

# *The Tanakh Standards and Benchmarks Project*

What We Have Learned About  
Design, Implementation and Impact: 2004-2010

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Tevet 5772 • December 2011



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# Executive Summary

The Jewish Theological Seminary's Melton Research Center for Jewish Education with support from The AVI CHAI Foundation launched the Jewish Day School Standards and Benchmarks Pilot Project on June 30, 2003. Funded initially for two years, the Project was designed to enable Community, Conservative and Reform day schools to enhance the teaching and learning of Tanakh. Based on the promising results of its first two years, AVI CHAI continued to fund the Project and its further development. As a result, as of June 2011, with ongoing leadership from Charlotte Abramson, Director, Jewish Day School Standards and Benchmarks Project at the Melton Center, 44 schools had participated in the Project and were using standards and benchmarks to improve the teaching and learning of Tanakh.<sup>1</sup>

At the Project's inception, there was general agreement that most Jewish day schools did not have a coherent set of goals that guided Tanakh instruction and did not appropriately assess what students were learning class-by-class or year-to-year. There seemed to be little articulation by schools or by the Associations of what a day school graduate should know and be able to do with respect to Tanakh. According to Rabbi Steven M. Brown, then Director of the Melton Research Center for Jewish Education, "the cry from school people, again and again, is a call for direction and qualitative markers to help guide decision-making and shape learning outcomes for [Jewish day school] graduates."<sup>2</sup>

To set the direction for improvement, the Project developers hypothesized that by adopting a standards-based approach to teaching Tanakh, schools would have an effective tool by which to a) develop a coherent vision for teaching Tanakh, and b) build a meaningful Tanakh curriculum with relevant professional development for Tanakh teachers.<sup>2</sup> In this context, the Tanakh Standards and Benchmarks Project developed eight standards to guide schools in improving the teaching and learning of Tanakh.<sup>3</sup> (See Appendix B for a list of the eight Tanakh standards.)

At the end of the 2003-2004 school year, AVI CHAI engaged Education Matters<sup>®</sup> to conduct an external evaluation of the Project that focused on a) the processes used to create the standards and benchmarks document, and b) the ways in which a small set of schools used the document to focus their teaching of Tanakh during the 2004-2005 school year. Since that time, Education Matters<sup>®</sup> has been evaluating the Project as it developed greater sophistication about the ways in which it could best support the schools so that they achieved its goals with respect to developing a coherent vision for teaching Tanakh and a meaningful curriculum. This longitudinal report summarizes what Education Matters<sup>®</sup> has learned from studying the Project from its inception through the end of the 2009-2010 school year.

## What did we learn?

- We learned that adopting standards and benchmarks can, indeed, result in a coherent *vision for teaching Tanakh, meaningful curriculum, and improved teaching* but that the simple word "adopting" masked the complexity of the enterprise. The story of the Standards and Benchmarks Project is the story of what is required to "adopt" standards and benchmarks and use them to good effect.
- We learned that the improved teaching that results from adopting standards and benchmarks and leads to better student outcomes is characterized by the presence of a) standards-based units of instruction and associated lesson plans, b) formative and summative assessments, and c) pedagogical practices that focus on student learning outcomes. Each of these components of improved teaching were in scant supply in schools when they began to participate in the Project. They are now present in the schools participating in the Project.
- We learned that creating the characteristics associated with improved Tanakh teaching depends on the presence of a professional, collaborative, instructionally-focused culture among teachers and Jewish Studies Heads. And, we learned that developing the culture in which these characteristics could be established requires hard work that, ultimately, depends on the knowledge and skill of the Jewish Studies Head. When this culture becomes standard operating procedure in a school, teachers continuously improve their curriculum and pedagogy. When new teachers join the faculty, they can be brought into the standards and benchmarks culture of curriculum, instruction, and assessment. Such school cultures were not the norm in most schools when they began their work with the Project. As a result of participating in the Project, these schools have developed professional, collaborative, instructionally-focused cultures that were focused on improving the teaching and learning of Tanakh.
- We learned that most Jewish Studies Heads did not begin the Project with the requisite knowledge and skill about how to use standards and benchmarks to improve teaching and learning and that, therefore, the Project needed to design a high quality, multi-faceted professional development program and Tanakh-specific professional development roles in order to increase the opportunities for successful Project implementation. As we describe in this longitudinal report, the Project succeeded in this effort.

