



DARE TO DREAM:

**A Report on the Feasibility
of Redesigning
Jewish Education
in Boulder, Colorado**



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**Is there a critical mass
willing to**

DARE to

DREAM

**about the future
of Jewish education?**

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INTRODUCTION

Boulder, Colorado is a distinctive community of a little over 100,000 residents nestled in the foothills of the Rocky Mountains, 25 miles northwest of Denver. Surrounded by mountains, open space, and miles of hiking and biking trails, Boulder is famous for its natural beauty, outdoor recreation and environmentally friendly policies. It is also home to such organizations as the University of Colorado, IBM, the National Institute of Standards and Technology and the National Center for Atmospheric Research. Since the 1960s, Boulder has had the reputation as an upscale, highly-educated, high tech, spiritually-oriented, “hippy” community. Such innovative enterprises as Celestial Seasoning Tea, Izze beverages and Crocs footwear have been born in Boulder. For a variety of reasons, Jewish families have been increasingly attracted to Boulder and are choosing it as a place to raise their children.

The metro Denver/Boulder area is now the 18th largest Jewish community in the US, similar in population to a number of important Jewish centers. Many Jewish families reside in the larger Boulder County area, the communities surrounding the City of Boulder. The current population of Boulder County is 294,750 with the Jewish population estimated at 12,600 people living in 7,000 households. The Jewish population of Boulder County has been rapidly growing, with an increase of 22% in the last decade. Research indicates that Jewish newcomers are independent, self-directed, and more strongly identified with Judaism culturally than religiously. The rate of inter-marriage among Boulder County’s families in 2007 was 65%, higher than the overall rate in the Denver regional area. The Jewish population in the region is relatively young, with one-third of all Jewish households including a child under the age of 18. Fifty-six percent of the children in the metro Denver/Boulder area are being raised Jewish. (The 2007 Metro Denver/Boulder Community Study and 1997 Greater Denver/Boulder Jewish Community Study).



Bolstered by such an increase in demographics, Jewish congregations and educational programming have blossomed. Boulder is now home to several synagogues with congregational Hebrew Schools, a Hillel and Chabad House located on the university campus, a community-wide Hebrew High School, the Boulder Jewish Community Center (BJCC) and the Boulder Jewish Day School. Boulder also has an active Jewish burial society (*Chevra Kedisha*), local offices of the Jewish Family Service and the Anti-Defamation League (ADL), and Stepping Stones, a program that reaches out to unaffiliated and intermarried families with young children. Educational programming is varied and diverse with options ranging from infant/toddler activities to programming for senior citizens. Long range plans include the development of the Boulder Jewish Commons, a central Jewish campus designed to house a full service JCC, Boulder Jewish Elder housing, and as many as three synagogues. The presence of a vibrant Jewish Community is demonstrated by the annual Boulder Jewish Festival, held on the prominent downtown mall.

An active supporter of Jewish life in Boulder, Francine Lavin Weaver, has taken a keen interest in the future of Jewish education. Francine, a philanthropist and family educator herself, established the *Chidush* awards in 2001 as a program to encourage and reward the development of innovative lesson plans by Jewish educators. Francine also serves on the Advisory Council of the Jewish Education Service of North America (JESNA) and was involved in the development of the recent publication, “Redesigning Jewish Education for the 21st Century: A Lippman Kanfer Institute Working Paper”, 2007. As her involvement with JESNA grew, Francine was inspired by the publication of the working paper, the demand for quality Jewish education in Boulder, and the steady success of the *Chidush* awards in stimulating innovative teaching practices. She conceived the idea of gathering input from members of the local Jewish community about the feasibility of redesigning Jewish education in Boulder. It appeared that the time was ripe for Boulder to engage in a discussion about the future of Jewish education; in other words to “**dare to dream**”.



METHODOLOGY

A focus group format was chosen to ensure that all participants had the opportunity to provide input and share a wide range of opinions. Fliers were distributed throughout the Boulder community and at major Jewish events for a period of three months preceding the focus groups. Prospective participants, self-selected due to their interest and experience with Jewish education, were encouraged to sign up for one of four groups and to ponder a variety of potential scenarios for the future of Jewish education (see Appendix: Dare to Dream Flier). They also received the Lippman Kanfer Working Paper and were encouraged to review it before attending.

Four key questions were developed to elicit a broad range of opinion about Jewish education in Boulder. The four questions were intentionally chosen to correspond to the Four Questions asked at the Passover Seder and to highlight the Seder as the ultimate model of life-centered Jewish education. The focus groups were facilitated by an outside educational consultant to ensure consistency and objectivity. Participants were encouraged to think creatively, be

Participants were encouraged to think creatively, be honest and build on each other's ideas.

honest and build on each other's ideas. In an effort to honor their time and talent, a \$50 stipend was offered to each participant, with the option of donating the stipend to a charitable organization.

The "Dare to Dream" focus groups were convened during the summer of 2007. Four meetings took place at the Boulder Jewish Community Center which fulfilled the vital purpose of a central, neutral gathering place. Participants included Jewish educators, directors of congregational Hebrew School pro-

grams, Rabbis, parents and other stakeholders. In addition, one focus group was specifically designed for young people aged 10 – 14 years old. A total of thirty-two participants attended and gave freely of their time and energy. While that number may appear relatively small, the breadth and depth of responses was notable and provided diverse perspectives into the issue.



DARE TO DREAM FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS

- 1a. What positive things are happening in Jewish education in the Boulder community? What's already working?
- 1b. What's not working as well? Where are the gaps?
2. How can families become more proactive in choosing a Jewish education for their children and themselves?
3. How can we encourage more communication, collaboration and creativity among Jewish education programs in Boulder?
- 4a. Is the Boulder community interested in supporting a redesign of Jewish education? Could Boulder be a model of innovation?
- 4b. Do you see yourself playing a specific role?

What follows are the findings of the combined results from the four Dare to Dream focus groups followed by a commentary on the responses to each question (see the Appendix for detailed results from each focus group), recommendations for next steps and conclusion. It is hoped that this report provides a window into the minds and hearts of the people of one Jewish community as they explore the prospect of redesigning Jewish education in the 21st century.

FINDINGS

1a. What positive things are happening in Jewish education in the Boulder community? What's already working?

Participants eagerly enumerated the many positive aspects of Jewish education and described what was already working. They revealed a broad knowledge and understanding of the scope of Jewish education in Boulder. Their responses are grouped into four main categories: On-Going Collaborative Efforts, Congregational Hebrew Schools, CAJE's Hebrew High School and the Boulder Jewish Day School.

On-going Collaborative Efforts

Boulder has a strong track record of collaborative efforts. As a community that began with a very small Jewish population, educators and religious leaders have seen the advantages of pooling their resources for years. Participants described an atmosphere of diversity and respect among Jewish programs. They felt the Jewish population of Boulder has reached a "critical mass" for quality Jewish programming to occur. Some of the outstanding models of collaboration mentioned included:

- *Haver*: The Boulder Rabbinic Fellowship
This organization of all the Jewish Rabbis in Boulder fosters camaraderie, support and cooperation among the various congregations

and their leaders in the Boulder area. One of their most popular programs is *Derech Chayim*, a nine-month introduction to Judaism taught by all the Rabbis. Participants described the synergy created by this group and spoke of *Haver* as the role model of collaborative leadership and mutual respect.

