

Rethinking Jewish Education

The Role of the Education Committee

By Keren Alpert



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UNION OF AMERICAN HEBREW CONGREGATIONS



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HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

In virtually every congregation with an outstanding school the most talented lay leaders have devoted themselves to education. Change is most dramatic in those synagogues where Temple Boards make the tough educational decisions and where Education Committees do policy and evaluation rather than classroom snacks and fundraising.

Rabbi Eric Yoffie, UAHC Biennial 2001

Engaging students in a lifelong relationship with Torah and the Jewish people is a complex process, requiring the very highest level of commitment and involvement on the part of temple leaders. For this reason, UAHC has developed “*Rethinking Jewish Education: The Role of the Education Committee*” as part of the **CHAI: Learning for Jewish Life** curriculum.

This book contains eight sessions to help the Education Committee address key topics confronting the religious school. Each session includes pertinent materials, resources, and information to guide the committee through its deliberations and decision-making processes. They also include an interactive exercise to encourage the focused involvement and participation of committee members in the negotiations and discussions. The activity for Session Eight, “Best Practices: Visiting Other Schools,” is the school visit itself.

We recommend that prior to each session, committee members receive and review the pertinent information contained in this book. The committee should plan on allocating approximately 30 to 45 minutes to the activities proposed at the end of each session, and the facilitator and/or committee chairperson can choose the most appropriate time during the committee meeting for the exercise to be conducted. An alternative to scheduling the sessions at regular committee meetings might be to group several sessions for consideration at a daylong retreat.

We recommend the use of a skilled facilitator to conduct the sessions. This approach can greatly enhance the quality and flow of discussion, especially since divergent opinions and ideas are likely to be expressed. The facilitator can be a volunteer or a member of your professional staff.

Finally, although the sessions of this book have been ordered to reflect a certain logic and flow, the Education Committee should feel free to schedule the various sessions in a way that prioritizes its most immediate and central needs, thus allowing to address particularly important issues in a timely and useful manner.

INTRODUCTION

*The world endures only for
the sake of the breath of schoolchildren...
Schoolchildren must never be made
to neglect their studies, not even for the building
of the Temple...Every town that has
no schoolchildren will be destroyed.*

Judah the Prince, B. Talmud, Shabbat 119b

The education of children has always been a priority for the Jewish people. At home and in the classroom, parents and teachers have transmitted the values and the practices that have enabled Jewish children to grow into knowledgeable Jewish adults. Implicit in these efforts is the understanding that Jewish survival depends upon our ability to transmit our culture, our heritage, and our vision of *tikkun olam* (the repairing of the world) from one generation to the next.

However, the changed necessities and character of contemporary life have increasingly challenged Jewish schools to find an ideal balance between Jewish learning and each individual's existence within the general society. How to provide a meaningful, effective Jewish education for students in a time-constrained supplementary-school format is a question our congregations constantly grapple with. In this contest, the work of an Education Committee assumes primary importance, as lay leaders and professional staff work together to plan, guide, and oversee the educational activities of congregations and their schools.

The goal of this book is to help congregations establish and/or strengthen their Education Committee. The Education Committee, normally comprised of lay leaders, clergy, and the education director, constitutes a "sacred" partnership dedicated to facilitating the transmission of Jewish knowledge and heritage to the next generation. This committee oversees and supports the work of the religious school, and in some congregations its functions often extend to other educational areas as well.

Although the terms "Education Committee" and "Religious School Committee" are often used interchangeably, the purview of the latter is generally limited to the education of children between grades K-10. However, since education does not only occur during the school-age years, many synagogues have found it desirable to expand the scope of their educational function to include formal and informal education, early childhood, family and adult education. This approach allows synagogues to reach out to a larger number of people within the congregation and to address the needs of all learners within the synagogue community. All material

presented in this book can be used for the work of Education Committees in their broadest sense, or in the more narrowly focused Religious School Committee setting.

To maximize the effectiveness of the Education Committee, this book will provide information and resources that address the key areas of the committee's activities.

Each session is designed to help your congregation:

- identify goals and needs in enhancing the work of the Education Committee;
- explore approaches and methodologies for accomplishing your goals; and
- consider additional factors that might be pertinent to your decision-making processes.

Important factors examined as part of the chosen topics include:

- Size (committee, congregation, and school)
- Role and responsibility of Jewish professionals
- Role and responsibilities of lay leaders
- Interaction and interface with other committees, personnel and lay leaders
- Goals of Reform Jewish education

Session One

STRUCTURING THE EDUCATION COMMITTEE

“The Book of Exodus provides one particularly memorable image of Moses as a team player. As the Israelites travel from Egypt to Mount Sinai, they stop to camp at Rephidim. There, the Amalekites confront them. Moses orders his men to battle, assuring them that he will be standing on a nearby hill with the staff of God in his hand. ‘Whenever Moses held up his hand, Israel prevailed,’ says the Bible, ‘but whenever he let down his hand, Amalek prevailed. But Moses’ hands grew heavy; so they took a stone and put it on each side, supported his hands; thus his hands remained steady until the sun set.’

Israel triumphed in that battle. Whether you’re weary or not, whether you realize it or not, we all need other people to support us and help us accomplish our objectives.”¹

Rabbi David Baron, *Moses on Management*

Who Should Serve?

The important and complex work of an Education Committee is best accomplished by a group of committed individuals who bring their unique blend of talents and perspectives to the task. These typically include:

Education Committee Chairperson: It is customary for a congregational president to appoint a committee chair, in consultation with the rabbi and congregational educator. Ideally, that person should have previously served on the committee.

Committee Members: In medium-size congregations, the committee should consist of ten to fifteen members. This is a general guideline; smaller congregations and larger congregations may differ in committee size. It is essential that the committee be large enough to be diverse, but small enough to be manageable. The members of the Education Committee should be as diverse a group as possible. Members should be:

- parents of various age-group students (typically a parent of an elementary student, a middle school student, and a high school student);
- a member of the Adult Education Committee; and
- a temple member who does not have children in the religious school.

¹ Baron, David with Lynette Padwa. *Moses On Management: 50 Leadership Lessons from the Greatest Manager of All Time* (New York: Pocket Books Press, 1999), p. 117.

Education Director: The education director, or principal, should be an integral part of the committee.

Rabbi: The congregational rabbi, or the rabbi who serves the education program, should sit on the committee in an *ex officio* capacity.

Cantor: Your cantor may also have educational responsibilities, in which case it would be appropriate for him or her to serve on the Education Committee.

Certain Education Committees have active sub-committees. They investigate specific issues and make recommendations to the entire committee. This arrangement allows committee members to be involved in serious research and take responsibility for a specific area of congregational education. Sub-committees also allow an Education Committee to work more effectively, to tackle the various issues of relevance to their congregation. According to specific needs, you may form a curriculum sub-committee, family education sub-committee, *tzedakah* sub-committee, post b'nai mitzvah sub-committee, facilities sub-committee, and accreditation sub-committee.

Some congregations let the chairperson choose the committee members, while others invite volunteers to serve. Another option is to elect committee members through a process similar to the election of congregational trustees.

Liaisons and Board Members: Many committees include other *ex officio* members in order to coordinate activities among the many organizations within the temple community. They may include:

- A liaison to the Youth Committee, so that youth and informal education are also a part of the overall congregational educational program.
- A liaison to the temple Sisterhood and/or Brotherhood, particularly if they provide programs for or financially support the school.
- A liaison to the congregational Board of Directors, particularly if the religious school chairperson does not sit on the board. (Board members may want to refer to the “The Role of Temple Boards in Congregational Education: A Discussion Guide,” *CHAI: Learning for Jewish Life*, New York: UAHC Press, 2002.) In some larger congregations, there is a vice president for education and youth activities.
- A liaison from the Adult Education Committee.

Any task force chairperson, or sub-committee chairperson, should be a voting member of the committee.

Future Leadership of the Committee: Certain committee members should be targeted for future leadership. It is in the school and congregation's best interests to always have a chairperson who has served on the Education Committee. Therefore, consider having the following positions on your committee:

- A vice-chair who will move up to the chairmanship position after the chairperson's term ends (typically after two years). If congregations want to avoid obligating members to a four-year commitment, the vice-chair can be appointed in the second year of the chairperson's two-year term.

- A secretary of the committee. This can be a volunteer member of the committee or a paid employee of the school, such as the assistant to the education director or a secretary. It is crucial that the minutes be taken at every meeting, and it is highly desirable that they be taken by the same person. The minutes should then be distributed to all committee members in a timely manner prior to the next meeting. (If this is not possible, they can be distributed at the next meeting.)
- The immediate past chairperson can be a valuable information source on previous policy history and can provide sound advice. Many congregations have an understanding that the former chairperson sits on their committee, either as a voting or an *ex officio* member.