<sup>1</sup> Jewish Day School Standards and Benchmarks End of Year 2010-2011 Report, June 2011, submitted by Charlotte Abramson to The AVI CHAI Foundation.

<sup>2</sup> The idea for developing standards and benchmarks for Tanakh arose from the awareness that this approach was informing improvement efforts in general studies subjects across the nation's public schools. See Appendix A for a further elaboration of the project's rationale.

<sup>3</sup> Education Matters<sup>®</sup> first evaluation report, The Jewish Day School Standards and Benchmarks Project, Year I: Creating the Standards Document and Preparing the Pilot Schools, August 2004, prepared for The AVI CHAI Foundation, includes a discussion of the process by which the Standards and Benchmarks were developed.

The Standards and Benchmarks Project is now a well-developed, Tanakh-focused professional development program that includes all of the components associated with best practices.<sup>4</sup> It includes a) multiple opportunities for Jewish Studies Heads to learn together with Tanakh Educator Consultants (TECs) who serve as their coaches, b) multiple school-based professional development sessions provided by the TECs in collaboration with the Jewish Studies Heads, c) weekly opportunities for Jewish Studies Heads to consult with their TECs, and d) in-school designated time for teachers and Jewish Studies Heads to develop units of instruction, reflect on their impact on students by examining students' work, and make revisions in curriculum, instruction, and assessment in light of what they learn. Teachers and Jewish Studies Heads point to the ways in which the Project's components lead to improved curriculum, teaching and student learning. These are notable achievements.

The hypothesis undergirding the Project was that by adopting a standards-based approach schools would have an effective tool by which to a) develop a coherent vision for teaching Tanakh, and b) build a meaningful Tanakh curriculum with relevant professional development for teachers. Education Matters<sup>®</sup> research confirms the hypothesis. But it also reveals the complexity of designing and putting in place the processes and developing the knowledge base with which schools can achieve these goals. The work, we learned, is neither quick nor easy. But, the Project and the schools have succeeded and this is good news. Furthermore, by showing what it takes to succeed, the Project provides the field of Jewish education with in-depth knowledge about what such transformative improvement requires and the steps that could be taken to achieve similar success in other areas of Jewish Studies in the nation's day schools.

### **What did it take to achieve these results?**

In this report we unpack what lies behind these encouraging findings in order to understand the Project's pedagogical orientation, components and strategies for supporting high quality implementation. We begin with a discussion of the standards-based orientation of the Project. Then we review the Project's components, the range of professional development supports provided at JTS and at the schools that were designed to enhance the capacity of the schools to implement the standards and benchmarks approach to teaching and learning. We present the evaluation design that led to our conclusions including a discussion of the indicators of implementation fidelity. And, of course, we present the data from the schools that support our conclusions about the Project's impact. Finally we consider what the Project as well as AVI CHAI can learn from the design, implementation, and impact of this Project.

<sup>4</sup> See the National Staff Development Council/Learning Forward's website for a definition of best practices in professional development: <http://www.learningforward.org/standfor/definition.cfm>

# Background for the Standards and Benchmarks Project

## What Are Standards and Benchmarks?

A standard is an overarching learning outcome that includes a synthesis of knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors. Benchmarks specify learning outcomes at each grade-level or in bands of grade-levels (for example, K-2; 3-5) as students work toward achieving each standard. They are written to provide explicit statements about what is to be taught and learned in any selected content area. Taken together, standards and benchmarks can a) inform the selection of curriculum materials, b) support the design of assessments that effectively measure achievement of the standards, c) provide an enduring framework for students that can withstand teacher turnover, d) provide guidance for the design of teacher professional development programs, e) guide a school in setting priorities with respect to hiring teachers who have the knowledge and skill needed to teach to the standards, and f) hold teachers as well as administrators accountable for teaching that enables students to meet the standards.

Schools that adopt standards and benchmarks also adopt a philosophy of teaching and learning, a philosophy that stresses students' deep understanding of a content area as well as their ability to a) make connections between new and prior knowledge, b) problem solve with respect to challenges posed by the material, and c) make connections between the materials and their own lives. Standards based teaching and learning recognizes that there are core bodies of knowledge that students must master in different content areas, but reminds us that mastery of that knowledge is only one of the goals for learners. Learning that includes making connections and deep understanding are major goals, goals that seem particularly compelling when considered in the context of teaching and learning Tanakh in Jewish day schools. However, for most teachers and administrators, this stance toward "teaching for understanding" is new and quite different from standard practice. Therefore, teachers and administrators must learn new instructional strategies in order to implement well a standards-based approach. This learning needs to occur in a collaborative, ongoing, instructionally-focused culture that enables teachers to practice new approaches to teaching, share their experiences, and learn from one another guided by the leadership of the Jewish Studies Head.