- Boulder Jewish Educators Council (BJEC)
A peer group of Jewish education program directors which has been meeting since the 1990's to foster networking between Jewish educators of different congregation schools and promote professional development for teachers.
- Stepping Stones
A free family education program providing outreach to interfaith Jewish unaffiliated families with preschool age to elementary children. Unique to the Boulder/Denver area, Stepping Stones is being replicated on a national level. Classes for adults and children are led by experienced and dynamic educators as well as various community leaders and Rabbis representing a wide spectrum of Judaism.
- Community-wide events such as:
the Purim Carnival, the Boulder Jewish Festival and the collaborative celebration of *Shavuot* (*Tikkun Leyl Shavuot*), an all-night learning marathon sponsored by *Haver*.
- *Chidush* Awards
This annual recognition of original, innovative lesson plans created by Boulder Jewish educators, was described by participants as a tremendous asset. The process encourages professional growth in educators and offers creative incentives to improve the art of teaching.



- CAJE’s Hebrew High School (see further description below)

Congregational Hebrew School: the Strengths

Both adults and youth agreed that, “kids don’t hate going to Hebrew School as much as they used to”. Parents were quick to point out that today’s after-school Hebrew School programs are much more engaging and varied than when they went to religious school. Through a variety of teaching techniques, educators have strived to make the Hebrew school experience more relevant, more interactive and more fun. Youth mentioned the opportunity to interact with their Rabbis as a highlight. In addition, the B’nai Mitzvah experience was generally seen as positive and of high quality across congregations.

CAJE’s Hebrew High School

Since 1995, Boulder synagogues have actively participated in the concept of one centrally located Hebrew High School program that serves teens throughout the community. Sponsored by CAJE (Colorado Agency for Jewish Education) in Denver, Boulder’s Hebrew High School program offers an eclectic range of classes for teens from 8th through 12th grades as well as a 10th grade confirmation class and prerequisites for the IST (Israeli Study Tour). In addition to a core curriculum, students have the opportunity to choose from a wide range of electives and create their own areas of concentration. Both adults and teens spoke about the strong social opportunities created by such a community-wide program, the benefits of not “losing” teens after their B’nai Mitzvah, and their


willingness to continue identifying as Jewish. In the words of one adult participant, “..... the content is secondary to the love of being there.”

Boulder Jewish Day School

For a community the relatively small size of Boulder, participants felt fortunate to have a Jewish Day School in their midst. As one participant remarked, “Prospective parents often judge the quality of a Jewish community by the quality of its Day School.” Participants specifically mentioned the school’s strong early childhood component, its success in attracting families of many backgrounds, and the opportunity to offer more in-depth Jewish education.

“Hebrew High is the most awesome thing. You get to hang out with your friends who are funny and supportive. You get to learn together.”

– teen Focus Group participant



1b. What's not working as well? Where are the gaps?

Building on their familiarity with the community, participants were well aware of what was not working as well. Both adults and youth could easily identify gaps in programming for certain age levels and populations. The majority of responses fell into the following categories: Lack of Salary and Benefits for Teachers, Lingering Competition and Philosophical Differences, Parental Attitudes, and the Weaknesses of Congregational Hebrew School.

Lack of Salary and Benefits for Teachers

At the top of the list are poor salary and benefits for Boulder area Jewish educators. Most teachers work part-time and are not eligible for benefits such as sick days, health insurance and retirement. A related issue is finding qualified teachers. While the pool of potential educators has grown in recent years with the influx of Jewish residents, there is no central registry or formal employment network. In addition, participants in the focus groups felt that Jewish educators were not given the respect they deserved and that their salary was not commensurate with their qualifications. They also described a lack of professional development opportunities, although the *Chidush* awards described earlier and the BJEC are beginning to address that gap.

Lingering Competition and Philosophical Differences

Despite many collaborative efforts, participants candidly talked about a certain element of competitiveness and territoriality that exists in Boulder. Individual congregations feel the need to be protective of their membership numbers and are not always quick to refer families to other Jewish resources outside of their own programming. Participants representing both congregational Hebrew Schools and the Boulder Jewish Day School mentioned a lack of support. They were also aware of the strong philosophical differences that exist between the different branches of Judaism (such as reform, conservative, renewal and orthodox). These philosophical differences affect Jewish educators as they strive to work together and find common ground about what they value most in Jewish education.

Parental Attitudes

Parental attitudes were also identified as an area of concern. Participants talked about a general apathy among Jewish parents and lack of commitment to Jewish education. This may be due, in part, to the parents' own negative experience with Hebrew School when they were young. Support of Jewish education is also affected by large numbers of families who are divorced, intermarried or unaffiliated. Boulder has attracted families seeking alternative life styles and a breaking away from social conventions found on the East or West coasts. Participants described a certain "flakiness" and lack of follow-through on the part of parents. A central concern was whether a majority of families actually want to identify themselves as "Jews".



Congregational Hebrew School: the Weaknesses

While the availability of a variety of Hebrew School programs was mentioned as a strength of the Boulder Jewish community, participants also identified some inherent weaknesses. Most of the congregational Hebrew School programs currently operating in Boulder offer approximately five hours of Jewish education on a bi-weekly (Wednesday afternoons and Sunday mornings) schedule. Educators were keenly aware of the curricular limitations of such a time restriction and the difficulty of staffing their programs with qualified teachers. Youth were more concerned about classes they perceived as boring, a lack of group experiences and the difficulty in maintaining student interest and motivation.


Other weaknesses were identified in the areas of transportation, a lack of effective marketing, lack of support for youth groups such as BBYO and USY, and the need to better coordinate adult education programs between congregations. Participants identified programming gaps between early childhood education and the next grades, from Stepping Stones to other family education programs, for 6th graders who have gone to Jewish Day School and for young adults in their twenties and thirties.

“What is the goal of a Jewish Education?”

COMMENTARY

The Boulder community has ample reason to be proud of its accomplishments in Jewish education. Boulder already has successful models of collaboration, indicating that the synergy so needed for innovation is already present. At the same time, participants expressed frustration that more families were not being reached, that vital resources were spread thin and that teachers were not compensated or valued commensurate with their work. These identified challenges represent the “nature of the beast” when it comes to Jewish education and are indicative of what is happening on the national level.

The positive feedback on congregational Hebrew School was both encouraging and surprising. The central question shifted from whether or not congregational Hebrew School was working (it obviously is on some level) to “Is it dynamic enough to survive and thrive in the 21 century?” Other core questions evolved during the focus groups such as, “What is the goal of a Jewish education? Can it offer our young people what we hope for them – the opportunity to lead a Jewish life and the ability to hand the legacy down to their children?” Ultimately, this is the essence of Jewish education: the tradition of handing down the heritage from generation to generation, L’dor v’dor. A starting point in any redesign effort should be a central dialogue about the goals and purpose of a Jewish education.



2. *How can families become more proactive in choosing a Jewish education for their children and themselves?*

Early reaction to the manner in which this question was initially phrased was very revealing. The original question asked how families could become more proactive in **designing** a Jewish education. Participants in the first two focus groups clearly felt that only a small percentage of the population would be actively engaged in designing a Jewish education for their children and themselves. They recognized that all families were different and brought different hopes and dreams to their vision of Jewish education. Participants stated that it is very difficult for families to be proactive if they aren't educated about choices and resources. They did not want to assume that all Jewish families in Boulder are knowledgeable and affiliated. Building on these observations, the main responses to this question focused on providing families with the tools they needed to make informed decisions.

Offer More Information to Families

Participants had a wide range of experiences in working with Jewish families across Boulder and realized the importance of out-reach to families who were either apathetic about a Jewish education or not connected to resources. One obvious solution was to provide families with more education and information so they would be aware of their options. Participants envisioned a packet

of information that contained the program descriptions, goals and benchmarks for each congregational and community program. They recommended that this information be made widely accessible so families would not become discouraged about searching for the information they needed.