Faculty Representative: Certain schools have faculty representatives who attend Education Committee meetings. Those congregations that have faculty representatives may have an executive session to discuss salaries, evaluations, and other issues of confidentiality, during which the faculty members are not present. The committee should determine if faculty members are to receive financial compensation for time spent attending committee meetings.

Inter-congregational or Community Schools: These schools may need added members to represent the various partners in the school. Many inter-congregational schools have two chairpersons, who alternate presiding over the meetings and who equitably divide up the duties and report to their own congregational Board of Directors. Community religious schools often have a Federation representative or a representative from the Board of Jewish Education (for larger metropolitan areas) who sits on their board. A typical rule of thumb is to allow for representation on the Education Committee from community partners who contribute funding.

GUIDING QUESTIONS

Does the size of our Education Committee allow it to work effectively?

Is our committee representative of the diversity in our school and congregation?

Have we ensured future leadership in our committee make-up?

Is our committee networked with other related components of our congregation?

Do we want faculty members to be a part of our committee?

If we want faculty participation, how do we handle confidential staff situations?

Structuring Meetings

Agenda Setting: To avoid the “current crisis” approach that can sometimes determine the agenda for committee meetings, it is best to schedule regular monthly meetings (typically with the exception of July) that focus, at least in part, on topics of strategic importance. These should be scheduled in such a way as to enable outcomes to be shared with the board, and to elicit board action, if necessary. You may want to consider the following timetable as a frame of reference for scheduling these topics:

- ☐ August/September (first committee meeting of the year): Review of religious school policies.
- ☐ October: Determining bar/bat mitzvah policies; religious school involvement in worship services. October meetings, generally a time when the fall Jewish holidays are nearly over, are an ideal time to discuss policy intricacies.
- ☐ November: Looking at relationships with other congregational education partners (i.e., adult education, family education, preschool) and how the school can and/or should dovetail its activities with those partners.
- ☐ January: Budget preparation.
- ☐ February: Creating family services.
- ☐ March: Training and retention (this topic should be addressed before hiring decisions are made for the coming year—while the activities and actions related to it are ongoing).
- ☐ April: Curriculum review (this activity is actually ongoing, but must be addressed before hiring decisions are made for the coming year, so that teachers are informed about what subjects they will be teaching).

Jewish Learning

Ideally, learning should be a part of every meeting—especially those of the Education Committee. Professional and volunteer committee members should share the “teaching” responsibilities. Rather than limit learning to a *d’var Torah* at the start of a meeting, it is possible, and often desirable, to devote 10–15 minutes to a topic related to the theme of the meeting, or to an ongoing topic in Jewish education.

Each congregational school has a unique culture, which Joseph Reimer refers to as a “distinctive Torah” in his book *Succeeding in Jewish Education* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1997, p. xv). The Education Committee can play a pivotal role in identifying, refining and modeling that distinctive Torah through its own thoughtful approach to lifelong Jewish learning.

WHAT AM I DOING HERE?

ACTIVITY

Time Required

30 minutes

Goals

Members of a temple Education Committee join for a variety of reasons. Some may just want to be helpful; some may simply like being involved; and others may have children in the religious school and want to advocate for some aspect of their child's education. The purpose of this exercise is to help committee members identify and articulate their reasons for joining the committee; analyze the strengths they bring to the group; and reflect upon what additional talents and skills the committee might seek in soliciting new members.

Step 1: Self Analysis

Utilizing the form on page 15, ask each committee member to answer the following questions:

1. What was my primary reason for joining this committee?
2. What are the specific goals or objectives that I want to accomplish in being a member of this committee?
3. What strengths/talents/skills do I possess that could be helpful to this committee's work?
4. Have I had the opportunity to utilize these strengths/talents/skills during my tenure with the committee?
How?

Step 2: Discussing and Sharing

Divide participants into small groups of up to four people. If the number of participants is too small, committee members can do this activity together as one group. Ask the committee members to share and discuss with their group the answers to the above questions.

Step 3: Group Discussion and Wrap-Up

- a. Ask the committee to identify its members' strengths (i.e., committed, caring parents; strong communications/marketing skills; professional education expertise, etc.).
- b. Ask participants to answer the following:
 - Are there any “gaps” in current member capabilities that the group can identify and focus on in the future? (“We need to look for people who...”)
 - As committee members, do you feel the role you have is one that allows you to use your strengths and skills? If not, how would you like your role to change? What changes could enable you to make an even greater contribution to the work of this committee?

WHAT AM I DOING HERE?

What was my primary reason for joining this Education Committee?

What are the specific goals and objectives that I want to accomplish in being a member of this committee?

What strengths/talents/skills do I possess that could be helpful to this committee's work?

Have I had the opportunity to utilize these strengths/talents/skills during my tenure with the committee? How?

Session Two

DEVELOPING A MISSION STATEMENT

A mission statement describes the purpose and goals of an organization, and reflects the ideology behind its existence and action. A biblical example of mission statement could be the following list of musts for the Jewish people set by the Prophet Isaiah:

*To unlock fetters of wickedness,
And untie the cords of the yoke
To let the oppressed go free;
To break off every yoke,
It is to share your bread with the hungry,
And to take the wretched poor into your home;
And when you see the naked, to clothe him,
And not to ignore your own kin.*

Isaiah 58:6,7

Mission statements are used by all types of civic, social, religious, and business organizations. They help the organizations' members work together and clarify and articulate their overarching goals. "Every mission statement," according to management expert Peter F. Drucker, "reflects three things: the competence of the organization, the outside opportunities and needs, and its commitment to achieving its goal."²

In our context, the mission statement essentially defines what the Education Committee is trying to do or achieve. The mission statement should clearly and concisely state the goals of the Education Committee and/or the religious school in a way that is consistent with the overall goals of the congregation. In addition, the mission statement makes apparent to all the core values of the Education Committee and school.

² Drucker, Peter F. *The Five Most Important Questions You Will Ever Ask About Your Nonprofit Organization: Participant's Workbook* (The Drucker Foundations Self-Assessment Tool for Nonprofit Organizations) (San Francisco: Jossey Bass Publishers, 1993), p. 12.

GUIDING QUESTIONS

Does our school have a clear mission statement?

If we have a mission statement, is it current and does it reflect our reality?

Are all committee members familiar with our mission statement? How can this be accomplished?

Does our congregation have a mission statement?

If the congregation does not have a mission statement, can the school proceed without the development of a congregational mission statement? Why or why not?

Is our education mission statement in keeping with our congregation's mission and vision?

In developing or revising an existing mission statement, the Education Committee should consider the following procedures:

- The Education Committee should appoint a “task force” to prepare a proposed mission statement in consultation with all the partners in Jewish education, including the rabbi and cantor, the education director and the faculty, as well as parents and students. A member of the congregational Board of Directors, who is not also a member of the Education Committee, should be invited to serve on the task force. It is essential that this be a collaborative process, so that the final statement will represent, and be supported by, all concerned constituencies.
- A process for presenting the mission statement to the congregational board should be outlined and approved by the board's leadership. This crucial step will increase the likelihood that the committee's mission statement is consistent with the board's vision.
- After the proposed mission statement has been endorsed by the full congregational Board of Directors, it should appear in all school publications, and be prominently displayed in the school setting. All committee members should know the mission statement and it should be reviewed at the outset of each new year.
- Other mission statements, particularly those recently developed by other schools and congregations, can be very helpful in focusing the committee's thinking on how to construct its own mission statement. The “Ten Goals of Reform Jewish Education” developed by the UAHC Department of Jewish Education can be consulted for further guidance and ideas. (See Additional Resources at the end of this session.)
- Members of the Education Committee need to educate themselves prior to developing the mission statement. The committee may want to acquaint itself with the history of the congregation and its education programs to determine if past decisions reflect a vision that is still relevant today. This critical re-evaluation of the past can be very meaningful for long-time members of a congregation, and

it helps bridge the needs of the newest congregants.

- The mission statement should be the “distinctive Torah” of each congregational school. Just as the Torah is taught, interpreted and reinterpreted by each succeeding generation, the mission statement is something that has been and will be passed down through the leadership of your Education Committee and school. It will be the tangible reminder of your roots and the path your congregation and its education programs will follow.
- Here is a possible methodology to the actual creation of your mission statement:
 1. Establish a task force to conduct the necessary research and prepare a draft statement. Consider including representatives from each constituency group to serve on the task force.
 2. Review the draft mission statement with larger constituency groups (i.e., entire Education Committee, the whole Board of Directors, and parents. It is not necessary to involve students in this part of the process).
 3. Make any pertinent changes.