To accomplish all of these Project goals, the Project Director needed to develop a) a careful plan for selecting schools that had the motivation and capacity to fulfill the Project's requirements, b) an ongoing professional development program for Jewish Studies Heads and teachers, and c) a new role for Jewish Education, the Tanakh Educator Consultant (TEC), a coach who could support each school's implementation of the standards and benchmarks. The Project, as a result, was and remains a complex endeavor well-designed to meet these goals.<sup>5</sup>

## What Are the Project's Components?

As a first step, the Project Director sought to interest Reform, Conservative, and Community schools in participating in the Project.<sup>6</sup> When schools identified themselves as interested, the Project Director spoke with the Head of School about the goals and requirements of the Project, what the Project would provide and what the school must provide. To participate, a Head of School had to agree a) to arrange time for teachers and the Jewish Studies Head to hold bi-weekly meetings devoted to developing curriculum units based on the standards and benchmarks and, b) designate one person dedicated to leading the Project. If the school could not find time for such meetings, then a school was deemed ineligible for the Project.<sup>7</sup> But, if the Head of School signed a memo of understanding agreeing to the requirements, then the school could join the next Cohort of schools.

At the end of the school year prior to beginning the Project, Heads of Schools and Jewish Studies Heads then met in New York with the Project Director to further clarify the Project's design and goals.<sup>8</sup> Beginning with Cohort II, this initial meeting included strategies with which the school's leaders would return to their schools and involve their teachers in selecting the standards and benchmarks that would be the focus of their Project work in the next school year.

<sup>5</sup> See Neufeld, B. Final 2005-2006 Evaluation Report: TaNaKH Standards and Benchmarks Project, July 20, 2006, prepared for The AVI CHAI Foundation for a discussion of the development of the TEC role. See also Neufeld, B., Focus on Preparing the Jewish Studies Heads in Cohort II Schools: Evaluation Findings: Cohort II, April 2007.

<sup>6</sup> The Project Director made presentations about the Project at Association meetings and at the PEJE conference, for example. She approached schools she knew would be good candidates for the Project to determine whether she might interest them in participating.

<sup>7</sup> Bi-weekly meetings were essential to insure that the Project's work was ongoing and that teachers and the Jewish Studies Head were working as a collaborative, instructionally focused professional community.

<sup>8</sup> As the Project developed, the Project Director held regionally-based orientation meetings with sets of schools to minimize the challenge of scheduling all of them come to New York at the same time.

Next, early in the school year participating schools from Cohorts I and II<sup>9</sup> sent a team comprised of the Jewish Studies Head and several teachers to a 2.5 day institute held at JTS. The institute was led by a professional developer from the Center for Performance Assessment skilled in the use of standards and benchmarks and knowledgeable about Tanakh.<sup>10</sup> This institute was followed by four on-site, two-day visits to the schools by the TEC.<sup>11</sup> These school-based professional development sessions were designed to support the Jewish Studies Heads and teachers in using the standards and benchmarks to create high quality units of Tanakh instruction. They were accompanied by weekly TEC phone consultations with the Jewish Studies Heads. Phone conversations focused on developing, using, and evaluating standards-based units of instruction. They were also used to design each of the TECs' school visits so they addressed issues essential to further developing the Jewish Studies Heads' and the teachers' knowledge and skill with standards and benchmarks. Implementation of the TEC role and the JTS-based professional development provided considerable support to the schools.

