

JECEI'S VISION OF EXCELLENCE

Foundational to JECEI are ideas and values about Jewish life expressed as the “JECEI Lenses.” The JECEI Lenses are ways of viewing and experiencing our lives and the world:

Masa – (Journey) – reflection, return and renewal
B'rit – (Covenant) – belonging and commitment
Tzelem Elohim – (Divine Image) – dignity and potential
K'dushah – (Holiness) – intentionality and presence
Hit'orerut – (Awakening) – amazement and gratitude
D'rash – (Interpretation) – inquiry, dialogue, and transmission
Tikkun Olam – (Repair of the World) – responsibility

The JECEI Lenses inform our vision and approach to Jewish early childhood education as we integrate them with constructivist, progressive, emotionally responsive, and Reggio inspired theories and practices in our work with children, families, and schools. This integration is expressed as JECEI's Principles of Excellence. These principles guide practice to help educators and lay leaders identify and construct excellent educational experiences in Jewish early childhood education.

JECEI'S PRINCIPLES OF EXCELLENCE, INDICATORS, AND EVIDENCE

The JECEI Principles of Excellence are intended to guide practice to help educators and lay leaders identify the type of educational experiences that reach high standards in Jewish early childhood education. These five principles focus on the following:

- Principle #1 – Relationships
- Principle #2 – Vision
- Principle #3 – Learning Community
- Principle #4 – Shared Leadership
- Principle #5 - Environment

These principles of excellence are ideally present and experienced by all on a daily basis throughout a JECEI school's system.

The principles of excellence are broad. Therefore, they are concretized as 14 indicators which in turn are further depicted through evidence that can be observed and/or documented. For example, the indicator that focuses on teachers attending to the social and emotional growth of families is experienced as teachers greeting families and children at the beginning and end of the day with respect and warmth. This piece of evidence reflects the emphasis on relationships that is a principle of excellence. The

indicators with their specific pieces of evidences tell us that the principles of excellence are being carried out.

Indicators and Evidence

The indicators and evidence were devised for two purposes: 1) articulate what educational excellence looks like in a JECEI Jewish early childhood school making it possible for a school to adapt these behaviors and 2) provide a basis by which a school can be accredited and then branded as a JECEI school of excellence.

The sections below list the five principles along with the accompanying indicators and evidence that make these principles explicit. All 14 indicators need to be present for a school to be considered excellent in working with children 0 - 5. Only in one case, is a special indicator developed for 0 – 2 year old classrooms.

The evidence itself is shared in some of the more important ways of articulating each indicator, but not necessarily all the possible ways. The expectation is that schools of excellence will have at least 5 – 6 pieces of evidence for every indicator.

PRINCIPLE #1 – RELATIONSHIPS

Learning and growth are best done in the context of individual and group relationships. Hence, partnerships are central to the JECEI approach. Respect, trust, and safety are necessary to propel children and adults beyond their comfort zone to strive for excellence.

Indicator #1 is either #1A for Children (2 – 5 years) OR #1B for Infant/Toddler Classrooms

Indicator #1A Children (2 – 5 years) - Children take responsibility for themselves and others.

- Children help each other.
- Children carry out classroom routines.
- Children manage their own behavior
- Children use others to get help
- Children explore relationships through interacting with other children
- Children engage in tzedakah (acts of righteous), chesed (acts of kindness), and mitzvot (commandments/deeds) that demonstrate caring for others.
- Children care for the school environment.
- Children are involved in helping others in the Jewish and general community.

Indicator #1B Infants/Toddlers – Teachers use relationships as the primary way of supporting the development of the infant/toddler’s self-awareness, autonomy, and self-expression.

- Teachers encourage infants/toddlers to express themselves through verbal imitation and expanding on their sounds and words
- Teachers encourage infants/toddlers to interact with adults and other children

- Teachers provide verbal interaction and aural stimulation for infants/toddlers
- Teachers expose infant/toddlers to Hebrew as well as other languages
- Teachers balance holding infants/toddlers with times for moving around on their own
- Teachers verbal and physical interactions reflect warmth and care
- Teachers create an environment that is calming and predictable
- Teachers take the infant/toddler's lead individualizing experiences around their interests and developmental level
- Teachers provide opportunities for children to learn through experimentation including trial and error
- Teachers provide infant/toddlers with opportunities to experience Jewish symbols, food, and music
- Teachers encourage infant/toddlers to help each other.
- Teachers help infant/toddlers manage their own behavior
- Teachers are responsive to the social/emotional as well as physical needs of infant/toddlers
- Teachers interact with infant/toddlers in a variety of ways and places including on the floor
- Teachers are planful in helping infant/toddlers make transitions throughout the day.