Corollary to the Mission Statement: The Strategic Plan

The strategic plan emanates from, and is related to, the mission statement, but it serves a somewhat different purpose. Whereas the mission statement describes the Education Committee’s vision for what should be and functions as a concise reminder of the core values of the educational program, a strategic plan—which lists specific goals, objectives and implementation steps—is a roadmap that gives directions on how to translate those values into actions to achieve desired outcomes. A strategic plan is specific, assigns responsibilities and lists the short-term, intermediate, and long-term steps that will help the committee attain its goals. Unlike the mission statement, a strategic plan is more a *process* than it is a document—it is fluid, flexible, and changes over time in response to changes within the congregation, the larger community, and shifts in available resources. Ultimately, the “job” of a strategic plan is to determine how to best actualize the vision of the Education Committee’s mission statement.

Responsibilities for the key players in the process might be outlined as follows:

The Education Director

- ☐ participates in the development of a mission statement;
- ☐ serves as a resource in collecting from other schools and congregations their mission statements to be used as reference material by the Education Committee.

The Rabbi and the Cantor

- ☐ provide input during development of mission and vision statements.

The Temple Board of Directors

- ☐ develops a congregational mission statement if none exists;
- ☐ reviews and approves the religious school's mission statement to make sure that it is in keeping with the congregational mission and vision statements.

Teachers

- ☐ participate as faculty representatives during mission statement development sessions.

Parents and Students

- ☐ participate in any mission statement development.

DREAMS AND VISIONS

ACTIVITY

Time Required

20–30 minutes

Goals

The creation of a mission statement is usually a complex process, generally accomplished over a relatively long timeframe. The mission statement of a religious school's Education Committee must be consistent with the mission statement of the congregation and it needs to be approved by the Temple Board. The purpose of this activity is to encourage Education Committee members to break down the elements of a mission statement and to give expression to their thoughts, views, and aspirations on this subject. The result of this activity can actually be the basic material upon which to build or revise a mission statement.

Step 1

On a blackboard or flipchart paper, write the following list of school operational areas. (Add all extra entries the group may offer.)

- ✓ Hebrew language
- ✓ Basic Judaic Studies
- ✓ *G'milut chasadim*
- ✓ General Environment (of the school)
- ✓ Community-Building

Step 2

Divide committee members into small groups and assign each group one of the above topics to discuss. (More than one topic can be assigned, if necessary.)

Step 3

Instruct committee members to “dream and envision.” Ask them to complete the sentence, “In the ideal congregational school, [selected topic] should be...”

Step 4

Ask the groups to share with one another their conclusions on what the role of their selected topic area should be in an ideal congregational school setting.

Conclusion

These responses should be recorded and can be used as the basic material for an eventual mission statement (or in the assessment of an already existing mission statement).

Additional Resources

TEN GOALS OF REFORM JEWISH EDUCATION

The UAHC Department of Education has set forth the goals listed below. These guidelines foster the deepening of the Jewish experience and knowledge for all Jews in order to strengthen faith in God, love of Torah, and identification with the Jewish people through involvement in the synagogue and participation in Jewish life. We believe that Judaism contains answers to the challenges and questions confronting us daily and that only a knowledgeable Jew can successfully discover these answers.

Linked to these goals, the programs of our religious schools embrace experience and learning activities, encouraging children, young people, and adults to become...

- Jews who affirm their Jewish identity and bind themselves inseparably to their people by word and deed
- Jews who bear witness to the berit, the “covenant” between God and the Jewish people through the practice of mitzvot, “commandments,” as studied in the Torah and the classic Jewish literature it has generated and as interpreted in light of historic development and contemporary liberal thought
- Jews who affirm their historic bond to Eretz Yisrael, the “Land of Israel”
- Jews who cherish and study Hebrew, the language of the Jewish people
- Jews who value and practice tefilah, “prayer”
- Jews who further the causes of justice, freedom and peace by pursuing tzedek, “righteousness”; mishpat, “justice”; and chesed, “loving deeds”
- Jews who celebrate Shabbat and the festivals and observe the Jewish ceremonies that mark the significant occasions in their lives
- Jews who esteem their own person and the person of others; their own family and the family of others; their own community and the community of others
- Jews who express kinship with K'lal Yisrael by actively seeking the welfare of Jews throughout the world
- Jews who support and participate in the life of the synagogue

Additional Resources

SAMPLE MISSION STATEMENT

Below are excerpts from a mission and vision statement of Temple Israel of Memphis, Tennessee, revised and adopted in February 2001. They consist of a series of statements with a paragraph of explanation for each. The selected samples specifically mention the education goals of the temple.

Temple Israel will enable People of All Ages to Worship. Prayer is vital to being Jewish, and Temple Israel—like all congregations—places a high priority on providing its members with meaningful opportunities to worship. Young people should be active participants in the worship life of the congregation. The prayers of young people should be heard not just in youth-only worship experiences, but also in all worship activities of the congregation. Young people should be encouraged to worship, and worship decisions should take the spiritual needs of young people into account.

Temple Israel will be a Safe Place for Youth. Young people cannot be expected to achieve healthy development if they do not feel safe in their situation. If Temple Israel is to become a place where youth gather, then attending to issues of safety—physical, spiritual, social, emotional—must be the highest priority.

Temple Israel will foster Jewish Identity. Through their involvement in Temple, young people should feel good about themselves as Reform Jews, and comfortable living Jewishly in the larger community. Every effort directed towards youth should take its Jewish identity-building potential seriously.

Temple Israel will impart Jewish Knowledge. When young people make the transition into adulthood, they should do so with a solid foundation of Jewish knowledge acquired at Temple. Teaching should be the primary objective of all that Temple does for youth, and content should be delivered in age- and developmentally-appropriate manners. Young people should possess at least a basic knowledge of: prayer, Hebrew as the language of the Jewish People, Jewish ethics, the importance of Tikkun Olam, our link to K'lal Yisrael, ancient and modern Jewish history, and the cycles of Jewish life.

Temple Israel will transmit Jewish Life Skills. It is vital that young people make the transition into adulthood feeling good about themselves as Reform Jews. It is also vital that they leave with a core of Jewish knowledge. But, most importantly, young people need to be able, when they move on into adulthood, to live lives enriched by Judaism, and to make life decisions guided by Jewish principles. Temple should give young people the tools, skills and passion to make their lives uniquely and energetically Jewish. For those young people with the potential and passion to serve the Jewish community, Temple should encourage and direct them towards Jewish professional fields.

Opportunities for Youth. Temple Israel should do all that it can to enable young people to have information about and access to as many unique Jewish opportunities outside of the Temple's particular youth programs as possible. Existing systems that encourage camp attendance, youth program involvement, Jewish travel, and travel to Israel should be celebrated and expanded. New opportunities should be cultivated. An ongoing method for communicating these opportunities to youth and families should be developed.

A Commitment of Resources. As part of its commitment to youth, Temple Israel should commit significant resources to ensure that appropriate personnel are retained to manage programs and services; and, appropriate programmatic space and supplies are made available for use in programs and services.

Session Three

SELF-ASSESSMENT AND FEEDBACK

Performance is the ultimate test of any institution... The discipline of thinking through what results will be demanded of the nonprofit institution can protect it from squandering its resources.

Peter Drucker³

Even the best-conceived and most relevant plans are meaningless without a way to evaluate their effectiveness in achieving stated goals and objectives. Once a strategic plan (typically of three- or five-year duration) is developed, the committee should review the plan and the school's progress, concentrating on individual parts of the plan over the course of the year's committee meetings. Such a process can often uncover new challenges and/or opportunities that were not apparent in the original planning process. UAHC congregations can avail themselves of the NATE accreditation process as a way to assess the school's needs and work on improving and refining the educational program. Local Bureaus of Jewish Education or regional educators' organizations often offer assessment tools. Other schools have developed ways to assess the school's strengths and improvement opportunities through surveys of committee members, teachers, parents, students and the professional staff. Many congregations have a sub-committee of the Education Committee to handle the assessment procedure. Your Education Committee can select one of the many options available for assessing and evaluating its efforts.

Once assessment results are known, the Education Committee can develop plans for improvement and for taking advantage of new opportunities. (For example, the "problem" of overcrowded classes might point to the need for more creative uses of space or new construction, but it also indicates the presence of a large parent body upon which to draw for volunteers and for whom parent-education programs might be very attractive.)

Responsibilities for the key players in the process might be outlined as follows:

The Education Director

- ☐ provides input during self-assessments and strategic planning and attends selected meetings of any pertinent sub-committees, if applicable;
- ☐ gathers as much documentation as necessary for a formal assessment, whether done professionally or in-house.

³Ibid., p. 39.

The Rabbi and the Cantor

- ☐ provide input during planning sessions.

The Temple Board of Directors

- ☐ reviews the strategic plan and helps provide resources to implement it;
- ☐ creates and refines congregational structures to help implement the strategic plan;
- ☐ sets limits on the school's strategic plan, when necessary.