As the Project developed, however, its Director learned more about the challenges the Jewish Studies Heads faced in leading the work at their schools. In response, with the support of The AVI CHAI Foundation and in collaboration with the TECs, the Project Director developed a series of three Instructional Leadership Institutes (ILI), a more intensive set of professional development experiences for the Jewish Studies Heads. The ILI were designed to provide the Jewish Studies Heads with the knowledge and skill they needed to lead the Project with TEC support in the first year and with little or no TEC support in the second year. The first ILI was held for five days prior to the start of the school year and was designed to prepare the Jewish Studies Heads to begin leading the Project at their schools. The second ILI, held for three days in February, focused on additional aspects of unit development as well as how to coach and mentor teachers. The final ILI, held at the end of the school year, focused on planning for the future by building on the work already completed.<sup>12</sup>

In addition to the ILI and on-site visits, TECs continued their weekly phone conversations with the Jewish Studies Heads. TECs kept formal records of the content and result of their phone conversations and site-visits by completing logs that they sent to the Project Director. The TECs also summarized the conversations with the Jewish Studies Heads, offered their reflections on them, and sent them each week to the Jewish Studies Head and the Head of School. The Project Director provided feedback to the TECs on their reports that served as part of their ongoing professional development. To insure the quality of the Project, the Director visited each school during at least one TEC visit.

## Organization of the Report

Education Matters<sup>®</sup> has completed seven evaluation reports that present data and analysis about the Project's rationale, design, implementation and impact. The most recent report was a longitudinal consideration of what was learned from the Project's inception through the 2007-2008 school year.<sup>13</sup> That report drew from previous reports but did not include attention to the design, implementation, and impact of the ILI because it was not in place for Cohorts I and II, the focus of the previous reports.<sup>14</sup> Previous reports addressed the extent to which schools were implementing the Project with fidelity prior to the advent of the ILI. We identified factors that supported high quality implementation and those that made it more challenging to achieve. This report reviews those findings and identifies the way in which the ILI further supports the goals of the Project. As such, it brings those interested in the development of the Project up-to-date with respect to its design, implementation and impact.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>9</sup> AVI CHAI did not fund Education Matters<sup>®</sup> to evaluate Cohort III. Therefore, we do not include data from Cohort III in this report.

<sup>10</sup> The Center for Performance Assessment is now known as The Leadership and Learning Center.

<sup>11</sup> The Project developed the TEC role in light of the schools' needs for ongoing, on-site professional development. We discuss the role in greater detail later in this report.

<sup>12</sup> We discuss the ILI in greater detail later in this report.

<sup>13</sup> Neufeld, B., The Tanakh Standards and Benchmarks Project: What We Have Learned About Implementation and Impact: 2004-2008, November 30, 2009.

<sup>14</sup> Neufeld, B., Final TaNaKH Evaluation Report: 2007-2008, July 2008.

<sup>15</sup> The Project has developed a Wiki as well as other web-based supports for those participating in it. These were not studied for this longitudinal review.

# Design of the 2009-2010 Evaluation Study

During the 2009-2010 school year, at the request of AVI CHAI, Education Matters® conducted an evaluation study that had two purposes. The first was to extend knowledge about the Project by answering questions about the ways in which and extent to which the ILI contributed to the capacity of the Jewish Studies Heads in Cohort IV and V to lead Project implementation. The second purpose was to use these findings to complete a longitudinal report based on the current study and all prior evaluation studies that would address the following questions:

1. To what extent and in what ways did the TaNaKH Standards and Benchmarks Project achieve its goals?
2. What were the factors that facilitated its success?
3. What were the challenges that the Project confronted?
4. What was the impact of the Project on the participating Jewish Day Schools?

And, in light of the answers to these questions:

5. What can AVI CHAI as well as other foundations/donors and Jewish educators at the school and university level learn about how to design and implement improvement programs in other areas of Jewish Studies?

## Research Methods

As in previous Project evaluations, Education Matters® employed a combination of a) school visits that included interviews with Heads of Schools, Jewish Studies Heads and teachers, b) conversations/e-mail exchanges with TECs who worked with the schools in the sample, c) attendance at the mid-year ILI in February 2010, and d) interviews with the Project Director. In consultation with the Project Director, Education Matters® included five Cohort IV and V schools in the evaluation. The Jewish Studies Heads from these schools had participated in the ILI, some as part of Cohort IV and some as part of Cohort V. This longitudinal report includes our findings from the evaluation study completed during the 2007-2008 school year that included eight Cohort I and II schools. These schools provide the basis of comparison of implementation and impact across cohorts.

The total sample provided us with a) three Cohort I, five Cohort II, three Cohort IV, and two Cohort V schools, b) six Conservative, four Community, and three Reform day schools, c) three high schools and ten K-8 schools, and, d) representation from all of the TECs who worked with the project. Furthermore, these schools included variation in characteristics relevant to implementation of the Project. Specifically, they varied in the extent of Jewish Studies Head and teacher stability, knowledge and skill, factors likely to influence the quality of implementation.

