



Jewish Education Task Force:  
*Next Steps and Action Plan*  
JULY 2015



*“The advancement of learning  
is the highest commandment.”*

— MAIMONIDES

The Jewish Education Task Force was established by Jewish Federation of Greater Vancouver in 2013. Jewish Federation would like to acknowledge and thank the task force members who brought their knowledge, expertise and commitment to Jewish education to the work of the task force and the completion of the final report. We also want to acknowledge the leadership provided by the task force co-chairs, Rob Greenwald and Risa Levine, who ensured that the final report reflected the voices of our community stakeholders.

We are most grateful for the contributions made by the following individuals:

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## Background

In mid-2013, Jewish Federation of Greater Vancouver (Jewish Federation) established a Jewish Education Task Force to examine the current state of formal and informal Jewish education in the Lower Mainland, identify gaps, establish priorities, and review promising practices and programs across North America. The goal of this review was to create a framework to guide Jewish Federation's strategic approach to Jewish education over the next 10 years.

The task force's work was divided into two phases. During the first phase, the task force worked with the consulting firm, ChangeCraft, to identify gaps and challenges in the delivery of Jewish education in Metro Vancouver; interview a variety of stakeholders ranging from parents to donors; and document new and emerging trends in the Jewish education sector across North America. Recognizing the relative strength of our six day schools, the consultants, with input from the task force members, primarily focused on the following local gaps and challenges:

- Dropping or stagnant enrolment in the supplementary school sector;
- Limited number of education options for interfaith or minimally engaged families;
- Limited number of supplementary Jewish education options for teens; and
- Limited or no Jewish education options for those living in underserved communities across Metro Vancouver.

ChangeCraft submitted their report, *Strategic Approaches to Jewish Education in Greater Vancouver*, in May 2014. Based on their research both locally and in jurisdictions across North America, the following promising practices were proposed in response to the gaps identified above:

1. Encourage innovation by offering education providers new tools and program models that can be customized to address local needs.
2. Incubate new models that attract the unengaged or minimally engaged by connecting education providers to innovation conferences and networks.
3. Support educational initiatives that take place outside of institutional settings.

Some of the suggested strategies are outlined in Appendix A. In addition, a document summarizing 32 best practices was prepared and will be posted on the new Jewish education mini-site.

## Phase Two

During the second phase of the task force's work, consultations were undertaken with the day and supplementary school leadership, and information from the National Household Survey (NHS) and Jewish Federation's strategic visioning process were reviewed. These three sources of information have contributed to the action plan. The NHS data confirmed what the day schools were saying about the growing number of Jewish families in financial need, and the anecdotal evidence that young families were moving out of the City of Vancouver. For example, that approximately 18% of Jewish children (just under 900 children) between the ages of 0 – 14 years old live in the Tri-Cities or the Langley/Maple Ridge areas. Even if we assume that half of these children are between the ages of 5 – 12 years old, still less than 10% of this cohort are receiving any formal Jewish education or Jewish connection. This created a sense of urgency for the task force to recommend ways to provide more Jewish education opportunities for families living in these communities.



The strategic visioning process also reinforced the need for Jewish Federation to strengthen its support to the regional communities, and to revisit the current funding model for Jewish education. The current model is perceived to be rigid, limiting, and not responsive to new models and approaches. This is consistent with the experience of Jewish Federations and Jewish Boards of Education across North America, many of which have adopted more flexible funding models to enable more innovative approaches to both informal and formal Jewish education.

To obtain the views of the day and supplementary group leadership, meetings were facilitated by Jewish Federation staff with the supplementary school principals. Individual interviews were also conducted with six day school principals and five board chairs.

## Supplementary Schools

The supplementary schools have experienced a drop in enrolment over the past five years. While the reasons for this vary from school to school, all of the schools report that families lead busier lives and that many other important extra-curricular activities compete with supplementary school participation. The traditional “Sunday school, Hebrew school” model no longer fits for all families. Additionally, with so many creative approaches to how general studies education is delivered, many children no longer are willing to accept the more traditional approaches used for Jewish education.

The situation is not unique to our supplementary school system. Many communities throughout North America have been seeking ways to invigorate this sector and apply new approaches to program design and delivery. A number of these programs have been identified in the program inventory.