Teachers

- ☐ participate in any assessments of the school;
- ☐ serve as a faculty representatives to strategic planning sessions or mission statement development sessions;
- ☐ give feedback to the committee and the education director regarding the progress of the strategic plan.

UAHC Regional Educator

- ☐ functions as a valuable resource for congregations that want input and recommendations regarding their strengths and areas of their educational program that need retooling.

Parents and Students

- ☐ Participate in any assessments of the school.

SCHOOL EVALUATION

ACTIVITY

Time Required

35 minutes

Goals

Based on the scenario provided below, the Education Committee members will share their opinions regarding who should conduct an evaluation of the religious school. This exercise will enable participants to point out and discuss the advantages and disadvantages of choosing certain people or organizations to perform the evaluation. The exercise will show that there are several possible models from which to choose in deciding how to conduct an evaluation and that, although none is ultimately impeccable, each of these models offers some advantages and disadvantages. Whichever model is chosen, planning can help provide needed information and background to make the process a meaningful one.

Step 1

Divide committee members into four groups of up to five people. The facilitator or a member should read out loud the following scenario.

SCENARIO

All of the members of the Education Committee agree on conducting a school evaluation as a first step in developing an improvement plan. Although there is unanimity regarding the need for the evaluation, there is quite a divergence of opinion as to how to conduct it. Some of the questions that members of the committee have regard:

- who should do the evaluation and get opinions from the education director, the faculty, the students and the rabbi; and
- who knows enough about the evaluation process to look at the curriculum, schedule, programming, and tone of the school.

Step 2: Groups' Roles

Each group will represent an “opinion” and will argue in favor of that particular point of view in order to convince the other groups to adopt its method for conducting the evaluation.

Group One thinks that the members of the Education Committee should conduct the evaluation, surveying all of the stakeholders.

Group Two wants the director to do the evaluation—because school directors know all of the players and understand Jewish education.

Group Three wants to use a Jewish Education Agency. They suggest asking the National Association of Temple Educators or the Board of Jewish Education Federation Agency to do the evaluation.

Group Four advocates the use of a private consultant who does evaluations in industry or one who works with public schools in the community.

Step 3

Come to an agreement as a committee about how you would begin an evaluation procedure.

Session Four

SETTING SCHOOL POLICIES

*When you hit a child for disciplinary purposes,
hit him only with a shoelace...*

*Until he reaches the age of six, do not accept a child as a
student. From that age and up accept him, and stuff
him with Torah knowledge...*

*The number of pupils that should be assigned to each
teacher is twenty-five. If there are fifty
students, we install two teachers. If there are forty
students, we appoint an assistant to the teacher...*

B. Talmud, *Bava Batra* 21a

Why does a religious school need policies? Couldn't our school simply deal with the issues as they come up?

School policies are not a modern invention! Rav, also known as Abba Aricha, a third-century Babylonian scholar, is quoted in the Talmudic tractate *Bava Batra* discussing such policy issues as classroom discipline, the appropriate age of students, class size and the need for classroom assistants. In setting policies for our Jewish schools, we are actually following an ancient and hallowed Jewish tradition.

Explicit written policies allow all education stakeholders (the congregational leadership, rabbi, educator, cantor, faculty, students and parents) to know what is expected of them. Clear and consistent school policies (as opposed to situational or ad hoc policies) establish a safe, predictable, and just environment for all students.

Typically, school policies deal with a host of issues. They can range from policies on bar and bat mitzvah, confirmation and graduation requirements, classroom size, attendance, dietary regulations, member and non-member privileges, scholarships, discipline and collection and disbursement of *tzedakah*.

GUIDING QUESTIONS

Does our committee know about the long-held Jewish tradition of setting school policy?

How do we communicate our school policies to the members of our Education Committee?

Are they familiar with them?

Do we handle policy infringements consistently or on a case-by-case basis?

Do our parents and students know what our school policies are? How is this accomplished?

Do any of our policies need to be changed?

Are there any additional policies that need to be considered?

Are the other members of our congregational community aware of our policies? How?

Do all members of our congregational community know whom to contact first regarding classroom discipline?

The following are some important principles to keep in mind when determining the Education Committee's approach to school policy:

- **The Education Committee is responsible for setting all school policies with the approval of the congregation's Board of Directors.** At the beginning of every school year, it is the responsibility of the Education Committee chairperson to review the policies with the committee. If there is no central repository of school policies, then the chairperson and the education director should review all previous documentation, including committee meeting minutes and parents' handbooks in order to compile a complete set of known school policies. These should then be presented to the committee, which can either approve them or alter them to create a new set of policies. In addition, new policies are sometimes established in response to a request from the education director, rabbi or Temple Board of Directors. In any case, school policies should be endorsed by the congregation's board before being adopted by the Education Committee and communicated to the school community.
- **It is the responsibility of the committee chairperson to ensure that all members of the school committee have a notebook of current school policies.** Education Committee members are responsible for knowing all school policies and for keeping that information readily available.
- **The Education Committee should establish and enforce penalties for school policy infringements.** However, disciplinary problems should first be solved in the classroom; if their gravity requires it, they can be brought to the education director's office, and ultimately to the Education Committee meeting.

Responsibilities of the key players in the process might be defined as follows:

The Education Director

- ☐ sends out written school policies prior to every school year to all parents, faculty and Education Committee members;
- ☐ incorporates discussion and explanation of school policy during teacher in-service sessions at the beginning of the year, and at the faculty meetings during the year;
- ☐ when appropriate, explains to students current policies and any changes;
- ☐ communicates by mail any policy changes to parents, faculty and Education Committee members;
- ☐ communicates with parents in case of variances in school policies of any kind;
- ☐ interacts with all students who have been sent to the office in an appropriate manner;
- ☐ approves all letters about class policies that are distributed or mailed out by teachers;
- ☐ informs the Education Committee in a timely manner about any major policy violations;
- ☐ gives input to the Education Committee about needed changes and additions to the current policies.

The Rabbi

- ☐ provides assistance, when requested, in dealing with situations regarding families who are not adhering to school policies;
- ☐ is also responsible for being intimately familiar with religious school policies.

The Temple Board of Directors

- ☐ approves school policies, if necessary, according to congregational policies;
- ☐ refers all school policy issues to the education director.

Teachers

- ☐ communicate school policies to students and parents;
- ☐ inform the education director of any and all classroom policies.
- ☐ understand, support and follow school policies.

Parents and Students

- ☐ read and retain policy information that is distributed;
- ☐ communicate school policies to their children.

GIVE US A BREAK!

ACTIVITY

Time Required

40 minutes

Goals

Parents who want to raise and educate their children as Jews face formidable challenges, many of which play out in the congregational school setting. These challenges often include conflicts about attendance at religious school versus sporting events; balancing Jewish family observance with secular world interests and demands; negotiating differences between the Jewish partner and a non-Jewish parent or extended family. The purpose of this session is to sensitize members of the Education Committee to the existence of these issues as they affect the behavior of students.

Step 1

Ask the committee members to share with the group some of the challenges that today's Jewish families face in making the commitment to a Jewish education for their children. (It would be ideal if committee members were willing to share their own, personal challenges.) Write these on a blackboard or flipchart.

Step 2

Ask for two volunteers to play the parts of a parent and temple educator. For each issue on the list previously created during Step 1, have two volunteers hold a dialogue, one person representing a parent asking for special consideration or an exception to school rules, and the other representing the educator.

Step 3

Ask the committee members if these scenarios gave them any new insights into parental needs and expectations. If so, how might these insights affect the setting of school policies in the future? Are there any "special" situations that could be dealt with on a more immediate basis?

Additional Resources

SAMPLE RELIGIOUS SCHOOL POLICIES

The following are sample policies on various topics from several UAHC congregations.

Academic Progress

Progress reports are sent home twice per year (three times per year for Confirmation Academy students). These reports provide both students and parents a graphic profile of the student's strengths as well as areas which need improvement. Parents or teachers may request a conference to supplement the information given. Copies of the progress reports are kept in the school office to help determine eligibility for Bat/Bat Mitzvah and Confirmation.

A student must successfully complete the requirements of each course in which s/he is enrolled. Make-up work for excessive absences and incomplete assignments must be completed satisfactorily before a student will be eligible for promotion to the next grade.

Temple B'nai Israel, Oklahoma City, OK

Attendance

In as much as we have so little time and so much to teach, it is required that pupils attend Religious School regularly. Frequent absences create difficulties in keeping up with the classwork and may discourage incentives for future progress. Also, excessive absences tend to lower the status of the Religious School in the eyes of the child and may negate all our efforts to raise the school's standards. Students are expected to attend a minimum of 80% of all classes scheduled. Please make every effort to have your child in school unless he/she is ill.