And, they varied with respect to the amount of time teachers had available for teaching Tanakh and for professional development with their colleagues. We knew these factors would influence the extent and quality of implementation as well as highlight the challenges that schools face when trying to use the standards and benchmarks.

## Criteria for Fidelity of Implementation

In order to proceed with the evaluation of Cohorts I and II and then Cohorts IV and V, the Project needed a definition of *fidelity* of implementation. We needed criteria with which to determine whether and to what extent schools were actually implementing the Project as it was designed; we needed to know whether, if they were making adaptations, those adaptations were supporting or diminishing key components of the Project.<sup>16</sup> Education Matters® and the Project Director discussed this need and agreed that fidelity of implementation would mean that all of the key Project components stressed during a) the school selection process, and b) the Project's professional development sessions prior to and including the ILI, were in place during the 2007-2008 and 2009-2010 school years. The implementation indicators we agreed to were the following:

- The Head of School, Jewish Studies Head and teachers collaboratively select standards that will guide the development of curriculum in light of the schools' goals for students with respect to Tanakh.
- The Head of School provides sufficient time for the Jewish Studies teachers to meet bi-weekly to develop units of instruction that include performance assessments.
- The Jewish Studies Head designs and leads the bi-weekly meetings. Teachers regularly attend the meetings and actively participate in the curriculum development work.
- Teachers and the Jewish Studies Head grow in their use of and comfort with the language of the Project, for example, standards, big ideas, essential questions, unwrapping, and performance assessments.
- Teachers produce units of instruction based on the standards and benchmarks selected by the schools. These units include big ideas, essential questions, evidence of unwrapping to produce "to do" and "to know" categories, lesson plans, assessments, and scoring guides.
- Teachers use these units of instruction in the school's Tanakh classes.

<sup>16</sup> Program Fidelity and Adaptation: Meeting Local Needs Without Compromising Program Effectiveness, by Cailin O'Connor, Stephen A. Small, and Siobhan M. Coney, University of Wisconsin-Madison and University of Wisconsin - Extension, What Works - Wisconsin Research to Practice Series, Issue #4, April 2007.



- Jewish Studies Heads use classroom observations and feedback to support teachers in the implementation of their standards-based units of instruction.
- Teachers and the Jewish Studies Heads review student work produced by the standards-based units and revise the units and/or teaching strategies as needed in light of the student work.
- The school develops a collaborative, instructionally-focused culture in which teachers support one another in improving their curriculum and instruction. This culture is both a *product of the process of using the standards* and a *necessary condition to sustain its further development and improvement*.

Education Matters<sup>®</sup> used these indicators in drawing conclusions about implementation at each of the sample schools in these two studies. However, we used them knowing that the fidelity and quality of implementation would vary in light of a number of factors (discussed in the next section of the report) and that the fidelity and quality would likely improve as the schools advanced their knowledge and skill over time. In addition, we also recognized that, given the normal course of development of knowledge and skill, schools might be stronger with some indicators than with others at the time of our data collection.

For example, if a school already had a collaborative, instructionally-focused culture in place, that school would not have to work hard to develop it as part of the Project. Schools without such a culture to begin with would require time to fully develop it. If teachers were familiar with Understanding by Design (UbD), then they might be strong in this area at the outset.<sup>17</sup> If, in contrast, they had not engaged in Looking at Student Work (LASW) to determine the impact of their teaching, their first efforts would not likely be as expert as those we would expect to see later in their involvement with the Project. Nonetheless, if they were using LASW as a strategy for their own learning, if they were seriously implementing a collaborative, instructionally culture, and if they were using the UbD process, even if as beginners, we considered them implementing these indicators with fidelity.

### Findings About Implementation: An Overview

Using these indicators in our research, we concluded at the end of the 2007-2008 school year that the Project had a significant, positive impact in seven of the eight Cohort I and II schools. In making this claim, we did not suggest that all seven of the schools were fully implementing all components of the Project but rather that a) some of them were well on their way to that status, b) all seven were using significant pieces of the Project's components, and c) all seven could point to evidence of the Project's positive impact on teaching and learning.