Create a Centralized Resource or Website

Providing such a wealth of information to families necessitated the creation of some kind of centralized resource. Participants discussed the option of using an on-line resource such as a website. A website has the capacity to list descriptions in one place, to post statistics on each school, and maintain a data base of other cities and their resources. Use of a website could allow families to coordinate common interests, link with "buddies" and provide the opportunity to email individual congregations and evaluate their responses.

Develop a Family Resource Center

As efficient as websites can be, participants realized that many families would benefit from the warm touch of person-to-person contact. The development of a Family Resource Center could remove a perceived "resource barrier" and make Jewish education more welcoming and accessible. Such a center would be open to all families identifying themselves as Jewish, whether they were affiliated or not. It would also serve as a place for families to be heard and to feel free to express their viewpoints on Jewish education.



Provide Educational Consultants to Families

Building on the need for more information and central access, participants brainstormed about a potential new role within the Jewish community. Similar to the concept of the “concierge” as described in the Lippman Kanfer working paper, they recognized the value of a person in the role of a Jewish educational consultant or mentor, a person who could help families negotiate all the choices. They described this consultant as a person with charisma who would encourage families to pursue a Jewish education. Ideally this person would be neutral and not connected to any one synagogue. As one person described, “...like a personal shopper for Jewish education.” The educational consultant could conduct personalized interviews with families and ask questions such as, “What do you envision for the future of your child?” The consultant would encourage consumers to try different approaches and find the right match for their families.


Other responses included the formation of an experiential service-oriented organization for youth and adolescents, hosting more informational events such as a Jewish Trade Show, and creating multiple ways to access Jewish education throughout the community.

COMMENTARY

In brainstorming ways for families to become more proactive in choosing a Jewish education, ideas for a redesign began to emerge. The need for a centralized resource location and access to information is a core concept. Even the youth group recognized the need to have information all in one place. It is a natural fit to take advantage of Boulder’s high tech profile by creating a centralized website with online resources. Some participants suggested that the Boulder JCC could play the role of a neutral entity in housing information and reaching out to unaffiliated families. The Boulder JCC already offers such resources as an extensive library (known as Ha Sifria) and a Teacher Resource Room. Others were concerned that the JCC would be perceived as “too Jewish” and would fail to attract families who were not strongly identified. The other potential redesign suggestion was the role of the educational consultant or personal shopper for Jewish education. This concept surfaced again during the discussion on encouraging more collaboration. In a community such as Boulder where there are many options and choices, such a role could be crucial in encouraging more families to pursue a Jewish education.

As one person described, “... like a personal shopper for Jewish education.”

– adult Focus Group participant



3. *How can we encourage more communication, collaboration and creativity among Jewish education programs in Boulder?*

Participants in all the focus groups saw the need to continue to enhance communication, collaboration and creativity. Some groups tackled each aspect separately while others saw them as intrinsically related. A wide range of options were identified as listed below.

Communication

Participants identified the need for more open dialogue and discussion. Once again, they mentioned the benefits of a central source of information such as a list serve or e-group. Other options were using an educational newsletter or the existing “Community Page” publication to publicize existing classes. Suggestions included using the BJEC to improve communication and break down barriers between congregations and programs. Adult participants honestly acknowledged the existence of negative talk (*Lashon ha-Ra*) among educators that often exists in a small community. They encouraged positive attitudes towards each other and a connection to core values. Such efforts should reflect a parallel, reflective process of living the values and speaking the same language among lay people, boards, and educators. Participants also recommended designing two different communication approaches to meet the needs of both affiliated and unaffiliated families.

Collaboration

Recommendations to increase collaboration revolved around the core concepts of recognizing the strength in unity and working together toward a common goal. Participants recognized that collaboration is a challenge and there are different goals among different synagogues. A strong theme that emerged was encouraging more collaboration between congregational schools and school directors. This could be accomplished by identifying interesting classes to be taught across congregations and sharing teachers between synagogues. Participants suggested creating shadowing experiences and encouraging synagogues to work together to streamline their educational offerings.

Adult participants also identified the need to create a comprehensive adult education curriculum. Such a curriculum could create variety, eliminate redundancy, and encourage efficiency. They suggested having the Rabbis or education committees form a consortium to further discuss the concept and investigate ways to publicize each other’s topics. In true brainstorming fashion, participants proposed the creation of a Boulder Jewish University, or in vernacular terms: “Jew U”. They also encouraged more participation between the BJEC and *Haver*.

“It’s like a
Jewish University
and you can do
independent study.”

– adult Focus Group participant



The creation of the role of a Jewish educational consultant or guidance counselor was again discussed from the perspective of community-wide collaboration. Participants described the role as similar to a Jewish Personal Trainer, a highly qualified person who could sit down with families and discuss options, and who would check in with them on a yearly basis. Another innovative idea involved the development of a tuition fund for Boulder Judaism. A potential funding mechanism could be the use of an inter-community voucher system where students accrue points towards their Jewish education for activities such as family education, camping trips or the Jewish Festival. Parents could earn points as well through adult education activities, and age-appropriate incentives to encourage teen participation would be offered.

Further suggestions included utilizing existing local resources more effectively and tapping into the strengths of CAJE. Some suggested creating a different Wednesday school model similar to that of Hebrew High, where electives could be offered such as Israeli dancing and calligraphy. Other collaborative ideas included forming city-wide Hebrew programs and camps that could be more efficient, more cost effective and cheaper for families.

Creativity


Ideas to encourage creativity among Jewish education programs centered on taking advantage of Boulder's natural beauty and outdoor environment to create dynamic learning environments. The youth focus group was especially interested in using different outdoor surroundings to help remember subject matter and journeying to beautiful mountain settings to study Torah. Youth

discussed the pros and cons of camping trips and agreed that they should be different and challenging in order to qualify as educational activities. Adults focused more on promoting outdoor activities and joint missions such as picking a place to "adopt" such as a park or community building.

Youth recommended more fun, interactive learning techniques such as card games, vocabulary flash cards, fast-paced lessons, and team-based activities. They requested more social time related to learning, including group projects. Other ideas for encouraging more creativity among educational programs included having joint Purim celebrations and joint Shabbat programs. Adults suggested empowering young people to take on leadership roles in these community-wide events. From an artistic and philanthropic perspective, participants recommended creating art projects to sell and raising funds for collective social projects. Other creative ideas to reach unaffiliated families included hosting activities with dancing and sports, and offering more cultural, less religious, functions in outdoor settings.

COMMENTARY

Participants were enthusiastic about encouraging a higher level of communication, collaboration and creativity among Boulder Jewish educational programs. They recognized that these are the necessary building blocks to strengthen Jewish education and create a wider appeal. Their innovative ideas reflect a history of success and willingness to build on previous collaborative efforts. They cautioned that communication and collaboration need time and stressed the importance of having funding to share in order to encourage creativity. They were keenly aware of financial considerations and the need to



recognize that synagogues are businesses with fiscal responsibilities to maintain their membership numbers. Other philosophical issues surfaced when the idea of having different dues structures was proposed. The possibility of providing a dues break for families who go to day school or other programs raised the complex question of whether some educational programs were more valued than others. This is clearly an area that warrants further discussion.

Participants were intrigued by the idea of the “Jewish Personal Trainer” and wondered whether it would be a full-time or part-time paid position, and who would provide the funding. Several participants in the focus groups were well qualified to fill such a role. Concerns about collaboration reflected a fear of changing what is already familiar. Even the youth group articulated this well as they described a sense of comfort and familiarity in their synagogue schools. As one young person stated, “Synagogues should look at what’s working already and collaborate when there’s a reason.” The youth group was not sure that can any major changes to Jewish education could be successful if limited to Boulder, and that a re-design may not be realistic with a small number of congregations. They saw the need for a national organization, such as BBYO, to spearhead such an effort.

4a. Is the Boulder community interested in supporting a redesign of Jewish education? Could Boulder be a model of innovation?