Students who are chronically late or excused early MUST make arrangements for additional class time. Failure to meet attendance requirements may result in loss of credit and delay of Bar/Bat Mitzvah. Three early dismissals equal 1 absence. Three tardies equal one absence.

Main Line Reform Temple, Wynnewood, PA

Bar and Bat Mitzvah Requirements

All students, at the time of Bar/Bat Mitzvah, must be registered and actively participating in Religious School. Each Bar/Bat Mitzvah candidate must be enrolled in and have met attendance requirements in a Religious School class or in an educational program approved by the Director of Education...Viewing the Bar/Bat Mitzvah as a step in the Jewish maturation process and not as the termination of one's Jewish studies, all Bar/Bat Mitzvah candidates are expected to be enrolled in the Confirmation Academy.

Main Line Reform Temple, Wynnewood, PA

Behavior and Discipline

We at Temple Beth-El believe that students are entitled to a wholesome classroom atmosphere conducive to effective learning. We encourage good communication among the Education Director, the teacher, the students and the parents; therefore, parents are asked to become involved when disciplinary problems arise. The Kedushah Kingdom Classroom Brit of Ethics describes the positive behavior and environment encouraged in the Religious School. Please read and discuss the Brit with your children. The following guidelines have been adopted to deal with disciplinary situations. In cases where the situation is deemed more serious, one or more of these steps may be omitted.

1. When a teacher determines that a student has gone beyond reasonable bounds of classroom behavior, the teacher will:
 - ☐ Render a verbal warning to the student;
 - ☐ Discuss the situation privately with the student;
 - ☐ Complete a behavior notification form about the incident, which will be given to the parent.
 - ☐ Make a written notation of the warning in the Ma Kara "What Happened Today" form;
 - ☐ Inform the Education Director verbally and in writing the day the incident occurs.
2. If the student continues to create a discipline problem,
 - ☐ The student and teacher will meet with the Education Director to discuss the situation.
 - ☐ The parents will be called by the teacher or the Education Director to inform them of this meeting.
 - ☐ A follow-up letter will be mailed home and the parent will be asked to sign and return it.

- ☐ If necessary, the Education Director will meet with the parents and the student to try to resolve the problems.
3. If all efforts to resolve the problem fail, the family and student will meet with the Rabbi(s), Education Director and a representative of the Religious School Committee.
- ☐ The Rabbi(s) and Education Director will recommend an appropriate action that may include, but need not be limited to, the following: expulsion, suspension from attending Religious School classes, suspension of the right of the student to Bar/Bat Mitzvah or Confirmation.
 - ☐ Additional independent study, tutoring at the parents' expense, or other alternatives may also be recommended.

Temple Beth-El, San Antonio, TX

Dress Code

Children should never wear clothing or accessories to religious school that would be unacceptable at public school. In addition, because ours is a religious school, students should refrain from wearing t-shirts or other items that might have inappropriate language or be otherwise disruptive or inappropriate in a synagogue environment. If a child is inappropriately dressed for religious school, parents will be called from the office to pick the child up and an absence will be recorded.

Moriah Family School (Conservative congregation) Deerfield, IL

Homework and Testing

When homework is given, it will be meaningful and realistic. Students are expected to complete all homework assignments.

Tests may be given as a part of the learning experience and to help teachers determine whether the learning goals are being attained.

Temple B'nai Israel, Oklahoma City, OK

Registration and Membership

A child may be registered to attend our religious school if he/she is three years old by September 1st of that school year. Each year parents are asked to register their children for school by August 1st. A school fee for each child is payable at the time of registration. Parents who register their children after August 1st will pay somewhat higher fees unless they are new members who have joined the temple after the August 1st deadline. Families must be in good standing with the temple in order to register their children for school.

Congregation Etz Chaim, Lombard, IL

Safety: Early Dismissals

A student requesting early dismissal must present a written request from a parent and have it signed by Rabbi Barry Diamond, RJE, or other authorized Religious School personnel. Teachers are to send the child to the office at the time specified. Parents may pick up children in the office; no child waits alone in our parking lot. Parents should not pick up children in their classrooms during school hours.

Temple Emanu-El, Dallas, TX

Safety: Staying in the Building

No student may leave the Temple or Synagogue buildings for any reason except under the personal supervision of his/her teacher between the hours of 9:30 and 12:15 on Sundays and during Hebrew School hours during the week.

Temple B'nai Israel, Oklahoma City, OK

Visitors

The Temple encourages parents to take an active interest in the school. Parents should feel free to visit the school and to observe classes. We ask parents to comply with the following rules which pertain to such visits:

- ☐ Parents are asked to call their child's teacher prior to a visit. There are certain times when a class visit is inappropriate due to special programming or particular curricular needs.
- ☐ In order to avoid distractions and disturbances during the class, parents are asked to arrive when class begins or during break time. Parents are asked to remain until the end of the class.

- ❑ Only students registered in the religious school may attend. Please do not bring friends or relatives to class.

Main Line Reform Temple, Wynnewood, PA

Who Can Attend Religious School

The purpose of the Religious School of Temple Beth-El is to provide a Jewish religious education for Jewish children. A Jewish child is defined as the child of at least one Jewish parent, who is being raised exclusively as a Jew and is not formally identified with any other religion.

Temple Beth-El, San Antonio, TX

Session Five

ADVOCACY: TEACHER RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION

The teacher is the text the student will never forget.

Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel

Classroom teachers are often the most direct transmitters of Jewish values, history, and ethics to our children. The part-time nature of their position in the religious schools, however, often results in a turnover rate that makes it difficult to maintain standards and continuity of teaching. Education Committees should be aware of the need to develop a plan for recruitment that will assemble the highest caliber of faculty.

Retention of faculty can be more difficult than recruiting new faculty, but ultimately has a greater importance. Teachers who are trained in the school's culture can help develop curricula, function as part of a faculty team, and work more effectively with students and their parents. Retention is the solution to the time-consuming and disruptive need of having to constantly find new teachers.

GUIDING QUESTIONS

What is our staff retention ratio?

Why do teachers leave?

Do we conduct faculty exit interviews?

What are we doing as a school to increase our retention rate?

What are our modes of communication regarding possible new faculty?

What is our policy on hiring congregants as teachers?

Here are some points to keep in mind when addressing teacher recruitment and retention:

- **The Education Committee can be a public-relations tool for the school.** The committee needs to articulate consistently and coherently the intrinsic and extrinsic (salary and benefits) rewards of teaching in its school. It is in the best interest of the school to retain its finest teachers. This will eliminate the need for later teacher recruitment and new teacher training. The benefits derived from retaining teachers are well worth the time and effort spent on developing retention policies.
- **Several avenues can be explored in searching for qualified faculty.** First, congregants and other staff should be encouraged to provide leads on possible candidates to the education director, who is generally responsible for hiring. Many congregations in large cities can find applicants through local Boards of Jewish Education. (In some cases, these congregations may be limited by local agreement to hiring only through the Boards of Jewish Education.) Finally, some congregations have found it desirable to employ congregants as faculty in their schools. Each option offers both challenges and opportunities, and must be assessed in light of the congregational school's specific situation.

Responsibilities of the key players in the teacher recruitment/retention process might be outlined as follows:

The Education Director

- ☐ follows up on faculty leads in a timely manner;
- ☐ uses prospective faculty as substitutes or as assistants prior to hiring;
- ☐ writes bulletin articles and takes part in any other public events (meetings, congregational functions, Shabbat services) which portray the school as a pleasant place to work, and stresses the importance of Jewish teaching;
- ☐ helps coordinate teacher appreciation Shabbat events;
- ☐ meets with faculty regularly to determine areas of the school and/or its administration that can help increase teachers' job satisfaction;
- ☐ interviews prospective faculty members; (See Additional Resources at the end of the session for Sample Teacher Application form and Sample Teacher Interview Questions)
- ☐ prepares and distributes teacher contracts in a timely manner. (See pp. 51-53)

The Rabbi

- ☐ informs the education director of any potential new faculty candidates;
- ☐ helps publicize the value of teaching in a religious school.

The Temple Board of Directors

- ☐ works with the membership committee to include in the membership forms questions regarding the

applicant's interest in a teaching position;

- ☐ establishes the budget for teacher salaries and benefit packages;
- ☐ helps coordinate teacher appreciation events;
- ☐ reviews exit interviews when faculty leave.

Teachers

- ☐ inform the education director about potential new faculty;
- ☐ meet with the education director to talk about job satisfaction and discuss ideas for improvement, and inform the education director if job satisfaction is low;
- ☐ suggest solutions to increase faculty retention.

RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION

ACTIVITY

Time Required

40 minutes

Goals

The following scenario will certainly raise many questions, which should result in informative discussion. The discussion provides a way for the director of education to hear the priorities and opinions of the committee members. Furthermore, it provides the committee members with a view of the complexity of the decision-making process that an educator faces on a daily basis.

