

Key Facts:



Complementary educational change is a multi-dimensional process. These efforts employ various approaches and foci for the change process. Some emphasize visioning and goal setting, and some focus on curricular reform. Professional and lay leadership is the foundation of some efforts, while others concentrate on changing the culture of schools and synagogues. Regardless of their emphasis (or starting points), the various approaches to change typically address multiple dimensions. The initiatives that take explicitly systemic approaches to change encompass all of the dimensions: vision and goal setting, content and methodology, personnel and institutional culture.



Systemic change processes produce powerful impacts in a variety of domains. Based on responses and feedback provided by key stakeholders (including education professionals, synagogue lay and professional leaders, teachers and students), systemic change initiatives are particularly effective in: developing professional and lay leaders' skills and effectiveness, increasing the skills and knowledge of classroom teachers, enhancing students' experiences in the classroom, and markedly increasing enthusiasm, energy and pride among lay leaders and professionals. Additionally, the changes and collaborative processes introduced have been incorporated in the congregations' broader cultures and ways of operating.



Rigorous evaluation and assessment is an essential component of successful complementary educational change initiatives. Ongoing formative assessment and reflective practice aimed at guiding improvement increases the effectiveness of these educational change initiatives. Evaluation introduces high levels of accountability to the schools and offers a model of responsible implementation to the entire community.



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This report is a product of the Publications and Dissemination Project (PDP): An initiative of JESNA's Learnings and Consultation Center (LCC).

The complete study is available online at:

www.jesna.org/j/pdfs/pdp3.pdf

JESNA's Publications and Dissemination Project is funded by a generous grant from the Mandell L. and Madeleine H. Berman Foundation.

Making Jewish Education Work: Complementary School Change Initiatives

Lessons Learned from Research and Evaluation in the Field



Publications and Dissemination Project (PDP)



Complementary School Change:

- Numerous local and national initiatives have been launched in recent years to change and improve complementary (congregational/community) schools.
- Change efforts have focused on schools, congregations, local communities and national networks. Some efforts have been operating for over a decade while others are currently in the pilot phase.
- Initiatives are both denominationally based and cross-denominational.
- As a result of complementary school change initiatives, researchers and knowledgeable experts have observed a “new energy and optimism” in the field, citing new ideas, curricula, initiatives, strategies and experimentation, with dozens of schools actively engaged in a process of reinvention.
- Change initiatives in Jewish education have drawn heavily upon the large body of literature that is grounded in the fields of business and education, including the works of Peter Senge, John Kotter and Michael Fullan — and have begun to produce a growing body of scholarship about these processes within the Jewish community (Aron, Weinberg, Koren & Sales, Cohen and Lynn-Sachs).

- **There are more than 2000 Jewish complementary schools in North America**
- **230,000 students are learning in those complementary schools**
- **“Attendance at supplementary schools for 2+ days a week for 7+ years exerts a discernable, positive impact on Jewish identity.” Steven M. Cohen, NJPS Report 3, 2004**

Lessons Learned

By offering a synthesis of lessons learned from evaluations conducted by JESNA’s Berman Center of 10 school change initiatives, and by contextualizing and extending these evaluations with insights from the general field of organizational and educational change and the growing literature in the Jewish field, the report is both a product of, and an advocate for, collaborative systemic change efforts.

The primary focus of this report is *process* rather than impact. While the report is not meant to be an exhaustive or detailed guidebook about complementary school change, it provides important insights that should inform and enlighten professionals and volunteers engaging in change and improvement initiatives.

Selected Conclusions and Recommendations:

Creating a shared vision and a sense of collectivity among key stakeholders is essential.

- Respondents from congregations that successfully cultivated key stakeholders’ buy-in reported many benefits including: lay leaders’ greater understanding of the educational issues facing their schools and increased familiarity with their schools’ programs; greater effectiveness of lay leadership in performing their roles within the education committee and in the broader congregational context; and cohesive leadership.
- Opportunities for professionals and lay leaders to learn together are particularly beneficial to the visioning and community-building process.

Systemic initiatives are more likely to succeed.

- Introduction of new *content* (curricula) and/or new *methods* (pedagogy) can create “ripple effects” positively affecting selection and use of educational materials by teachers, engagement and attitudes of students, and parental involvement.

- The professional support and training that teachers receive (from supervisors/guides as well as peers/colleagues) is critical to their successful implementation of new curricula and methods.
- Teachers (and schools) benefit from communication and peer support from others adopting the same curricula.

Teachers’ participation in professional development opportunities advances their practical abilities, provides access to new models and theories of education, and enhances feelings of competence, confidence, credibility, professionalism and career satisfaction. This is particularly important given that the transience of educators is a key challenge to effective change.

- Insuring that professional development opportunities are also made available for senior educators, school directors, and rabbis (who play a pivotal role in these processes) is critically important.
- The efficacy of curricular reform is dependent on on-going support to maintain changes in teachers’ thinking and behaviors.
- The impact of professional development programs reaches beyond the participants. Change initiatives raise community awareness and commitment to professional development.

Collaboration is both a process and an outcome of the work of complementary educational change.

- The involvement of a broad-based representation of the leadership of the institutions within which the school functions bridges what for some schools is a chasm between the synagogue and its school (or the Rabbi and the Education Director and their respective lay structures). This aspect of the change process is often best facilitated by a highly skilled outside consultant.
- Communication is essential. The potential of change initiatives is greatly affected by how clearly and frequently information is shared, and by the consistent involvement of key stakeholders (or lack thereof).