Our supplementary school leadership recognizes that changes have to be made but with few exceptions, the schools lack the skills and resources required to justify and implement the required changes. Few of the schools have the needed personnel in place to even conceptualize significant changes. Without active support and funding from Jewish Federation, most of the schools will not be able to design and implement new changes that have proven effective in other jurisdictions. However, there are several areas where Jewish Federation involvement could strengthen existing programs and create an environment for new programs to emerge: These include:

*Centralized Marketing:* The supplementary programs would like Jewish Federation to take a more proactive role in promoting Jewish education and featuring the range of supplementary Jewish education programs in the community. While the larger programs primarily draw from their existing membership, the smaller programs, and in particular, the programs in the regional communities are constantly trying to attract new families. Initiatives like the WOW project, ([www.cjtoronto.com/the-wow-project](http://www.cjtoronto.com/the-wow-project)) and the Sprout Initiative ([www.jfed.org/sprout](http://www.jfed.org/sprout)) have come up with unique ways to market the array of Jewish educational opportunities available and to communicate to parents that there are a number of high quality, reputable programs available in the community to address their children’s needs and interests.

*Professional Development:* There has been an outpouring of new models and approaches in the area of supplementary Jewish education. Through our own program review, over 32 program models were highlighted. Many communities have closed down their existing boards of education and





created new mechanisms to foster innovation and change. A key role of these new mechanisms has been knowledge transfer. Most of the current schools hire faculty for a few hours a week. There is no time built in for learning about new methods and approaches. Only one or two of the larger programs have a principal or a dedicated staff person who has been exposed to some of the many innovations that are being tried. Without a professional development component, there is little possibility that most of our schools have the capacity to introduce new approaches.

*Flexible Funding Model:* The current funding model for supplementary schools is limited in two ways: only the long-standing primarily synagogue based programs are eligible for funding and the level of funding is based on enrollment numbers. The model limits the ability to fund innovative programs that are delivered by informal or grassroots groups. As a result, programs serving an important need in underserved areas are not currently eligible. It also means that if an organization wants to redesign their program or change the model, they are not eligible for any additional funding unless they continue to run their existing program. This is only possible with one or two of the schools that have full time staff dedicated to running the supplementary school. By its structure, the current funding model does not facilitate innovation and change, nor does it allow for new or “pop-up” initiatives to be supported.

*Eliminate the historical demarcation between supplementary school education and informal education opportunities.* As has been documented through a number of research reports, some of the most successful educational programs have been programs deemed as “informal”. These include but are not limited to youth leadership programs, Hebrew fluency programs and camp initiatives. By combining supplementary schools and informal Jewish education into one funding “pot”, funds could be leveraged more effectively and a larger pool of students can be reached.

## Jewish Day Schools

While there were many common themes expressed by the schools related to metrics for success and current challenges, each of the schools emphasized their unique differences and cautioned the task force from proposing recommendations that would be applied across the board. This was particularly evident when the schools were asked about opportunities for collaboration or the need for a central mechanism.

The Greater Vancouver Jewish day schools are healthier than many across Canada but there is a perception that there are “have” and “have-not” schools. This is especially evident when discussing the physical space, technological resources and an array of programming opportunities among the three elementary schools. During the interviews with the day schools, questions were raised about Jewish Federation’s role in ensuring the financial health of all the schools and whether the community believes that every child has a right to a Jewish education. While answering these questions was beyond the mandate of the task force, these are useful questions to consider as Jewish Federation grapples with the overall issues of affordability and access.

The day schools continue to introduce new approaches to teaching and utilize a variety of resources to engage the students. Their biggest challenges are in the areas of affordability and student recruitment. While each school had specific suggestions as to how Jewish Federation could support their school, all of the schools identified broad areas where Jewish Federation could be supportive.

One issue that produced no common solutions was how to increase accessibility for students with diverse and complex learning needs. The Ministry of Education’s provides limited support for these students enrolled in the independent schools and all of the schools have had to raise additional funds to provide support. Developing a plan that addresses both the cost and resource implications of supporting these students and their families exceeds the scope of this task force’s work. However, it is an important piece of work that should be pursued under the mandate of the Jewish Education standing committee.

There were several areas identified by all of the day schools where Jewish Federation involvement could have an impact on their growth and financial sustainability. These include:

*Affordability:* All of the schools are faced with a growing number of families unable to pay the full tuition fee. This creates a tremendous burden on the overall operating budget of the schools. While tuition assistance has always been available for poor and lower income families, the schools report that a growing number of middle income families are also seeking tuition assistance. The schools are also reporting that families are also struggling with other costs over and above school fees. These include lunches and snacks, school uniform, supplies and costs associated with field trips and other activities.

