential know that becoming a Jewish Day School educator is a viable career path?
- Elevating the profile of Jewish educators: How might compensation and benefits better reflect the value that Jewish Day School educators provide to their communities?
- Recruiting and training qualified educators into the system: How might we provide pathways to teaching beyond traditional pre-service MA programs?
- Creating the environment in schools where teachers can succeed: How might we create healthy, supportive school cultures?
- Ongoing development and learning: How might we shift school structures and mindsets to enable a culture of learning and growth?
- Investing in the arc of the career of an educator: How might we ensure that school leadership prioritizes and invests time and resources in creating healthy school cultures?

Session 7: Generated Ideas from External Sectors

We reviewed the array of solutions that the pipeline pillar groups brainstormed, and we added additional thoughts and ideas.

HIGHLIGHTS OF DISCUSSIONS

Below is a comprehensive list of the “How Might We” questions that the groups generated, although we opted to focus on the ones highlighted above.

Early pipeline

- How might we ensure that young people with potential know that becoming a Jewish Day School educator is a viable career path?
- How might we inspire and encourage young people to pursue a career in Jewish education?
- How might we provide young people with potential to experience the expanse of teaching?
- How might we create information and training pathways that make pursuing a career as a Jewish Day School educator more accessible?

Elevating the profile of Jewish educator

- How might we shift discourse about education in the Jewish community?
- How might compensation and benefits better reflect the value that Jewish Day School educators provide to their communities?
- How might we elevate the profile of the field through recognition efforts?
- Recruiting and training qualified educators into the system
- How might we expand current recruitment beyond young professionals?
- How might we ensure future teachers understand the avenues of training and support that are available?
- How might we provide pathways to teaching beyond traditional pre-service MA programs?

Ongoing development and learning

- How might we ensure that schools have and prioritize allocating funds to support meaningful educator growth and learning?
- How might we shift school structures and mindsets to enable a culture of learning and growth?

Creating the environment in schools where teachers can succeed

- How might we create healthy, supportive school cultures?
- How might we help teachers have the time and capacity to take advantage of mentoring and professional development opportunities available to them?
- How might we create the conditions in which school leadership prioritizes and invests time and resources in creating healthy school cultures?

Investing in the arc of the career of an educator

- How might the field provide access to resources and meaningful opportunities for professional growth?
- How might we ensure teachers who want to stay in the classroom can do so?
- How might we transform compensation (both salary and benefits) into a tool for recruitment and retention?
- How might we ensure educators are adequately resourced for the demands they face?

Planning Phase

Session 8: Surfacing the Most Promising and Innovative Ideas

We vetted ideas generated during the Exploration Phase, identifying the highest-potential concepts worth pursuing.

Session 9: Develop Proposals and Action Plan for Next Steps

We created an action plan, laying the groundwork for implementation and experimentation.

HIGHLIGHTS OF DISCUSSIONS

To whittle down the ideas we generated, we took a vote of all of the working group members and chose the six top ideas, gleaned from the aggregate of conversations from the six working groups:

1. Jewish Educator Investment Fund

- Develop a percentage of annual return of large communal/foundation endowments and create an investment fund for full-time Jewish day school educators.

2. Universal Jewish Educator Benefits

- Offer subsidized, reduced, or free rates for full-time educators to schools, shuls, camps, JCCs, and other benefits of Jewish organizational life.

3. Education Financial Incentives for Pre-Service Training

- Create a forgivable loan program for grad school/pre-service training after a scale of years of service in the field.

4. Fellows Programs

- Recruit college or graduate students to teach and learn in schools.

5. Office for Jewish Day School Educators Recruitment

- Focus on recruiting candidates in the early pipeline – camp counselors, gap year students, college students/Hillel leaders – and encourage them to pursue Jewish Day School teaching.

6. Flexibility

- Explore how Jewish Day Schools can keep pace with the flexibility in the rest of the workforce.

For each of the working groups focusing on one of the initiatives, we delved into the following questions:

Designing this initiative

- Imagine you're creating a playbook for the team that will carry this initiative forward.
- Other than raising money, what would need to be done to bring this initiative to life?
- What can we learn from similar efforts or similar initiatives to inform next steps?
 - What concrete actions would need to be taken?
 - What would the first steps be?
 - Where/with whom might this project live?

HIGHLIGHTS OF DISCUSSIONS

Identifying success

- If we made significant progress related to this initiative, what would be different in the field of Jewish Day School education in three years?
- If in three years we were to sit down with the group responsible for pushing forward this initiative to talk about their successes, what would you hope to hear?
- In order to prove how successful the initiative is, what specific and concrete evidence might this group point to? (For example, in three years time, we have 300 Jewish Day School educators participating in this program.)

What New Ideas Did We Come Up With?

At the end of this process, we realized that the six proposed initiatives fall into a number of categories, either for funding or for operationalizing or for both:

Operational:

- Recruitment Initiatives
- Teacher Training Initiatives
- Educator Growth Initiatives

Funding:

- Field/Community Funding Initiatives
- Community Grassroots Initiatives
- School-Based Initiatives
- School-Based Compensation and Benefits

For more information about the initiatives in each of these categories, and to find out further details about each of these six initiatives and the other ideas that were surfaced, [please see the Playbook](#).

What are the Next Steps?

We have now completed stage one, in which we employed design thinking and convened a diverse group of big educational thinkers to surface new and perhaps untried ideas. We will now embark on stage two, looking at the potential of piloting one or more of the six final suggested programs so that we can determine whether these can serve to ease the teacher shortage that we are experiencing in the Jewish day school world. We are putting out a call to action for funders to financially support one or more of the programs and to operating partners to help us actualize the programs in pilot schools across North America.

Special thanks to the Mayberg Foundation, Melissa Kushner and Jeremy Kaplan, and Evelyn and Dr. Shmuel Katz.