The answer to this question was a “qualified yes” across all four groups. Participants in every focus group expressed great interest in continuing the conversation and exploring the feasibility of a redesign. They were generally positive about the potential of Boulder to be a model of innovation. Some stated that it was already happening. Several people thought there was the potential for Boulder to be a leader in an educational redesign effort. In the words of one Boulder congregant, “We’re always identifying ourselves as innovators.”

“We’re at a tipping point where it’s cool to be Jewish in Boulder.”

– adult Focus Group participant

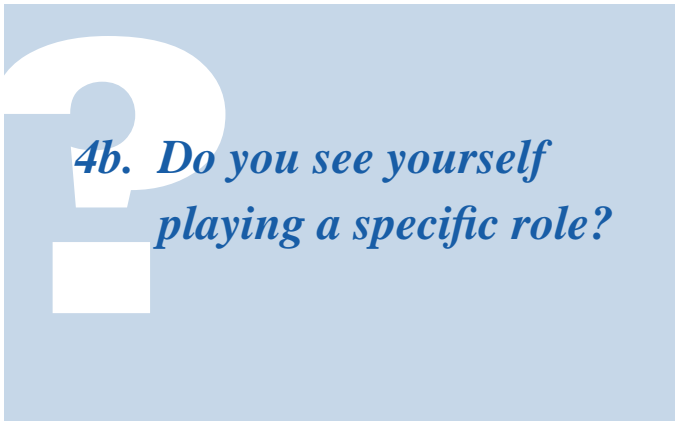
The youth group was unanimous and enthusiastic in their response. They felt that Boulder was already a model of innovation and the birthplace to such novel products as Izze and Crocs. The youth felt that living in Boulder, “is all about doing things differently.”



COMMENTARY

While adults participants were generally in agreement that the Boulder community would be interested in a redesign, they strongly felt that not all stakeholders were in the room, especially Jewish families who have not yet been reached. Concerns about leadership and financial resources were also voiced. The groups were painfully aware that in a community such as Boulder, the Rabbis were already involved in many collaborative efforts and are “stretched thin”.

In a different interpretation of the findings from the Lippman Kanfer working paper, some participants suggested that a redesign effort would have to occur from the top down. They felt that grass-root activities were not strong enough to make it happen and that the Jewish community was not yet well enough established. Others suggested modeling it after other successful cross-congregational social action efforts such as Chevra Kedisha. On a practical level, adult participants suggested starting with a pilot project and recommended that engaging the support of Haver would be key.



4b. Do you see yourself playing a specific role?

More than two-thirds of adult participants answered that they wanted to be involved in a future effort involving redesigning Jewish education. Those who wanted to remain involved described specific roles for themselves. Several discussed their willingness to work across congregations and to form consortiums. Others asked to be kept “in the loop” and expressed interest in “being involved in whatever develops.”

Youth also wanted to contribute to an on-going effort. Several suggested developing sports teams such as soccer or lacrosse at individual congregations and sponsoring inter-congregational athletic events. One teen volunteered to provide outreach to other young people who had dropped out of Jewish education and might be seeking to find their way back.

“We can all come together to serve the needs of the deceased. Let’s see if we can come together to meet the needs of the living.”

- adult Focus Group participant quoting Rabbi Victor Gross, co-Rabbi of Pardes Levavot, a Jewish Renewal Congregation in Boulder



COMMENTARY

It was evident that there was much passion around the concept of improving Jewish education. The strong response to the last question is a very encouraging sign to support taking a planning effort to the next level. Many participants had been instrumental in building the collaborative programs that so strongly characterize Boulder Jewish education. They appeared ready to build upon the solid foundation of their previous work. The focus group participants have the potential to become the nucleus of a core group to explore redesigning Jewish education in Boulder.

"It's for real now."

- adult Focus Group participant describing the state of Jewish education in Boulder

NEXT STEPS

The findings from the Dare to Dream dialogues provide encouragement to continue exploring what a redesign of Jewish education could look like in Boulder. Feedback from all of the groups indicated the presence of strong interest, passion and the energy needed for any community to embark on such a venture. The following next steps are recommended:

- Continue the conversation. Invite the focus group participants who saw a specific role for themselves to form a vital, core group. Make efforts to ensure that the core group includes educators and parents, stakeholders from a variety of congregations and programs, and is representative of the range of Jewish diversity in Boulder. Investigate where the group wants to go from there. A necessary first step should be a central dialogue about the goals and purpose of a Jewish education. Ask parents and educators questions such as:
 - *What do we really want our children to learn?*
 - *Why are we Jewish? Why do we care?*
 - *What is it about being Jewish that we want to continue?*
 - *What is the "it" that we're trying to pass down?*
- Seek out collaborative partners or funding sources. Explore funding options with current and potential organizations at a local, state and national level.
- At the same time, begin to discuss philosophical differences among Jewish educational programs. Approach these discussions from the perspective of promoting and redesigning Jewish education



in Boulder. Encourage the core group to explore their collective Jewish education backgrounds and how they developed their own strong Jewish identities. Begin planting the seeds of even greater collaboration so that down the road, strongly held philosophies and values will not pull Jewish educators apart, but rather enhance their work and give it a new dimension and flexibility.

- Identify a pilot project. Possibilities could include efforts in the area of centralizing resources, developing a Family Resource Center and creating the role of the Jewish Personal Trainer (see below for further ideas).
- Disseminate the Dare to Dream report widely to encourage further discussion, stimulate conversation and publicize efforts.

POTENTIAL PILOT PROJECTS

- Create a centralized data base, website, virtual resource center, list serve or e-group
- Develop a Family Resource Center
- Create the role of the Jewish Personal Trainer
- Explore using a Hebrew High model for congregational Hebrew School and create a different “Wednesday school” model
- Promote inter-congregational classes for adults and children
- Conduct personal interviews with families about Jewish education
- Explore the creation of a Boulder Jewish University (Jew U)
- Pursue a new funding mechanism such as a voucher system or punch-card in which consumers can get credit towards their Jewish education for a wide variety of educationally related activities
- Host a Jewish Trade Show or Educational Fair
- Develop an experiential service-oriented organization for youth and adolescents



CONCLUSION

The Dare to Dream dialogues on Redesigning Jewish Education were made possible because of the seeds that have already been planted in Boulder, CO. Since people self-selected into the focus group based on their interest and experience with Jewish education, it remains to be seen whether their views will resonate with the larger Jewish community. However, the Dare to Dream participants represented the viewpoints of the current group of active Jewish stakeholders in the Boulder area. They served the vital purpose of “taking the pulse” of the Jewish educational community. Any future effort will have to have their endorsement and support in order to succeed.

Also vital to any redesign effort is the support of *Haver*, the Boulder Rabbinic fellowship. Jewish educators already turn to this collective of Rabbis for leadership, and view them as role models of collaboration and intellectual stimulation. Their support and buy-in is crucial both at the individual synagogue

“Is there a critical mass willing to **‘DARE to DREAM’** about the future of Jewish education?”

level and to any cross-congregational endeavor. It is also well worth exploring the role of youth in a redesign effort. The young participants were eager to talk about their experiences and in general, were positive about their Jewish education. They offered a different and equally-valid perspective on the state of Jewish education in Boulder. As one of the largest consumer groups of Jewish education, their opinions should matter. Including youth in a redesign project would simultaneously fulfill the adults’ recommendation for stronger programming for teens and involve Jewish youth in community leadership roles.