Indicator #2 - Teachers and families are partners in nurturing the social and emotional growth of community members - children, families, and staff.

- Teachers greet families and children at the beginning and end of the day with respect and warmth.
- Teachers use home visits to understand children and families' needs, interests, and home life.
- Teachers and families exchange information about children on a regular basis, daily for infant/toddlers.
- Teachers are responsive to the social and emotional needs of children and families.
- Teachers provide feedback to families on a regular basis.
- Teachers share the strengths of children and joyful moments of learning and growth with parents on a regular basis.
- Teachers focus on supporting the parent child relationship.
- Teachers model desired ways of listening and interacting with children.
- Teachers engage families in co-creating the classroom and school community.
- Teachers and families respect issues of confidentiality.
- Teachers and professional leadership make referrals to families when needed.
- Teachers and professional leadership create an environment where families feel comfortable seeking support for parenting and family issues.
- Teachers collaborate with families to support the social and emotional needs of children.
- Teachers feel that their social and emotional needs are supported.

Indicator #3 – The professional leadership (director/2nd tier) facilitates the flow of information and exchange of feedback.

- Communication is experienced as:
 - respectful
 - warm
 - ethical
- The communication structures consist of:
 - Schedules, agendas, and notes for staff meetings
 - Schedules and agendas for family/teacher meetings
 - Staff bulletins
 - Display areas in shared space
 - Bulletin boards in each classroom
 - School newsletters
 - Teacher emails and websites
 - School emails and websites
 - Daily or weekly updates from each classroom
 - Yearly program evaluation that families answer
 - Yearly program evaluation that teachers answer
 - Vehicle for ongoing feedback e.g. suggestion box
- Regular communication systems, reflective supervision, and meetings exist among the following:
 - Professional leadership team members
 - Professional leadership and teachers
 - Professional leadership and lay leadership
 - Lay leadership and professional leadership with the host institution
 - Professional leadership, lay leadership, and teachers with JECEI
 - Teachers and parents
- Teachers experience the communication system as helpful, consistent, and comprehensive.
- Families experience the communication system as helpful, consistent, and comprehensive.
- Teachers and professional leadership are accessible.

PRINCIPLE #2 - VISIONING

The school expands its vision to incorporate the JECEI approach. Judaism becomes the foundation for all of the school's interactions with children and families. The vision then guides the quality of interactions and all other aspects of the school system. A shared vision among school, family, host institution, and community is essential to establishing and furthering the JECEI approach.

Indicator #4 – Key stakeholders in the community are involved in creating a vision integrating JECEI's lenses and principles of excellence.

- The visioning process integrates the JECEI lenses and principles of practice with the school's history, culture, and context.
- The visioning process includes families, teachers, professional leaders, lay leadership, and host institution and may include community leaders and funders.
- Stakeholders can articulate the vision and give examples of its existence in the school.
- The school's vision statement is found in multiple places e.g. school's entrance, parent handbook, staff handbook.

Indicator #5 - The professional leadership and teachers grow in their understanding of themselves as Jewish educators in early childhood.

- Professional leaders see themselves as Jewish educators.
- Teachers consider themselves to be Jewish educators.
- The teachers are committed to a career in Jewish education.
- The teachers are involved in lifelong Jewish learning.
- The teachers are involved in studying early childhood education including how to work with families.
- Teachers view Jewish life as core to their work.
- The teachers value Jewish learning as essential to their work.
- Teachers attend to the social and emotional needs of both the individual and group as part of the learning experience.

PRINCIPLE #3 - LEARNING COMMUNITY

Learning is a way of transmitting foundational Jewish ideas that inspire all generations. Learning draws on the learner's life experiences – intellectual, social and emotional, physical, spiritual, and cultural – in dialogue with Jewish and general sources of knowledge and the understandings of others. Therefore, based on its vision, the school creates a learning community that is interactive and joyful, cultivating curiosity and interests and fostering the habit of Jewish learning at all ages. Through the school's learning community, children and adults gain knowledge and skills to experience, dialogue, and generate meaning about life within the school, home, and beyond.

Indicator #6 - Children explore life through the JECEI lenses.

- Children share their feelings, ideas, and experiences with their peers and adults.
- Children raise questions and problem solve together.
- Children have access to a variety of materials for play, projects, and other learning experiences.
- Children work on projects in small groups.
- Children explore and celebrate together moments of blessing, transition, and thanks.
- Children explore relationships through interacting and reflecting.