Step 1

Divide the Education Committee into three groups. Give each group a copy of the following scenario and then read the scenario aloud to the entire committee. Explain that each group will be confronting different questions based on the scenario. At the conclusion of the discussion, each group should ask a spokesperson to read the group's responses to the given questions.

SCENARIO

Mrs. Rosen teaches fifth-grade Hebrew. She is a middle-aged teacher who loves Jewish education, and feels that her task is very important. Her lesson plans are always turned in ahead of the lesson, and always carefully thought out. She has a behavior modification program in class, and always keeps treats and rewards on hand. Her students do consistently well on the yearly Hebrew Assessment Test, which must be taken prior to enrolling in the next level of Hebrew.

Yet, the students just don't like Mrs. Rosen. They feel that she isn't "fun" enough. The students complain about having to do too many boring reading drills. Some of the parents complain about her strictness in class and old-fashioned methods.

The education director is torn between being proud and happy for the excellent learning results and the desire to turn Hebrew school into a positive Jewish experience for all students. The education director observes Mrs. Rosen in class and offers suggestions for improvement. She even attends an in-service designed for Hebrew teachers. Nevertheless, complaints are still coming in.

Step 2

Each group will now examine the situation presented in this scenario from different angles: the different questions assigned to each group will help lead the discussion.

Group 1: How much should the decision to retain Mrs. Rosen be affected by the availability of Hebrew teachers? Should Mrs. Rosen be retained?

Group 2: How important is it whether the students are “having fun” or not if good learning results are achieved? After all, they spend with Mrs. Rosen only two hours a week. Are positive Jewish experiences and increasing Jewish knowledge mutually exclusive? Give examples?

Group 3: Is the director of education doing enough in this scenario? What would your Education Committee advise the education director to do?

SAMPLE TEACHER APPLICATION FORM

When interviewing potential candidates for teaching positions, the following form should be completed prior to the interview:

CONTACT INFORMATION

Name:

Address:

Phone Numbers

Home:

Work:

Is it okay to contact you at this number? ☐ yes ☐ no

Cell:

Is it okay to contact you at this number? ☐ yes ☐ no

E-mail address:

Do you check your e-mail regularly? ☐ yes ☐ no

Where is it best to contact you?

GENERAL EXPERIENCE

List work experiences outside of Judaic teaching:

Name of workplace	Position	Years worked	Duties	Supervisor
1.				
2.				
3.				
4.				
5.				

JUDAIC TEACHING EXPERIENCE

List schools in which you have taught:

Name of school	Position	Years worked/Grade/ Subject	Supervisor
1.			
2.			
3.			
4.			
5.			

JUDAIC EDUCATION

Where did you attend religious school?

Have you completed any Judaic, Hebrew, or other education courses in high school or university? Which ones? Where?

Are you a certified teacher here, in Israel, or in another country? _____

Are you a certified or accredited religious school teacher? _____

Have you participated in Jewish day camp(s) or overnight camp(s)? Which ones? In what capacity?

Were you active in any Jewish youth movements? Which ones? In what capacity?

Have you been to Israel? List the dates and the nature of your visits.

TEACHING PREFERENCES AND ABILITIES

Do you have any specialty skills, such as music, arts and crafts, drama, dance, special education?

What are your subject and grade preferences?

REFERENCES

List at least three references who have either supervised you or worked with you as colleagues:

Name	Address	Phone	Relation to you
1.			
2.			
3.			

SAMPLE TEACHER INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

You can tailor an interview for a potential faculty member by using any combination of the following questions.

1. Tell me about your Jewish religious practice now.
2. Who was your best Judaic or Hebrew teacher? Why?
3. Why do you want to be a Jewish teacher in this school?
4. Suppose you are a kindergarten teacher on the first day of religious school. A father brings in his five-year-old daughter and she is crying and clinging to his legs. Class has already begun. You have an assistant. What do you do?
5. You overhear two of your fifth-grade students taunting one of their classmates, who is overweight. What do you do?
6. You are teaching a high school class. One of the students blurts out that he has decided that there is no God and therefore no reason to be in religious school. You know for a fact that this child has lost a grand parent in the past month. What do you do or say?
7. Every time you pass out a quiz or test, Naomi says she has a headache and needs to call home. What do you do?
8. Jacob, your second-year Hebrew student, is struggling. He tries to answer questions, but he consistently forgets the vowel sounds and confuses letters. He is falling behind the rest of the students in the class and he doesn't like to read aloud anymore. Any time you do let him read aloud, the pace of the class slows down and the other children get bored and restless. You have also noticed that Jacob's reading of English is behind his peers. What steps should you take?

Session Six

TEACHER SUPERVISION

If the current teacher of a class of children teaches at a certain pace and there is another teacher available who teaches at a faster pace, we do not remove the first teacher and appoint the other one in his stead. For if the second teacher were to be appointed, he might become lax in his work, arrogantly believing that his teaching abilities are beyond compare and he will never be dismissed.

B. Talmud, *Bava Batra* 21a

Just as in the time of the earliest Jewish schools, teachers vary in ability, expertise, and style. The message from Bava Batra is that we can accommodate a whole range of teachers in our schools, but they need adequate supervision. This ensures that our educational goals are being reached in the classroom. In addition, supervision helps us serve our students better and encourages the professional growth of our faculty.

Although teachers are generally committed to the welfare of the school and its students, they too need direction, encouragement and opportunities for growth. These can best occur under the rubric of supervision.

Supervision presents teachers with the opportunity to learn and grow from a coaching relationship with a master teacher—the school education director. At its best, supervision is an ongoing process that enables the educator to provide the teacher with specific suggestions about improved effectiveness, based on private discussions and classroom observations. Ideally, the supervisory relationship can become a partnership that enriches both parties and improves the quality of the Jewish school and the effectiveness of learning.

GUIDING QUESTIONS

How does our education director supervise teachers?

Is there a regular system of supervision followed by the education director?

Would our school benefit from a mentoring or peer-coaching program for our faculty?

Do we have examples of prescriptive programs that can be used when teachers encounter difficulties?

The following are some of the principles that should guide the supervisory process:

- **The education director has primary responsibility for supervising faculty.** This includes regular observation in the classroom, both formal and informal, with subsequent written and/or verbal feedback. In addition, the education director is responsible for creating and implementing a prescriptive plan for teachers.
- **The education director should regularly observe all classrooms, formally and informally.** Although students' behavior may improve when the education director walks into the classroom, the act of occasionally dropping in unannounced gives the education director good information about the teachers' style, possible student behavior problems, and some clues as to how the materials are being used in a classroom setting. New teachers should be visited early in the year and often.
- **All issues regarding teacher supervision should be referred to the education director.** If any matter concerning a teacher comes up during an Education Committee meeting or Board of Directors' meeting, the matter should first be referred to the education director. The education director then discusses the specific issue with the faculty member, and can decide to schedule an in-class audit. Sometimes it might be necessary to call a conference with students and/or parents to determine which steps should be taken—including deciding not to rehire the teacher. Only after accurate fact-checking, and after establishing the state of the matter, can the education director bring this issue in front of the Education Committee for further discussion.
- **With permission of the education director, other members of the community may observe in the classroom, but not for purposes of supervision or rehiring.** It is imperative that all members of the committee agree to spend time visiting classrooms every year so that they can acquire a working knowledge of how the classroom teachers function and see examples of how the educational material is presented.
- **Congregations should assure long-term opportunities for growth and improvement to all teachers.** Some congregations offer a mentoring program or a peer-coaching program for new teachers, where they partner with experienced Jewish and/or secular teachers who are members of the community. This involves some classroom visitation, which facilitates a dialogue between an experienced and a novice teacher, in order to improve the skills of the novice teachers. These observations do not

necessarily include the education director, but are a staff development tool offered for the benefit of the faculty.

Responsibilities for the other key players in the teacher supervision process might be described as follows:

The Rabbi and The Cantor

- ☐ as members of the faculty, the rabbi and cantor should allow the education director to observe any classes. In the confines of the school, the education director supervises the rabbi and the cantor. These periodic in-class audits allow the education director to observe students' problems and to check the progress of the curriculum.

The Temple Board of Directors

- ☐ refers all teacher supervision-related issues to the education director.

Teachers

- ☐ set a time for a formal observation on a day when they are comfortable with the lesson being taught;
- ☐ take advantage of any mentoring or peer-coaching programs, particularly for teaching new material, dealing with students with learning difficulties, or if it is their first year teaching.

Parents and Students

- ☐ discuss any classroom problems first with the teacher, and then with the education director.