Any future redesign will also depend on determining whether there is enough feedback to warrant taking the next steps, and how far those steps should lead. Feedback on this issue must be both qualitative and quantitative. Individuals willing to continue the conversation should continue to take the pulse of the larger community and reach out to a wide variety of Jews whose voices have not been heard. Further discussion is warranted to answer the central question: *“Is there a critical mass willing to ‘dare to dream’ about the future of Jewish education?”*



“Boulder really is a microcosm of the Jewish community across the nation”

- *Francine Lavin Weaver*

The immediate challenge is to capture and sustain the new energy created by the Dare to Dream dialogues. Signs are ripe that there is a shift towards a deeper level of communication, as evidenced by recent cross-congregational meetings of synagogue Presidents and Boards of Directors. As mentioned in Next Steps, the starting point in Boulder’s redesign effort should be a central dialogue about the goals and purpose of a Jewish education. The Boulder Jewish community needs to build on the many strong programs that exist and develop even stronger, deeper camaraderie and solidarity within the core group. That way a strong group will be poised and ready to take on the task should funding become available.

Yet new efforts rarely survive and thrive on energy and passion alone. Several groups mentioned the need for leadership and resources to make this happen. Some people mentioned the appeal of outside funding from a national source. Recognition at the state or national level could help influence whether the timing is right for a redesign and help determine if there is a critical mass ready and willing to implement it.

As unique as Boulder perceives itself to be, these findings have led Francine Lavin Weaver to conclude, “Boulder really is a microcosm of the Jewish community across the nation.” This is both an encouraging and enlightening observation. It may lead other communities to use this report to design their own process for discussing the future of Jewish education. At the same time, the Boulder Jewish community may find it appealing to adapt innovative ideas that have been successful in other parts of the country. It is wise to appreciate the distinctive characteristics of the Boulder community and be aware that future efforts will probably not look like model programs from either coast or the Midwest. Innovative programs in Boulder will need to tap into its distinctive culture and environment to succeed.

It is hoped that the results of the Dare to Dream dialogues can be a blue print for the future of Jewish education in Boulder. They should be used to help facilitate an even deeper conversation about the goals, values and direction of Jewish education. The time may be ripe to make Jewish education more relevant, vibrant, and meaningful in the next century. This will empower the Boulder Jewish community to seize the opportunity, in the words of the Lippman Kanfer working paper, to “redesign the system as a whole so that it can more successfully achieve its ultimate objective: inspiring large numbers of Jews to live Jewish lives of meaning and purpose.”

APPENDIX



DARE TO DREAM?

What if . . .

- Every family in Boulder providing their children a Jewish education was engaged in Jewish experiential learning in a multitude of venues?
- Every Jewish family had an Individual Family Jewish Educational Plan that was agreed upon by a team of professionals, executed and evaluated at least twice per year?
- Every family had a variety of Jewish choices across our community in which to enjoy?
- Jewish learning was so exciting that families that weren't involved felt left out?
- Synagogue communities became a true multigenerational "community of learners"?
- Experiential elective credits could be gleaned from many different areas such as:
 - ie. Jewish summer camp • Jewish family retreats • Tikkun Olam Family Projects
Family Education Programs focusing on Jewish Ethics and Mitzvot
Jewish learning sites on the Internet • Youth leadership retreats
Multi-generational Torah Study • Special Jewish Research Projects
Kehillot-wide or Jewish community wide field trips (tiyyulim)
Adult education programs • Congregational and youth trips to Israel
Youth Experiential and Social Programs
Local and National Jewish Sports Events (Maccabiah)
- **Good congregational religious schools cooperated with each other and created a positive synergy/energy, drawing from each others's resources. In other words, "the whole is greater than (and more effective) than the sum of its parts."**

. . .Think About It!

Sweetening Jewish Education

Join a Focus Group

Let's talk and brainstorm together . . . Meet me in the Teacher Resource Center at the BJCC willing to share your ideas. A \$50.00 stipend is available for each participant. Space is limited to the first 10 people to sign up! Register for ONE of the following sessions:

Wednesday, June 20, 7-9pm OR Sunday, June 24 4-6pm
Sunday, August 12, 7-9pm OR Tuesday, July 31, 10-12 am

e-mail Francine@Weaverfoundation.org to sign up !

**DARE TO DREAM
FOCUS GROUPS ON
REDESIGNING JEWISH EDUCATION
Notes from Group #1: June 20, 2007**

**1a. What positive things are happening in Jewish education in the Boulder community?
What's already working?**

- The Jewish leaders for Shalosh Regalim (the holidays of Sukkot, Pesach, & Shavuot)
 - o share knowledge and experience
 - o respectful across the board
- Family Education – Stepping Stones
 - o it can transform Jewish life. “We make Jews.”
- Haver
 - o Jewish leaders are working together
 - o the collaborative work among Rabbis and educators
 - o SYNERGY
- Francine's vision, ex. Chidush Awards
 - o mechanisms to recognize educators
- The organization of Jewish educators
- The B'aderech class
 - o students from 3 congregations coming together for the confirmation class
 - o co-operation from all the Rabbis
 - o a mellowing, blurring the edges between synagogues, organizations
- Summer Camps (Chabad, Har Ha Shem)
- Diversity, interaction between shuls
- Willingness to try different things for the kids
 - o fun, relevance, engagement
 - o more craziness, excitement (ex. Bibliodrama)
 - o more involvement, hands-on experiences
 - o flexibility in Hebrew High (learner-centered)
- Different options available for teens
 - o their willingness to continue to identify as Jewish
 - o 95% of the kids in Hebrew High have been affiliated
 - o Rabbis encourage participation in Hebrew High
- Dynamic energy
 - o “It's for real now”.
 - o not as much of a struggle
- Energy & enthusiasm of the teachers; their level of commitment
- B'nai Mitzvah camping trip at Bonai and the trip to New York (confirmation class)
- Bringing teens back as Madrichim (teaching assistants)
- Preschools are growing and are full

1b. What's not working as well? Where are the gaps?

- Hebrew School
 - o “What's the context?”
 - o can it be modeled off of Haver options?

- o the goal should not be just to get to B'nai Mitzvah.
 - o Have a continuum from 3rd grade on. Do not end with B'nai Mitzvah.
- Lack of support for Day School
 - o lack of understanding of its value and impact on Jewish life
 - o prospective Jewish families moving to a new city will judge the community by the quality of its Day School
- Lack of resources in the community for individual congregation's supplemental schools
 - o use a Hebrew High model
 - o provide high quality
- There is a huge gap from Stepping Stones (like a womb for families) to other family ed models.
 - o participation in Stepping Stones limited to 2 years
- Lack of referrals to Stepping Stones from synagogues
 - o territoriality still exists
- Gaps exist between:
 1. early childhood and next grades for unaffiliated families. Shabbat Club could be a transition.
 2. for 6th graders who have been going full-time
- Competition still exists
 - o synagogues still see the need to keep their membership numbers up
 - o there are financial barriers for families
- Lousy salaries and benefits for teachers
 - o youth educators are not paid as well as adult educators
 - o lack of retirement plans, insurance
 - o not enough training workshops for teachers
 - o teachers need to be rewarded for their qualifications
- Finding qualified teachers who have a background in pedagogy, teaching methods
- A registry or employee network
- Need more paid professionals to work with youth
- All-synagogue youth groups
- Make Jewish education more affordable
- Transportation – bus service
- TIME! Five hours per week is not enough to learn to speak and read Hebrew
- Lack of intergeneration role models
 - o “What does a Jewish man do when he grows up?”
 - o lack of role models within genders
- Philosophical differences, difficulty with collaboration
- All-city camp
- Two tracks of Hebrew
- Coordinate adult education across congregations
- Endowment fund for Jewish education (scholarships)

2. **How can families become more pro-active in designing a Jewish education for their children and themselves?**

- The phrasing of this question assumes a lot; that Jewish families want to design their own education. Many Jews do not want to participate. Not all families may want to be pro-active. Other ways to phrase this question could be:
 - o How can we find out what families want?