Using these indicators again, we can conclude that at the end of the 2009-2010 school year the Project had also had a significant and positive impact in all of the schools in Cohort IV and V. In addition, and as a result of the ILI, the Jewish Studies Heads and teachers in Cohorts IV and V a) had produced more units of instruction at the end of the first year than had their colleagues in earlier cohorts and, b) had more fully developed all features of those units including lesson plans and assessments. These educators reported that their teaching was more focused and that their students were achieving more than in the past. Our data lead to the conclusion that the bi-weekly meetings in these cohorts were more focused and involved careful consideration of the work students were producing as a result of the standards-based units of instruction. Jewish Studies Heads who participated in the ILI reported that they were better able to observe their teachers and provide feedback as a result of the ILI sessions that focused on preparing them for these aspects of their work.<sup>18</sup> These findings lead to the conclusion that the ILI represents a significant addition and contribution to the accomplishment of the Project's goals.

In presenting the findings from the 2007-2008 school year we noted that we found scant differences in schools' extent and fidelity of Project implementation as a function of a) denominational affiliation, b) Cohort membership, and/or c) level – K-8 or high school. Other factors such as the quality of leadership of the Jewish Studies Head, time for teachers to work together, and the extent of teacher turnover, for example, proved more significant as factors associated with implementation. In presenting the findings from the 2009-2010 school year, all of these findings except one remain valid: now Cohort membership mattered. Schools participating in Cohorts IV and V, those that had the professional development provided by the ILI, demonstrated greater extent and fidelity of implementation than those participating in earlier Cohorts.

We turn now to a discussion of our findings with respect to implementation and the value added by the Project's professional development supports, in particular, the ILI.

<sup>17</sup> Understanding by Design (UbD) is a framework for improving student achievement. Emphasizing the teacher's critical role as a designer of student learning, UbD works within the standards-driven curriculum to help teachers clarify learning goals, devise revealing assessments of student understanding, and craft effective and engaging learning activities. (<http://www.authenticeducation.org/ubd/ubd.lasso>.) This is the approach implemented by the Project.

<sup>18</sup> There were schools in the sample that had Jewish Studies Heads who were not given supervisory responsibilities and, therefore, did not observe Jewish Studies teachers. And, one school had teachers leading the Project which meant they did not supervise their colleagues. However, to the extent possible, all participating teachers observed each other teaching a standards-based lesson.



# Project Development, Implementation and Impact

We begin this section of the report with a response to the question: To what extent and in what ways did the TaNaKH Standards and Benchmarks Project achieve its goals? Our answer rests on a comparison of the extent and fidelity of implementation at the schools in Cohorts I and II with that of schools in Cohorts IV and V. In all cases, schools in Cohorts IV and V, despite some internal variation, were more successful in fully implementing all components of the Project. It is likely that these positive changes result from the professional development provided to Jewish Studies Heads in the ILI. We feel confident in saying this because we know that this set of schools did not vary in any meaningful ways from those in the previous cohorts nor did the extent of on-site professional development provided by the TECs. We also feel confident in saying that the Project Director and the TECs became more knowledgeable and skillful as a result of their work supporting the schools over time and as a result of their collaboration in designing and implementing the ILIs. Their increased knowledge and skill likely also have contributed to the schools' increased success.

## Cohorts I and II

Without question, seven of the eight schools in Cohorts I and II were using what they learned from participating in the Project. By making this statement we mean that a) teachers were working collaboratively to develop units of instruction that were tied to their schools' selected standards and benchmarks, b) teachers were using the units when teaching Tanakh, c) big ideas and essential questions were posted in classrooms and teachers reported using them during instruction to focus students' attention, d) Jewish Studies Heads were supporting their teachers' work in multiple ways, and e) teachers and Jewish Studies Heads were using the language associated with the Project. The eighth school was not using the Project because a) the Jewish Studies Head and most of the school's Jewish Studies teachers were new to it in the 2007-2008 school year, and b) the relatively new Head of School demonstrated scant commitment to the Project.

This finding about implementation is critically important. Many projects demonstrate little impact not because they are poorly designed but because they are poorly implemented or implemented with adaptations that degrade the original project design. They are not, in other words, implemented with fidelity. The Tanakh Project, with its ongoing TEC support and related school-based accountability, was avoiding the pitfalls often seen in the implementation of instructional improvement projects.

Given this positive finding, however, we note that implementation varied within and across the Cohort I and II schools.

**First**, there was variation around the extent of implementation within schools. In a few schools only some teachers were using the Project's methods to guide their teaching. Those who were not using them, most of the time, were teachers who a) were new to the schools, and, therefore, b) were not yet familiar with the Project's approach and methods and, c) had not yet developed units of study.