*Marketing:* All of the schools suggested that Jewish Federation play a more active role in marketing the Jewish Day Schools as a system, focusing on the complementary strengths of each school and celebrating the range of choices available in the community. The schools recognize the important role that Jewish Federation can play with donors and community members and have asked for help to heighten their profile. Examples of the types of marketing products proposed

include promotional videos, ads in community papers, brochures or a Jewish education website to provide prospective parents with the information and resources they need to make a decision about the right choice for their child.

*Recruitment:* All of the schools are interested in identifying new sources of potential students. Similar to the recommendations related to marketing, the schools would like to see Jewish Federation take an active role in reaching out to families not yet affiliated with Jewish education.

*Accreditation:* Increasingly accreditation has become an important tool to communicate to prospective parents about the quality of education offered by a particular school. Many American Federations now require schools to pursue accreditation as part of their requirement for ongoing funding. Both Toronto and Montreal Federations have implemented new funding to support accreditation. There are a number of costs involved in pursuing accreditation as well as having dedicated staff time to meet the reporting requirements.





## Common Themes

While the day and supplementary school systems function very differently, attract different population groups, and face distinct challenges, the task force identified some common themes across both sectors.

1. *Jewish education is a gateway to ongoing community involvement and connection.* Both systems identify ongoing community affiliation as an important outcome, and believe that their alumni provide the foundation for ongoing community leadership. Both systems strive through their programming to embed Jewish values and traditions in their students, and expose them to the many and varied opportunities offered through our communal organizations.
2. *Jewish educators need professional development and support.* While the larger institutions can provide an array of professional development opportunities to their faculty and administration, the smaller institutions are more limited. While this is particularly true of the supplementary school educators, the smaller day schools would benefit from more professional development opportunities, particularly in more specialized or technology focused areas.
3. *Jewish Education is a system containing a range of choices and options* along a continuum needs to be more actively promoted and highlighted. Both sectors look to Jewish Federation to provide a centralized marketing function to assist them with marketing their schools and facilitating student recruitment. While the specific tools requested vary from school to school, all of the schools agree that they would benefit from more sophisticated and comprehensive marketing strategies that emphasize the quality of education available and the choices offered.
4. *Jewish education options need to be expanded to meet the needs of underserved areas.* Both sectors recognize the growing number of young families living beyond the borders of Vancouver and Richmond, but they are struggling to find ways to reach these families and provide education options that meet their needs. The most recent demographic data confirms that there are a growing number of Jewish children who are not being exposed to any form of Jewish education.

## Task Force Recommendations

During the first phase of the task force's work, several principles were identified to guide the work. These principles were:

- Balance the old with the new;
- Increase collaboration among education providers;
- Build staff capacity; and
- Increase participant numbers.

Using these principles as a guide and incorporating suggestions from the day and supplementary schools along with promising practices from other jurisdictions, the following ideas are being proposed to address the identified gaps. These can be categorized into four areas: Funding, Professional Support, Marketing and Promotion, and Innovation.

## FUNDING:

*Establish a Jewish education fund* within the Jewish Community Foundation to provide additional funds to support program innovation and address affordability issues.

*Introduce a new “start-up” grant program* to support Jewish education initiatives undertaken by informal or grassroots organizations to attract unaffiliated families or deliver programs in underserved areas.

## PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT:

*Create an itinerant team of Jewish education specialists* to provide targeted support to underserved and regional communities. Team members could include adult educators, day and supplementary school faculty, or youth workers. They could rotate among several communities to deliver programs, mentor young teachers, and model new delivery approaches based on community need.

## MARKETING AND PROMOTION:

*Create a Jewish education mini-site* on the Jewish Federation website to promote the centralized marketing of Jewish education options for parents and teens, and post articles and resources on new and innovative programs for educators and administrators. The mini-site would include a database of all education offerings available for different age groups, in order to facilitate a more seamless transition from Jewish elementary school to Jewish high school programs and activities.

## INNOVATION:

*Incentivize innovation.* Create a “rewards” system to recognize innovative programs and models that are introduced to attract minimally or unengaged youth or families. The program ideas listed in Appendix A, along with the program inventory that was created, provide a range of program models that could be considered.

*Eliminate the historical demarcation between supplementary school education and informal education.* Some of the most successful informal programs such as PJ Library, youth leadership programs, Hebrew fluency programs, and camp initiatives are defined as informal. By combining the two, staff resources could be shared and leveraged, more collaboration could occur, and a larger pool of innovative programs could be launched.

*Launch a social media campaign* directed toward Jewish teens to engage them in a virtual collaborative visioning process toward the development of meaningful youth programs.