- o How can families become active in choosing a Jewish education?
- Recognize that all families are different
- Don't assume that families are affiliated and knowledgeable
- Provide more Family Education. Make it mandatory?
- More awareness of options
- Do personal interviews with families. Ask, "What are you guys looking for?"
- Encourage families to try different things and find the right match for themselves
- Provide a Master List of happenings in all shuls, or a central website
 - o maintain a data base of other cities and their resources
- Family Ed is not plentiful
- This sounds like home schooling
- What are the options?
- Give parents more education, more information
- Have concurrent education for parents while their children are in class
- Provide a package so parents have a framework
 - o include goals & benchmarks
 - o have frameworks for each congregation, community program
 - o "It's like a Jewish University and you can do independent study." And it's OK.
 - o lower the cost of entry
- Families need to feel heard (Boulder JCC Library sometimes fills that role)
- Have a Family Resource Center, whether families are "affiliated" or not

3. How can we encourage more communication, collaboration and creativity among Jewish education programs in Boulder?

- Some entity in the role of neutral player. The BJCC library may play that role.
- Create a Boulder Jewish University
- Approach Sisterhood and Men's Clubs to serve in the role of intergenerational role models and develop personal relationships
- More participation between the Boulder Jewish Educators Council and Haver (a pearl, ex. Kabbalat Shabbat)
- Two distinct needs:
 - o affiliated families; may already be aware of more options, value
 - o unaffiliated families
- Communication
 - o we already have a good instrument (BJEC)
 - o use it more, establish new social practices
 - o break down barriers between congregations and programs
- Collaboration
 - o form city-wide Hebrew programs and camps that are more efficient and more cost effective, cheaper for families
 - o encourage an attitude among young people such as, "All the other Jewish kids I know are doing this."
 - o communication and collaboration need time
- Creativity
 - o need to have dollars to share
 - o develop power, then creativity happens
- Have to deal with the main issue of synagogues' financial need to maintain the number of

- family memberships and logistics. Recognize that synagogues are a business.
- Encourage synagogues to work together
 - o more flexibility
 - o pull resources together
- Stress the strength in unity, working together toward a common goal
- Jewish identity, rituals
- What about families who aren't looking?
- Provide a dues break for families who go to day school or other programs (comment: Be careful about sending the message that some programs are more valued than others)
 - o offer other incentives; for example, free High Holiday tickets
- Develop an inter-community voucher system
- Use more accessible entry points, multiple entry points
- Have different dues structure
- Encourage synagogues to host "introductory" events such as Schmoozes or Show & Tell informational meetings
- Create a different Wednesday School model
 - o offer electives like Hebrew High
 - o Israeli dancing, calligraphy, etc.

4a. Is the Boulder community interested in supporting a redesign of Jewish education? Could Boulder be a model of innovation?

- Yes (by consensus), especially if there is funding
- It's already happening
- But it's not up to us
- It would need leadership. Who would lead?
- It requires stakeholders to buy in
 - o ex. five-year plan
 - o pilot program
- Be aware that the Rabbis are stretched thin
 - o care & feeding of Rabbis

4b. Do you see yourself playing a specific role?

- Want to stay involved. Think we need project leaders. Particularly interested in Benchmarks Project.
- Stepping Stones as a national model for Family Education. This is a void everywhere! Mentor/Teach/Consultant.
- Want to be involved as an educator and as a librarian and want to expand teacher resource center. (Froma)
- Keep me informed. I'll figure it out.
- Want to stay with the group; committed to Hebrew Ed and Holocaust/Human Rights/Mitzvot Education.

Email addition:

- I thought it was a great brainstorming session and would definitely like to be involved in this as we go forward. I'm not yet sure how I would like to focus my efforts but please keep me in the loop.

**DARE TO DREAM
FOCUS GROUPS ON
REDESIGNING JEWISH EDUCATION
Notes from Group #2: June 24, 2007**

**1a. What positive things are happening in Jewish education in the Boulder community?
What's already working?**

- Menorah and cross-congregational adult studies
- Using the arts for learning; reflection following action
- The demand for a broad spectrum of education
 - o very qualified teachers in the community
 - o have some resources to meet the demand
- Boulder Jewish Day School; doing a great job of attracting families of many backgrounds
- A lot of kids like supplemental Hebrew School and feel positive about it
- Hebrew High; bringing all teens together
 - o not losing them
 - o seen as a social opportunity
- Social aspects across the board
 - o "It's now very cool to be Jewish." Learning is fun. Teens refer to their Jewish friends as "my Jew crew."
- IST is a wonderful experience
- Stepping Stones, outreach to inter-faith families
- Teens finding a broader identity through B'nai Mitzvah
- Positive Bar and Bat Mitzvah experiences
 - o rigorous expectations lead to self-confidence
 - o carries over to any synagogue
- B'nai Mitzvah camping trip at Bonai Shalom cements the group
- Chidush program is a tremendous asset
 - o recognizes and encourages educators; creative incentives
- This community brings so many Jewish aspects together:
 - o BJCC, Purim Carnival, Haver, B'aderech, Derech Chayim, Hebrew High
 - o strong, unique to Boulder
 - o Rabbis working together
- The Community Page
- Synagogue Retreats
 - o great opportunity to role model
 - o fun activities, skits

1b. What's not working as well? Where are the gaps?

- Advanced Jewish studies (currently have to go online to pursue)
- A lot of Jews who have "phobia" towards Jewish learning
 - o adult's negative child-hood experiences are also projected onto their children
- The impact of divorce
 - o causes schisms within families
 - o different congregations

- o mixed religions, Jewish and non-Jewish parents
- Inconsistencies with teachers – no quality control
- There is a marketing disconnect between what’s available and where
 - o how to gather information from the community about their needs, ex. “What do you want?”
- Need powerful, effective out-reach to unaffiliated families
- Minimal involvement from teens
 - o they go to Hebrew High and High Holiday services
 - o want them to have more than that religiously
- Need more families with young children (babies, preschoolers) in synagogues
 - o there seems to be fewer young Jewish families than before
- Changing demographics
 - o at BJCC preschool, 98% of families have one Jewish parent
- Do a better job with family education
 - o parents have to want it
- Have to pay our teachers better
 - o we pay way too little; part-time teaching
 - o we don’t value teachers enough
- Change parent’s priorities re: Jewish education
- Provide education for parents that brings them back
- Nothing for 20s and 30-somethings
 - o hard to find the ROI (Return on Investment)
 - o difficult to get a critical mass
 - o gap after Derech Chayim. Need more follow-up such as “after care” or sponsors
 - o there are Havurot for social engagement
- Gap between those who are attracted to Kabala, the “spiritual seekers”, and broader Jewish practice. Other opinion: a start is all that matters.
- Parental apathy is very difficult; a huge issue
- More special programs needed for children across the board, ex. community Chanukah program
- Provide alternatives to Saturday morning soccer

2. How can families become more pro-active in designing a Jewish education for their children and themselves?

- Does this mean every family and every child?
- How can you be pro-active if families aren’t educated?
- This serves only a small percentage of the population (Jewish parents who would like to design their children’s education)
- Families who care are already doing this (ex. they find tutors)
 - o How do we get families who are apathetic connected?
- Jewish educators should be doing this planning
- Offer alternatives, ex. home study, online (but still linked to a group)
- Families can become part of the Education Committee at their synagogue. “It’s like an open door.”
- Is there a way to be more learner-centered?
- Need more marketing of resources (ex. art, music, outdoor ed)
- Need a central resource that can coordinate common interests