- Children co-create with teachers learning experiences that connect with the stories and ideas in torah and Jewish sources to daily classroom experiences.
- Children explore with others the why as well as the how and what of Jewish symbols and practices.
- Children's learning from one another is physically visible.
- Children learn about their identities and uniqueness e.g. developmentally, culturally.
- Children explore and interpret ideas and feelings through art and nature experiences.
- Children reflect on documentation to further learning.

Indicator #7 - Families are partners in the creation of the learning community.

- The school facilitates experiencing and exploring parenting.
- The school facilitates Jewish learning and living.
- Parents feel part of and responsible for the well being of the school community.
- Parents feel connected to the Jewish community.
- Parents feel that they may have made long term friends.
- Families have at least one adult who participates in some form of Jewish learning.

Indicator #8 - Teachers document children's learning.

- Teachers regularly engage in the process of observation and documentation as a way of facilitating learning and growth.
- Teachers use documentation as a tool for reflecting on and planning the learning experience.
- Teachers' documentation of children's learning occurs in multiple forms.
- Teachers' documentation incorporates multiple perspectives and voices of children, parents, teachers, and others as appropriate.
- Teachers document children's exploration of Judaism and Jewish life.
- Teacher observation and documentation of children's work are part of assessment.
- Teachers use documentation to help children reflect on their ideas and questions.
- Teachers use documentation to celebrate accomplishments and growth.
- Teachers use documentation as a vehicle for communicating with parents about their child's learning experience.
- Teachers use documentation as a way of making visible the child's learning experiences throughout the time that they are in the program.

Indicator #9 –The teachers implement the JECEI principles of excellence - an integration of the JECEI lenses with Reggio inspired, constructivist, progressive, and emotional responsive theories and practices - in their work in the classroom and with families.

- Teachers create a culture of inquiry in the classroom; this cycle involves dialogue, reflection, investigation, and action.
- Teachers make Jewish learning foundational by exploring the ideas, values, symbols, stories, and practices embedded in the JECEI lenses.

- Teachers use classroom experiences, rituals, and routines to explore and celebrate moments of blessing, transition, and thanks.
- Teachers co-create learning experiences with children that connect ideas in torah and Jewish sources to daily classroom experiences.
- Teachers explore with children and families the why as well as the how and what of Jewish symbols and practices.
- Teachers dialogue with children and families about Jewish life.
- Teachers utilize Jewish sources, materials, artifacts, symbols, food, music, and Hebrew to deepen children's learning experiences.
- Teachers utilize art and nature experiences with children to explore and interpret ideas and feelings.
- Teachers share with families and colleagues evidence of the lenses into all aspects of teaching and learning.
- Teachers get to know children and their families by gathering stories and symbols about their histories, hopes, and dreams.
- Teachers demonstrate respect for others by listening to and interacting with them in caring, non-judgmental, and ethical ways.
- Teachers actively engage in reflective processes individually and collectively to grow their self-awareness and ability to relate to others.

Indicator #10 - Ongoing paid professional development is aligned with the school's vision.

- Professional Leadership leads the school in understanding and implementing a Jewish and constructivist approach to learning.
- Professional Leadership plans professional development offerings that further the teachers' understanding and implementation of a Jewish and constructivist approach to learning that is family centered.
- Professional Leadership provides dedicated, contracted time for teachers individually and collectively to study, experience, and discuss Judaism and early childhood educational theories and practices.
- Professional Leadership co-creates with each teacher an individualized professional development plan.
- Teachers participate in ongoing professional development through a variety of formats and media.
- Teachers learn from and with other teachers in the school.
- Teachers use the JECEI lenses and principles of practice to think about and reflect on their professional and personal experiences.
- Professional Leadership shares books, articles, and materials with Jewish and/or early childhood educational content with the teachers.
- Professional Leadership and teachers use protocols for studying books and articles.
- Professional Leadership collaborates with the Jewish and early childhood communities in providing professional development opportunities.
- Professional Leadership seeks resources from the host institution and other sources to support ongoing professional development.

PRINCIPLE #4 - SHARED LEADERSHIP

Professional (director/2nd tier) leadership and lay leadership work together to direct, implement, advocate, and sustain excellence in Jewish early childhood education. The professional and lay leadership share in the responsibility to reach out and partner with families, teachers, and the host institution to transform vision into educational excellence.