In addition, several Cohort II schools had not developed many complete units of instruction by the end of their first year in the Project. This was expected. As a result, however, these schools did not have units for new teachers to use. New teachers had to learn the basics of the Project as well as how to develop units of instruction. Several of these schools took advantage of the opportunity offered by the Project Director to have a TEC provide professional development to new teachers on-site at the start of their second year in the Project. This support facilitated the further implementation of the Project.<sup>19</sup>

**Second**, one school in the sample, to a far greater extent than any other, was implementing all components of the Standards and Benchmarks Project. The Jewish Studies Head in this school was fully engaged with and committed to the Project. She sought multiple opportunities to increase her own knowledge and skill as well as that of her teachers with professional development provided by the Project.<sup>20</sup> Teachers were encouraged, indeed required, by the Jewish Studies Head, to collaboratively develop and implement multiple units of instruction that included most if not all of the required Project components.

<sup>19</sup> In addition, a number of schools in the sample took advantage of the opportunity to review and deepen their learning by sending representatives to the Project's Fall 2007 professional development for Cohort III schools.

<sup>20</sup> We refer to all Jewish Studies Heads and all teachers as she to preserve confidentiality.

**Third**, and related to the point above, *the quality and extent of support provided by the Jewish Studies Heads varied across the schools and influenced the extent and fidelity of implementation.* Overall, greater knowledge, skill, and attention to the Project from the Jewish Studies Head was associated with a greater extent and fidelity of implementation.<sup>21</sup>

**Fourth**, *in one school, themes rather than standards were the primary focus of the curriculum.* Teachers collaboratively selected themes for their classes and then identified standards and benchmarks that could be addressed while focusing on the themes. Teachers and the Jewish Studies Head met on a regular basis to develop and review units and lessons; they collaborated with each other outside of regular meeting times; they used the lessons developed; and they used much of the Project's language. However, their approach did not meet the criteria for fidelity established for the Project with respect to choosing standards and benchmarks – not themes – with which to focus the curriculum.

**Fifth**, *teachers in all seven of the schools had developed units of instruction but their completeness and coherence varied.* Most units reviewed identified the standards and benchmarks that were the focus of the unit and indicated what students would need “to know” and “to do” to achieve the standard. Most also indicated some examples of assessments, although in more than half the units these were not fully developed. Units tended to lack scoring guides for the assessments and, when they were included they did not always match well the desired outcomes for the unit. Units tended not to have associated written lesson plans.

## Cohorts IV and V

What did we find regarding the extent and fidelity of implementation in this sample of schools? As in the first two Cohorts, a) teachers were working collaboratively to develop units of instruction that were tied to their schools' selected standards and benchmarks, b) teachers were using the units when teaching Tanakh, c) big ideas and essential questions were posted in classrooms and teachers reported using them during instruction to focus students' attention, d) Jewish Studies Heads were supporting their teachers' work in multiple ways, and e) teachers and Jewish Studies Heads were using the language associated with the Project.

In addition, teachers from the five Cohort IV and V schools completed *more fully developed* units of instruction than did their counterparts in Cohorts I and II. Their units included assessments and scoring guides as well as attention to lesson plans. And, in most of the schools, the teachers, with the support of their Jewish Studies Heads, TECs and colleagues, developed *more* units of instruction than had teachers in the earlier Cohorts. We attribute this finding to the fact that the initial five-day ILI, held in the summer prior to the start of the school year, provided Jewish Studies Heads with multiple opportunities to learn how to develop units of instruction and to use what they learned with teachers early in the school year:

Based on interviews with the TECS, the Jewish Studies Heads, and participating teachers, we concluded that the quality and extent of support provided by the Jewish Studies Heads from Cohorts IV and V reflected their greater knowledge and skill with the components of the Project than what we saw in Jewish Studies Heads from Cohorts I and II. Specifically, these Jewish Studies Heads were more clear than their earlier counterparts about a) the rationale for standards and benchmarks, b) the processes associated with developing a unit of instruction and accompanying assessments and, c) lesson planning. In addition, as a result of the second ILI's attention to mentoring and coaching teachers, these Jewish Studies Heads reported greater comfort observing teachers and providing them with feedback.<sup>22</sup> Overall, greater knowledge, skill, and attention to the Project from the Jewish Studies Head was associated with a greater extent, fidelity, and quality of implementation.