- o ex. on a JCC website
- o link with “buddies”
- Like a Stepping Stones for new parents. Ask, “What do you envision for the future of your child?”
- Pay attention to adolescents
 - o create a service-oriented organization like Jewish Corps, similar to AmeriCorps
 - o make it experiential, where kids can do what they love
- Use teens to work with younger students (ex. Madrichim)
- What does out-reach look like?
- Encourage or require families to host an event (as in coop preschools)
 - o Nevei Kodesh does this; every family has to volunteer, ex. dinners at B’nai Mitzvah
 - o or have kids interview a family member
- Have an informational evening when all religious schools come together
 - o Like a “Jewish Trade Show” or Educational Fair
 - o Families can find a good match

3. How can we encourage more communication, collaboration and creativity among Jewish education programs in Boulder?

- It’s a challenge. There are different goals among different synagogues.
- Model the organization of Boulder Jewish Educators off of Haver
- Create shadowing experiences across synagogues
- Reb Zalman has hosted a similar discussion among educators
- Create art projects to sell and raise money for programming or collective social projects
- Create a very comprehensive adult education curriculum
 - o have the Rabbis or education committees form a consortium
 - o publicize each other’s topics
 - o create variety, eliminate redundancy, be more efficient
 - o the learner pays the same price if he/she belongs to a synagogue
- Have shared teachers between synagogues like team teaching
 - o customization
 - o or hire someone from the outside ex. Holocaust education, Storahtelling
- Encourage more collaboration between school directors to identify interesting classes that could be taught across congregations
- In some communities, the secular high school gives credit for Hebrew learning as part of the foreign language requirement
- Create a tuition fund for Boulder Judaism
- Use an educational newsletter to publicize what’s going on
 - o “Give & Receive”
 - o central source of information such as a list serve or e-group
- Use the Community Page to advertise already existing classes that are available at synagogues and other programs
- Create the role of a “Guidance Counselor” to work with families; check in with them on a yearly basis. Like a Jewish Personal Trainer.
- Use existing resources, ex. library at CAJE
- Single point of entry makes it easier for families
- Build on the “Trade Show” concept

- Accrue points for every activity – maybe parents could earn points, too. Use incentives for teens.
- Jew U

4a. Is the Boulder community interested in supporting a redesign of Jewish education? Could Boulder be a model of innovation?

- Yes (by consensus)
- “We’re always identifying ourselves as innovators.” – Nevei Kodesh
- Boulder tends towards innovation. The community almost demands it; it’s a unique opportunity
 - o ex. such a diverse Boulder Jewish Day School
 - o ex. Chevrah Kedisha. “We can all come together to serve the needs of the deceased. Let’s see if we can come together to meet the needs of the living.” – Rabbi Victor Gross
- Model it after the Sudanese Project, other successful cross-congregational social action efforts
- Yes, do a pilot program. Test them out. Boulder is the right size quantitatively and qualitatively.
- Haver would be key

4b. Do you see yourself playing a specific role?

- Arts & action consortium
- Cross-congregational consortium/communication, online grouping
- Cross-congregational, operations, visioning
- Keep me in the loop
- Encourage Congregation Bonai Shalom adult ed and education chairs to participate, cross-congregational consortium
- Liaison with JBDS and/or Haver

**DARE TO DREAM
FOCUS GROUPS ON
REDESIGNING JEWISH EDUCATION
Notes from Group #3: July 31, 2007**

**1a. What positive things are happening in Jewish education in the Boulder community?
What's already working?**

- Kids don't seem to hate Jewish Education as much as their parent's generation did; educators have strived to make it fun
- B'nai Mitzvah students don't seem to hate going
 - kids enjoy the socialization and want to go on Sunday; even some kids in Day School
- The model of Life Long Learning
- There is a lot of diversity already
 - there are already choices among the major synagogues.
 - this is reflected in the Jewish Day School; it is really a community school
- The caliber and number of Rabbis in the community
- Great resources in Rabbis (ex. Reb Zalman, the Adventure Rabbi, etc.)
- The interaction between communities such as Haver, the group of Rabbis. The commitment to share and interact.
- The 6th grade retreat program in lieu of Sunday School
- The B'nai Mitzvah camping trip at Bonai Shalom
- Kids are more open now about Jewish Education; they feel more free to share and talk about their experiences
- The people – amazing educators who are creative & passionate
- The Boulder Jewish Educators Committee is hoping to provide professional development for teachers
- The families in the Early Childhood Education program at the Day School have a huge hunger for learning
- There is excitement about Jewish Early Childhood Education; starting families off in the right way
- JCC Preschool Program
 - partnership between ECE programs
 - not hoarding students
- Collaboration, diversity and respect among programs
 - educators, Rabbis, Presidents of Congregations meet regularly
 - teachers are shared among programs
- Hebrew High
 - energy among kids across the community.
 - content is secondary to the love of being there
- Stepping Stones family education; parent & child
 - unique to Boulder & Denver
 - has been replicated nation-wide
- Population has reached a critical mass
 - one of the fastest growing Jewish areas
 - community is already receiving funding from national organizations

1b. What's not working as well? Where are the gaps?

- Need to focus on family education
- Haven't addressed the needs of the youngest families – infants and toddlers
- Strengthen the buy-in of parents, the commitment to follow through
- Pay for Jewish educators is too low, especially in administrative and early childhood education
- Lack of commitment from families, comes across as “flakiness”
- It is exhausting to always have to provide dynamic programs
- Weak programming for post B'nai Mitzvah kids
 - only BBYO and Hebrew High
 - reluctance to pursue USY
- Jewish community is spread throughout the whole area. The future Jewish Commons will help pull people together.
- Lack of leadership; still need more, especially for funding purposes
- High percentage of inter-marriage
- High numbers of unaffiliated families
 - Stepping Stones does address these groups
 - also Pardes Levavot and Nevei Kodesh
- Individual families have established their own Havurot to meet the need (ex. Louisville)
 - need more of this effort
 - there isn't really a “Jewish neighborhood”
 - use a personal approach such as “parlor meetings”
 - invitations for Shabbat dinners. Lacking this framework, ex. Shalom Baltimore
- Need more strong, charismatic role models (ex. Reb Zalman) to spark kids
- Jewish educators are part-time. There is no support network such as paid professional development, sick days, or benefits.
- Youth Group and post-B'nai Mitzvah activities are talked about as “band aids”. BBYO is not well supported.
- Lack of motivation for IST'ers to return to Hebrew High in 12th grade
- Jewish educators can't afford to send their own kids to Jewish education
- The 20's and 30's age group are not tapped into. Make incentives for them to stay involved.
- Jewish kids and families are not respected enough in public schools. This has improved somewhat, ex. scheduling around Jewish holidays.
- Lack of Jewish camp culture in Boulder (summer 2010 date for Flying J Camp, cooperative effort between JCC Ranch Camp and Camp Ramah)
- What do we need to do separately? How do we coordinate, yet maintain identity, diversity and growth?

2. How can families become more pro-active in choosing a Jewish education for their children and themselves?

- Make information easier to find
 - ex. pamphlets and brochures that list all the options
 - child care, preschools, B'nai Mitzvah, tutors, etc.
- Request forms, information through JCC or CAJE that could go through school directors
- Create a central website with other links
 - opportunity to email individual congregations, hear their responses, etc.