## Conclusion

The Jewish Education Task Force was established to guide Jewish Federation's actions in relation to: capacity building and resource sharing among the day and supplementary schools; supporting informal Jewish education; providing a framework for allocating resources based on community priorities; and increasing access to all forms of Jewish education.

The task force established key priorities to address stagnating or limited enrolment in the supplementary schools, the lack of Jewish education programs for youth, and the need for innovative approaches to engage minimally or unengaged individuals and families. Through the consultations with the day and supplementary schools, issues of affordability and access, along with the need for centralized marketing and professional development, were also identified.

Although the work of the task force is now complete, there is a need to maintain the momentum and continue to address new and emerging needs. Jewish education is a critical tool to enhance Jewish life and community engagement. As our community has grown, it has become more culturally diverse and geographically dispersed. New approaches to how we envision and strengthen Jewish education need to be adopted. The proposed action steps developed in response to the task force's recommendations will enable Jewish Federation to play a pivotal role by providing the necessary tools and funding to implement these changes.

## Action Plan

In response to these themes, the following general recommendations are being made to address issues that have been raised in both sectors:

1. *Work with the education providers to create and implement a comprehensive marketing plan to help raise awareness about the array of options available and facilitate student recruitment.* This would include but is not limited to creating a centralized website hosted by Jewish Federation, purchasing ads in community papers, producing electronic brochures that can be distributed widely, and hosting a biannual Jewish education fair.
2. *Establish a professional development fund* to enable faculty and administration to be introduced to new approaches and program models. The funds would support ongoing learning to facilitate the implementation of new content and delivery models based on best practices around North America. Another component of professional development is creating a clearinghouse of information on new program models and research reports. The centralized website could be the repository for this information.
3. *Create a standing committee for Jewish education.* Support and funding of Jewish education is an important priority for our Jewish Federation, but there is no ongoing mechanism for individual schools, families or donors to explore issues that arise in a systematic way. Without creating a new level of bureaucracy, the standing committee could either be a component of the existing planning council or a committee in its own right.
4. *Establish a Jewish education fund at the Jewish Community Foundation* to provide additional funds to support the initiatives that are required to address the affordability issues at the day schools and invigorate programming through the supplementary school system
5. *Expand the role of the Manager of Jewish Education* to focus on supporting innovation and change to address new and emerging needs, particularly in the underserved communities.
6. *Introduce an evaluative component as part of the new approach to funding.* Currently there is no mechanism to assess the effectiveness and impact of Jewish Federation funding on the delivery of Jewish education. All of our partner agencies, with the exception of the schools, are now required to do so. Using evaluation tools to measure effectiveness is useful both for funders and providers. Senior staff could work with the Jewish education committee on an implementation process.



## APPENDIX

### CHANGECRAFT RECOMMENDATIONS:

Population	Goal	Strategies
Children K – 7	Expand educational programs and opportunities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Build on the flourishing models in after school learning such as the Nitzan Network, Jewish Kids Groups/Edah, and Jewish Journey Project.</li> </ul>
Teens	Expand educational programs and opportunities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Offer programs that incorporate life skills opportunities as an engagement tool.</li> <li>• Create a database or listing of all of the education offerings for Jewish teens.</li> <li>• Engage the K – 7 day and supplementary school leadership in a community based “handoff”, whereby all educational offerings are promoted and encouraged for teens transitioning to high school.</li> <li>• Convene a collaborative visioning process among teen education providers to generate approaches to reach unengaged or minimally engaged teens.</li> <li>• Support new initiatives that expand the youth movement presence in Metro Vancouver</li> </ul>
Young Adults	Invest in educational initiatives to increase social connections	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Encourage and support innovation in existing and new programs that focus on social connections, such as Moishe House, Birthright, and Israel NEXT.</li> </ul>
Families	Broaden the scope of educational opportunities that reflect the diversity of Jewish families	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Capitalize on our unique outdoors and environmental concerns by introducing programs such as the Hazon, Labshul, Urban Adamah, Wilderness Torah.</li> <li>• Introduce programs offered through the Jewish Outreach Institute and Interfaith Family.</li> <li>• Develop cross institutional strategies among organizations providing services to new immigrants to leverage educational outreach.</li> <li>• Utilize informal networks, social media, and community newspapers to expand the current reach and access to families not currently connecting to the existing Jewish education offerings.</li> </ul>
Regional Communities	Expand the reach of Jewish educational opportunities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Support grass-roots initiatives generated by community members residing outside the City of Vancouver.</li> <li>• Develop customized approaches to incorporate the unique needs of each community and promote buy-in.</li> </ul>