THE EDUCATOR PRESENTS

ACTIVITY

Time Required

30–45 minutes

Goals

Teacher supervision is a direct responsibility of the school's educator. This exercise presents an opportunity for the temple educator to share with the committee the process for regular, ongoing supervisory activity, the challenges she/he may encounter in discharging this responsibility, and any recommendations the educator may have regarding beneficial assistance from the committee or from other temple personnel (rabbi, cantor, board president, etc.).

Questions for Discussion

The educator may utilize the following questions in preparing the presentation:

1. How often is the education director in the classrooms—formally and informally?
2. What are the benefits and disadvantages of both formal and informal classroom observation?
3. Are there regularly scheduled formal observations of faculty members? How are these set up and conducted?
4. If there are regular classroom observations, are they done for purposes of evaluation, staff development and/or to make decisions about rehiring?
5. What, if anything, is the education director obliged to share with the committee about classroom observations?
6. Are Education Committee members allowed or encouraged to observe in classrooms?
7. What is the role of an Education Committee member if he or she does formally observe a classroom?
8. Are your faculty members observed enough, too much or not enough?

9. If observations are not occurring frequently enough, who can assist the education director in either observations or in taking on the director's other duties during religious school so that he or she is free to be in the classrooms?

Session Seven

TEACHER TRAINING

*As iron sharpens iron,
So do two scholars
sharpen one another's mind.*

B. Talmud *Taanit* 7a

Teacher training provides an opportunity for classroom teachers to grow as professionals and as Jews. Since many who teach in our congregational school classrooms have no credentials in education or Judaic training, congregations should create opportunities to demonstrate to our faculty our commitment to their continuing education. Even those who possess credentials in these essential areas should be encouraged to engage in continuing teacher training. The best teachers are often the most committed learners.

Teacher training programs are usually available in these formats:

- In-service workshops or programs conducted at the school. These focus on a specific topic or subject, and are generally single-event programs.
- Subsidies for college-level or post-graduate level classes.
- Attendance at professional conferences. These might include NATE (National Association of Temple Educators) and/or CAJE (Coalition for the Advancement of Jewish Education).
- Community-supported teacher training programs. These are becoming increasingly available as Federations and Bureaus of Jewish Education address the teacher shortage crisis in congregational schools. (See *The Teachers Report: A Portrait of Teachers in Jewish Schools*, by Adam Gamoran, Ellen Goldring, et al. New York: Council for Initiatives in Jewish Education (CIJE), 1998.)

Over the past few years, national Jewish educational organizations such as JESNA (Jewish Education Service of North America), CIJE, and CAJE have studied the problem of teachers' preparation in Jewish schools. One of the key findings of the research is the serious lack of training for teachers who serve in our congregational schools. According to the CIJE report, few supplementary school teachers are "fully prepared as professional Jewish educators" (p.10). Only about 46 percent of supplementary school teachers have received formal training in the field of education, and very few have had any formal college-level or post-graduate Jewish education. It has become increasingly clear that those who are entrusted with the Jewish education of our children

must themselves be given opportunities to obtain the skills and knowledge needed to accomplish this mission.

GUIDING QUESTIONS

Are we providing consistent teacher education opportunities to our faculty? Which ones?

How are we choosing topics for teacher education?

How are we determining the success of our past teacher education programs?

Are we making the best use of our resources by inviting faculty to attend special programs that may be of professional interest to them?

Are we adequately funding teacher education?

How can we improve attendance at teacher education events?

Are education opportunities meeting the needs of our congregational faculty?

What was the role of our rabbi and cantor in previous teacher education programs?

In this environment, the Education Committee might support the teacher training process as follows:

- **Suggesting topics for future teacher training.** These should include topics of pedagogy or Jewish learning that would be helpful to the school teachers. This should be discussed during Education Committee meetings, so that the education director will receive frequent input about the perceived needs. The school committee may also suggest relevant conferences for teachers and/or appropriate speakers or seminar leaders the faculty could benefit from (and provide sources of funding).
- **Setting appropriate policies for compensating and subsidizing teacher training.** Some congregations also pay their teachers for attending regular staff in-services. Many congregations significantly subsidize teacher education opportunities, including CAJE conferences, mini-CAJE conferences, city-wide Jewish education days, UAHC Education Kallot and adult education opportunities within the temple. To encourage teacher attendance, certain congregations provide meals and childcare. Some congregations increase regular salaries after teachers attend a certain number of Jewish education courses. (Your congregation may want to utilize *The Video Guide to Jewish Teaching* for in-service training. Available from the UAHC Press, it contains valuable learning segments on lesson planning, classroom management, and family education.)

Responsibilities of other key players could be described as follows:

The Education Director

- ☐ determines areas of greatest need among faculty, in terms of teacher training;
- ☐ sets dates for three or four teacher in-services per year on relevant topics;
- ☐ publicizes all opportunities for Jewish teacher education early and often;
- ☐ makes ancillary arrangements for the teacher in-services (meals, childcare, building set-up, honoraria);
- ☐ conducts evaluations to determine the usefulness of the program and solicits future topics from the attendees.

The Rabbi and the Cantor

- ☐ attend in-services as learners, thereby demonstrating the clergy's commitment to lifelong Jewish learning;
- ☐ teach portions of in-services, upon request;
- ☐ notify education director of teacher training opportunities.

The Temple Board of Directors

- ☐ provides the funds for teacher training, possibly to include the cost of the training, a stipend for teachers to attend, and ancillary costs such as meals, transportation, and childcare. Smaller congregations, and isolated congregations, may have to pay a greater percentage of their budget on teacher training—while larger metropolitan areas may have more Jewish teaching resources, either through their own congregational resources or a Board of Jewish Education;
- ☐ seeks to include the teachers in any relevant special programs that are brought in for other members of the congregational community. These can include, but are not limited to, programs for outreach, Sisterhood, Brotherhood, adult education, social action, or ritual and worship. Either the Education Committee chairperson or the education director should be informed of all special programs that could have a faculty tie-in.

Teachers

- ☐ attend in-services with an open minded and a willing attitude;
- ☐ turn in evaluations;
- ☐ suggest helpful teacher training topics to the education director;
- ☐ share learning from conferences with other faculty members.

REACHING HIGHER

ACTIVITY

Time Required

45 minutes

Goals

Many Jewish professionals acknowledge that there is a critical shortage of qualified teachers in our congregational school classrooms. A wide range of factors contribute to this situation, including the part-time nature of the job, relatively low pay scales, lack of benefits, and the relatively low status of the position both in the congregation and in the community. The purpose of this session is to provide Education Committee members with an understanding of the commitment and dedication with which most religious school teachers view their work, and to raise the level of support provided to the faculty for professional training and development.

Step 1

Give each committee member a large index card and ask them to write down (only on one side of the card) their answer to the following question:

- In your opinion, how important is the job of the religious school teachers in our classrooms? Why?

Then, ask them to write on the other side of the index card their answer to this second question:

- Would you encourage your child (grandchildren or other relatives) to enter the field of Jewish education? Why, or why not?

Step 2

Instruct the committee members to start by answering Question 1 and then move to the second question.

Step 3

Show the film, *The Video Guide to Jewish Teaching*. (If your temple does not own a copy of this film, you can order one through UAHC Press by calling the toll-free number 1-888-489-UAHC.)

Step 4

Discuss the following questions. (Notes should be taken to capture the key points of the group's discussion. These may be helpful in future planning on this topic.)

- Did you learn anything new about people who teach in congregational schools from this video?
- Has viewing the video changed any perceptions you had about religious school teachers or their training needs?
- Who teaches in our school? What training have they received to prepare them for this role?
- Do you have any ideas or suggestions about how to encourage or support new teachers?
- Do you have any ideas or suggestions about how to encourage or support senior teachers?

Additional Resources

SAMPLE TEACHER CONTRACT

[Revised edition of "Teacher's Agreement" published in *The Jewish Educational Leader's Handbook* (Denver, Co.: A.R.E. Publishing, 1998)]

The religious school of _____ Temple is happy to engage _____ as a religious school teacher for the 2002-2003/5763 school year in accordance with the following conditions of employment:

A. Teacher's Responsibilities

The teacher is responsible for the fulfillment of teaching duties according to the satisfaction of the Director of Education.

1. The teacher shall: (a) adequately prepare for classes; (b) plan lessons before entering the classroom; (c) submit lesson plans as requested by the Director of Education; (d) be present in the classroom at least 15 minutes before class begins; (e) arrange the classroom so as to make it conducive to learning; (f) supervise students throughout the school hours, including breaks during or between classes; and (g) meet with students or with parents as necessary before or after class sessions.
2. The teacher shall: (a) assist the school efforts to strengthen cooperation between home and school, and shall participate in assemblies, services, special activities and school programs whenever his/her students are involved; (b) participate in school faculty meetings and parent-teacher conferences, and (c) abide by the school calendar.
3. The teacher shall prepare reports for the administration of the school as requested by the Director of Education, including the timely preparation of the twice-yearly student evaluations. Monthly paychecks will be withheld until student evaluations are submitted.
4. Every teacher is expected to increase his/her ability as a teacher of Judaism. The minimum requirement for all teachers is attendance at in-service sessions offered by our school. Teachers are further encouraged to enroll in Judaic Studies classes offered through our community and/or education courses offered at an institution of higher education. At the discretion of the Director of Education, partial tuition grants may be provided for other educational programs if funds are available.