- Create a role like a Jewish educational consultant or mentor to help families with all the choices
 - a “personal shopper” for Jewish education
- Get someone with charisma (ex. Oprah) to encourage families
 - a person not connected to any one synagogue
- Create more opportunities for multiple access points throughout the community
- Publicize activities on the family level
- Create a culture of evaluation & research
 - need to follow-up on ideas that have been tried; whether successful or not
- Need to address the rising rate of intermarriage among the next generation (17 – 27 year olds)
 - make events inviting, open
- Remove the “resource barrier”
 - make Jewish ed accessible, welcoming
 - not an unattainable goal

3. How can we encourage more communication, collaboration and creativity among Jewish education programs in Boulder?

- Have a central institution of educational consultants to sit down with families and discuss options (find an engaging name)
 - paid? part-time? Who would fund this?
 - perhaps the Boulder Jewish Community Foundation or CAJE
 - make demands on these organizations. Tap into CAJE’s Boulder rep.
- CAJE will come to Boulder and help teachers with lesson planning. Maintain more awareness of the Denver, Boulder history.
- Have a great Purim celebration (Haver is discussing this; a lot of potential)
 - include teens; empower young people to take on leadership
 - create opportunity to be role models
- Promote more outdoor activities, joint missions
 - ex. pick a place to “adopt” such as a park or community building
 - could be secular, (make it simple & sustained)
 - use the Jewish campus for such an event
- Decrease any negative talk among Jewish educators about congregations
 - encourage more positive attitudes towards each other
 - connect to core values
- Hold a community-wide family ed program on the Ethics of Speech
- Implement a parallel, reflective process of living the values, speaking the same language, and living the same goals
 - for lay people, Boards, educators
- Hold a joint Shabbat “something”
 - even just for teens
 - could be a lay event
 - consider how to accommodate people who don’t drive on Shabbat
 - link with Shabbat Across America
- Host more activities for those who are not affiliated
 - dancing, sports-related, more cultural, less religious, community gardens, outdoors, in a park
 - feed the community

4a. Is the Boulder community interested in supporting a redesign of Jewish education? Could Boulder be a model of innovation?

- Yes
- Yes
- No – because many families haven't been reached yet
- Who is the community?
- Yes – if it means quality
- The culture of Boulder can change. We're at a tipping point where it's cool to be Jewish in Boulder. A qualified 'yes'.
- It would have to be from the top down. Will need leadership and funding. Grass-roots activities alone won't make it happen. The Jewish community is not yet well enough established. There is the potential for Boulder to be a leader.
- Would need to define the "redesign"; then do Out Reach.
- A big "maybe". Needs leadership. That's where the flakiness comes in (ex. the new Mikvah – where are the people?)
- Don't recreate the wheel
- Yes
- Hopeful
- Need to stress and promote the value of Jewish Education

4b. Do you see yourself playing a specific role?

- Yes, through Haver. I am currently the coordinator.
- Yes, don't know which specific role, but I would really like to be involved a lot.
- Include me. Especially for advice on the educational consultant role.
- Especially with early childhood education/young families/ family ed ideas.
- Interested in being involved in whatever develops.

**DARE TO DREAM
FOCUS GROUPS ON
REDESIGNING JEWISH EDUCATION
Notes from Group #4: August 12, 2007
(Youth Group)**

**1a. What positive things are happening in Jewish education in the Boulder community?
What's already working?**

- There are congregations and places to go to
- Small classes with 10 or less
 - o can get help for your level of learning.
 - o can focus more on individual abilities
- At Nevei Kodesh, they met on Wednesday's at people homes
 - o it was a comfortable, relaxed atmosphere.
 - o they put mizuzot up on the doors
- There are a lot of different classes so you can focus on different things
- There are a variety of places for kids to learn; also met at teachers' house
- Like the split times of meeting Sunday morning and Wednesday afternoon
 - o it helps you remember what you learn
- "Hebrew High is the most awesome thing".
 - o you get to hang out with your friends who are funny and supportive
 - o get to learn together
- Did a ropes course to build trust
 - o helps you make friends
 - o also went on hikes in 6th and 7th grade program, Crossing the River (CTR)
- Camping trips for 10 & 11-year olds
- Torah classes with the Rabbi (at Bonai Shalom & Nevei Kodesh)
- The opportunity to interact with the Rabbi
 - o can go to the Rabbi's house or the Rabbi comes to your class
 - o get to know Rabbi Tirzah right away
- Adopt-a-Highway (Pardes Levavot)
- Mitzvah Project in 6th grade

1b. What's not working as well? Where are the gaps?

- Need to work more on conversational Hebrew
 - o learned the prayers but don't know what they mean
- Classes were boring
 - o no motivation to learn what was in the binder
 - o the promise of B'nai Mitzvah at some future point "is not a very good incentive"
- Not enough group learning experiences; only games
 - o for example, projects to work on together
 - o should be more fun, group work
- Lack of consistent rewards – no clear idea of how to progress in learning to the next level
- The first year was more fun, more games. The second year was not as fun and the expectations were higher.

- Jumped too quickly from lower to higher expectations
- Raising the bar too much in a single interval. Like a rock climbing wall; if you go at a steady pace, you will succeed. If you go too fast, you can miss and fall.
- Maintain student interest and motivation
 - make sure students are interested early on
 - some friends have dropped out
 - get first-timer's attention and keep it throughout the year
- Poor physical structures can lead to noise and many distractions (such as curtains between classrooms, dogs, etc.)
- Use the outdoors as a learning environment
 - on nice days take advantage of being outdoors
 - some kids don't like being 'locked in'
 - when classes do move outside, kids feel restricted (ex. are told not to laugh and there are not enough comfortable places)
- Some classes get free time, but not all
- Not having enough energy
 - classes are late in the day
 - sometimes fall asleep

2. How can families become more pro-active in choosing a Jewish education for their children and themselves?

- It depends on how your family chooses their congregation; usually look for what's close
- Kids don't usually have "a say" in this choice; your mom picks for you
- Some people like small congregations and small classrooms
- Can depend on the needs of a sibling
- Have to compare and contrast; like the scientific method
- Make the congregations fun
- Have the descriptions in one place
 - have statistics on each school
 - how well kept the school is
- There are many fewer synagogues than churches in Boulder

3. How can we encourage more communication, collaboration and creativity among Jewish education programs in Boulder?

- Not sure that can be done well limiting it to Boulder
 - may not be realistic with only 4-5 congregations
 - like a national organization such as BBYO
- There are now two different confirmation classes. Should there be only one? Encourage collaboration with other congregations.
- The model works well at Nevei Kodesh
- Some teachers are not members of the congregations where they teach
- Synagogues should look at what's working well already and collaborate when there's a reason
 - for example, we did a Chocolate Seder with different congregations and different grades. It was a little louder than when we did it with just our own congregation and people didn't know everybody. I liked the first one better.

- Boulder has a fair amount of synagogues (but not compared to New York, St. Louis, or Washington, DC). Boulder can have small congregations if that's what people want.
- When some members leave and take others with them, it can damage small synagogues
- More social time related to learning, ex. group projects
- Have teachers use more fun, interactive learning techniques
 - o fun, educational games (ex. card games, vocabulary, fast-paced, interactive, teams)
 - o games to warm up, such as circle games
- Take advantage of the mountains and outdoors
 - o go up to beautiful mountain settings and study Torah
 - o camping trips (pro and con). Some found it very inspirational; others found it was not that different from their everyday experience. Make it different and challenging.
 - o use different environments to help you remember
 - o ideal place: the Great Sand Dunes

4a. Is the Boulder community interested in supporting a redesign of Jewish education? Could Boulder be a model of innovation?

- Yes (consensus)
- Yes, it already is
- It's all about doing things differently
 - o Izze, Crocs
- Some people look up to Boulder for its beauty, new ideas, and environment (the Flatirons)
- Would need more resources between communities in the plains and the mountains

4b. Do you see yourself playing a specific role?

- I would play the role of "Necromancer" – bringing back people who have left
- I was first in my group to have a B'nai Mitzvah
- Would like to see congregations get sports teams like lacrosse, or soccer
- There is no one your own age to talk to about your Jewish life



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