Indicator #11 - Lay Leadership partners with Professional Leadership to champion the JECEI change process.

- Lay and Professional Leadership take responsibility for supporting and implementing the JECEI change process.
- A JECEI team consisting of professional and lay leadership meets regularly to support the JECEI change process.
- Lay Leadership is connected to the host institution board.
- Lay Leadership seeks resources to support the work of the JECEI change process.
- Lay Leadership partner with Professional Leadership to build a school community.
- Lay Leadership participates in policy and decision making based on research and the JECEI lenses.
- Lay Leadership is committed to sustaining the JECEI approach to Jewish early childhood education.
- Lay Leadership participates in recognizing and celebrating moments of school growth, transition, and accomplishment.
- Lay Leadership strengthens linkages between the school and other Jewish institutions.

Indicator #12 - Professional leadership designs and maintains structures that support daily operations in alignment with the school's vision.

The school's vision informs a wide range of practices:

- Lay leadership making decisions about policies and funding.
- Professional leadership making decisions about personnel, professional development, and resource allocation.
- Marketing
- The intake/enrollment process.
- Orientation of new families and staff.
- Teachers planning and practice.
- Interactions among children and adults.
- Involvement with the Jewish and local communities.
- Program design and learning experiences for children, families, and teachers.
- How to engage families and lay leaders
- The relationship with the host institution.

The school has the following structures in place:

- Professional Leadership consists of both a director and at least one 2nd tier leader.
- Teachers have scheduled time to meet and plan with co-teacher(s) and supervisors.
- Professional Leadership designs a program that is coherent and consistent with its vision.
- Professional Leadership respects others (children, families, and teachers) by listening to and interacting with them in welcoming, caring, non-judgmental, and ethical ways.
- Professional Leadership initiates repair of relationships with all the members of the school community.
- Professional Leadership recognizes and celebrates moments of growth, transition, and accomplishment.
- Professional Leadership is intentional about what and how procedures and processes of welcoming children, families, and teachers are carried out.
- Professional Leadership cultivates relationships and partnerships with a wide circle of Jewish and general community members.
- Professional Leadership facilitates the process of informing, encouraging, and linking families, both children and adults, to lifelong learning opportunities and community building experiences and resources.
- Professional Leadership develops transition plans for children and their families when they enter the program, as they move from infant/toddler to preschool age programs, and beyond preschool.
- Professional Leadership implements a system for reflective supervision as a way of deepening the work and holding teachers accountable for their work.
- Professional Leadership designs a program evaluation plan that incorporates the views of teachers and parents.
- Professional Leadership facilitates the flow of information and exchange of feedback (see Indicator #3).
- Professional Leadership creates a professional development plan aligned with the school's vision (see Indicator #11).

Indicator #13 – Professional Leadership partners with teachers to carry out the vision of the school.

- Teachers are involved in decision making about the school's direction.
- Teachers take responsibility for implementing the school's vision in the classroom.
- Teachers initiate or take leadership roles that advance the school's direction.
- Teachers hold themselves accountable in partnership with leadership for implementing the school's vision.
- Teachers are given increasing opportunities to broaden their responsibilities and deepen their roles.
- Teachers take on leadership roles by coaching and mentoring peers.

PRINCIPLE #5 - ENVIRONMENT

The school environment – the people, place, and tone – embody the relationships, vision, and learning community necessary for school transformation. The environment is intentionally constructed to promote learning, growth, and Jewish living. It fosters a deep sense of welcoming and belonging, of dignity and potential of each individual to contribute to the school community. The voices of children, families, teachers, lay and professional leadership, the host institution, and the surrounding area it serves are visible throughout the environment.

Indicator #14 - The environment reflects the school's vision.

The school's environment sets a tone that supports relationship and community building.

- The school's vision and identity are visibly articulated and represented.
- The school's engagement with Jewish life is evident through the environment.
- The identity and voices of children are evident through photos, stories, artifacts, and other items throughout the school.
- Families', host institution's, and local and Jewish communities' identities are evident through photos, artifacts, and other appropriate items
- The space is designed to be welcoming.
- The school building includes space for families to build relationships with one another.
- Space promotes interaction, conversation, and learning among all who enter the school.
- Children, families, and teachers demonstrate their sense of responsibility and ownership of the school by caring for and enhancing the school property.
- Materials are constructed and arranged to be accessible to children, aesthetically pleasing, and engaging to promote learning.
- Natural materials are used throughout the school.
- Children, teachers, and families take care of the environment.

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