5. Every teacher shall prepare an introductory letter about themselves, and their expectations of student learning and parental involvement, to be mailed to parents within the first month of the school year.

B. Appointment

1. Teachers are employed on an annual basis for the full school year, but are paid on a per-session basis. Paychecks are distributed on the first of every month from October to June.
2. Teachers will be paid for attending in-services outside of religious school hours. In addition, teachers will be paid for attending programs that occur outside of the religious school session.
3. Under special circumstances, however, a teacher may be engaged for less than a full school year, and if that is the case, it will be indicated below.
4. Appointment is contingent upon sufficient enrollment in the assigned class. If, by the fifth school session, the Director of Education judges enrollment not to be sufficient to justify the teacher's appointment, any agreement pursuant to this offer shall be deemed terminated. The teacher shall be paid on a per-session basis for sessions taught and shall be paid for teacher in-service sessions.

C. Termination of Employment

A teacher may be discharged at any time during the school year if, in the judgment of the Director of Education, the teacher has failed to fulfill his/her responsibilities stated above. However, before discharge a teacher may request the opportunity to have a hearing before the Subcommittee on Personnel of the Religious Education Committee, at which the Director of Education will be present.

D. Personal/Sick Leave

Each full-year teacher shall be entitled to two paid sick/personal days of leave for every day of religious school that they teach. Teachers who are appointed for one semester only shall be entitled to one paid sick/personal day.

E. Salary and Teaching Schedule

Class _____ Days and Hours of Class _____

Salary: _____ per session X _____ sessions

Total yearly salary _____

Salary per month _____

Teacher's signature

Date

Education Director's signature

Date

Please return this contract to the school office by:

Additional Resources

TEACHER TRAINING TOPICS AND RESOURCES

The following is a list of possible topics for teacher training.

Jewish Content Topics

- Integrating holiday curriculum with other curriculum pieces (life cycle, Jewish history, values, Torah, Holocaust, Israel, prophets)
- The Jewish calendar
- Making each Torah portion relevant to today's children
- Serving the needs of the children of intermarried couples
- Teaching appropriate God concepts to all ages (faith development)
- What do Jews believe?
- What is the role of the Messiah in Judaism?
- History of Reform Judaism
- Teaching Jewish moral values
- The development of Jewish law (halachah)
- Jewish life cycles
- Teaching prayer (*t'filah*)
- How to teach Israel to students who have never known a world without it
- Methods for teaching about the Holocaust and anti-Semitism
- Sex in the Texts (New York: UAHF Press, 2001)
- Who wrote the Tanach?
- Elijah in the Jewish tradition

Pedagogy (Teaching Skills) Topics

- Improving classroom discipline
- Asking better questions
- Teaching to multiple intelligences
- Teaching children with special needs
- Making report-card comments substantive and helpful
- Designing effective lesson plans
- Involving families in our classrooms
- Dealing with family crises (death, divorce, illness)
- Making classrooms conducive to learning
- Using time effectively in the classroom
- Utilization of classroom assistants or madrichim
- Making Hebrew reading fun
- Tricks for teaching Hebrew grammar

Development of the Faculty as a Team

- Our goals as a school and a congregation
- Planning for future school programs
- Developing and revising the curriculum
- Investigating textbooks and materials

Resources for Teaching Training

- UAHC Regional Educator
- UAHC Reform Judaism online course
- Torah at the Center (published by UAHC Department of Jewish Education and available online at www.uahc.org. Click on Department of Jewish Education.)
- Torat Hayyim (available online at www.uahc.org under Adult Jewish Growth)
- Shabbat Table Talk (published by UAHC, available at www.uahc.org)

- CAJE (Coalition for the Advancement of Jewish Education) yearly conferences and mini-conferences
- Central Agency or Bureau of Jewish Education (if you live in a city without a Central Agency or a Bureau of Jewish Education, contact one in the nearest town)
- Association of Supervision and Curriculum Design (online at www.ascd.org)

Session Eight

BEST PRACTICES: VISITING OTHER SCHOOLS

“ ‘Best practice’ in my view refers to the quality of educational practice that is observable from careful observation. It is not the same as ‘effective education’—or the producing of the highest average level of achievement. If [a] program be ‘best practices,’ it is because the teaching and learning within it are judged to be of high quality, because the goals that it sets for itself are largely met...Best practice programs are a joy to observe. Their presence helps restore our confidence in what it is possible to achieve in a synagogue context.”

Dr. Barry W. Holtz, *Best Practices in Supplementary School Education*

We are often so intimately involved in the day-to-day running of our school that it becomes difficult to create new visions or to think about new ways to accomplish our goals. One way to keep a fresh perspective about the work the Education Committee is doing is to visit other schools to learn what they do well and how they do it.

Here are some suggestions for creating a best practices school visit protocol for your school:

- **Determine which schools the committee members should visit.** Your team might be interested in visiting congregations that are having particular success with a specific curricular topic (e.g., mid-week Hebrew, teaching prophets, teaching about God) or a specific program area (family education, teacher in-services, post b’nai mitzvah education).
- **Select the visit team.** Members should include: the Education Committee chair and/or vice chair; the education director; the clergy; any education sub-committee chairs; a faculty representative, and the future leadership of the committee.
- **Prior to visiting any other school, every member of the committee should be required to do a site visit at their home congregational religious school.** This should include time in four classrooms of various ages, attendance at multi-age or family programming, time spent “shadowing” the education director to see what the duties of that job are, and attendance at a faculty in-service or meeting.
- **Prepare a budget to cover the costs of this team trip to the selected congregations.**
- **Develop a list of question that will guide the team members in the school observation process.**
- **Arrange for the site visit.** The education director should call the education director of the chosen congregation, find out more about its programs, and agree on a mutually convenient time for the site visit to take place. The education director then provides the members of the visiting team with the

names and titles of all the staff members with whom they will be meeting.

- **Review the visit.** The visiting team should reconvene, share notes, and develop a report that articulates what they have learned. If appropriate, the committee can then discuss programs or educational modes or models that can be emulated, and prepare a report for the committee. A combined meeting between the Education Committee and the temple Board of Directors could provide an excellent opportunity for sharing the results of the site visit.
- **Promptly send a thank-you letter to the leaders of the host congregation.** A letter signed by the education director, rabbi(s), Education Committee chairperson and temple president should be mailed within a week of the site visit.

GUIDING QUESTIONS

Do our committee members have a detailed understanding of the schedule, curriculum, and administration of our school?

How can we best prepare our team members for what they may see at other schools?

Should we only visit UAHC congregations?

What process will we employ to determine which “best practices” are feasible to implement in our own school?

Additional Considerations

In certain cases, the site visit may take more than one day throughout the course of the year. If your congregation is either starting a school or planning dramatic changes to the existing one, you may want your visits to provide more in-depth information. In such cases, in addition to classroom visits and educator and teacher interviews, committee members might “shadow” the education director, meet with the committee chair and possibly the committee of the congregation, arrange for attendance at a monthly Education Committee meeting, and attend a faculty in-service.

Perhaps the questions developed for the visit can be given to the host congregation ahead of time in order for it to prepare copies of helpful materials to hand out to the visiting guests. In addition, the visiting congregation should offer to pay for any costs associated with the visit, including copy costs, meals, etc.

Additional Resources

SAMPLE QUESTIONS FOR “BEST PRACTICES” VISITS

The following questions are adapted from “A ‘best practice’ supplementary school should be a place...” in *The Best Practices Project: Supplementary School Education*.

- How are educational goals set and measured?
- How are all stakeholders involved in the setting of educational goals?
- Do students continue their Jewish education after bar/bat mitzvah?
- Is there a written curriculum that provides real learning content and allows for differences among students?
- What are the educational backgrounds of the teaching staff? Do the teachers seem motivated, and is the staff stable over time?
- Is there sufficient “experiential” learning built into the school program?
- What is the role of parent/family education in the school community?
- Is staff supervision handled on a serious, professional basis? Is supervision understood to be a regular part of the educator’s responsibility?
- Does the congregation provide the necessary means for teachers and the educator to participate in professional development opportunities?

*“Religious school is the key that opens the door
to the grand adventure of Jewish learning and
Jewish life. We will not rest until our schools are
a place where our children hear God’s voice
and see Torah as a tree of life.”*

— Rabbi Eric Yoffie, UAHC Biennial Boston 2001



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