Nonetheless, there was still variation in implementation within and among schools. We turn next to a discussion about what we learned about variations in implementation and the factors associated with them.

<sup>21</sup> One school did not have a Jewish Studies Head during the 2007-2008 school year. Teacher leaders, with the support of the Head of School, led the collaborative work of developing units of instruction. The school hired a Jewish Studies Head for the 2008-2009 school year.

<sup>22</sup> When teacher leaders were leading the Project rather than a Jewish Studies Head, they were able to talk about observed classes with their colleagues but were not comfortable with providing feedback that might sound evaluative.

# Factors that Influenced the Extent and Fidelity of Implementation

Examining the data closely, we learned that a number of school-based factors and two Project-supported professional development factors most influenced the extent and fidelity of implementation in all of the schools in the four cohorts. The school-based factors were a) the role of the Jewish Studies Head in leading the Project, and b) factors other than leadership, for example the time available for teaching Tanakh, and teacher stability and/or turnover. The Project-supported factors that mattered most were a) development of the TEC role beginning in the 2005-2006 school year, and b) implementation of the ILI beginning in the 2008-2009 school year. The advent of the TEC role greatly increased the schools' capacity to work with the standards and benchmarks. In comparing the role of the Jewish Studies Heads in Cohorts I and II with those in Cohorts IV and V, however, we learned that those in the later cohorts who had the combined learning opportunities provided by the TEC and the ILI were even more capable of supporting their teachers in implementing the Project's components. We would argue, as well, that as a result of their increased involvement with the TECs during the initial ILI as well as their increased knowledge and skill gleaned at the ILI, the Jewish Studies Heads from Cohorts IV and V were able to make better use of their TECs. We turn now to a discussion of the data that led us to these conclusions.

## A. Jewish Studies Head Leadership

The most significant factor to influence the extent and fidelity of implementation of the Project was the Jewish Studies Head's skillful leadership of it. Jewish Studies Heads were not equally effective in implementing their leadership role with the Project due to variations in their own knowledge and skill. However, all of the Jewish Studies Heads in the seven implementing Cohort I and Cohort II schools contributed positively, albeit to varying degrees, to the Project's implementation and progress. All but one of them made good use of the supports available to them from the TECs' ongoing availability by phone and e-mail. All of the Jewish Studies Heads as well as the teacher leaders in Cohorts IV and V contributed positively to the Project's implementation and progress and made good use of the TECs.

Teachers in schools that had effective Jewish Studies Heads identified multiple actions associated with that positive leadership a) providing time to meet and work collaboratively on the Project, b) demonstrating enthusiasm and encouragement, c) conducting classroom observations and providing feedback, and d) attending to the development of units of instruction. Teachers reported that effective Jewish Studies Heads became actively engaged in their teaching of Tanakh as well as in their development of the units and their associated lesson plans. This involvement extended to participating in the review and revision of the units and their associated assessments after they had been taught.

Jewish Studies Heads in schools that were implementing the Project's components with fidelity took an active role in guiding new teachers toward using the Project. Needless to say, this was essential if whole departments were to work collaboratively toward the same standards-based goals for students using the same pedagogical approaches. It was also essential because three of the schools in the sample experienced considerable teacher turnover.

In multiple ways then, effective Jewish Studies Heads played a significant role in the further development of the Project at their schools. Without their leadership, the Project would not have advanced as much as it did. When the Jewish Studies Head was less skillful in leading the Project, more experienced as well as new teachers noted that they did not feel sufficiently supported in the development of a coherent, high quality curriculum based on the standards and benchmarks. New teachers in Cohorts I and II, in particular, were largely left to their own devices or dependent on colleagues who were willing to help them learn to use the standards and benchmarks processes.

How did implementation of the TEC role and the ILI provide the Jewish Studies Heads with the increased knowledge and skill they needed to lead the Project effectively in all four of the cohort's schools? What did the Jewish Studies Heads learn from their TECs and in the ILI that increased their ability lead the Project at their schools?

## B. Development and Implementation of the TEC Role

By the middle of the 2004-2005 school year, the Project Director realized that participating schools needed on-going, on-site professional development support if they were to succeed in leading their schools in the Tanakh Project. This was because Jewish Studies Heads and their teachers, for the most part, were unfamiliar with using standards and benchmarks to develop an aligned curriculum with units of instruction, lesson plans, and formative and summative assessments. Furthermore, Jewish Studies Heads, again for the most part, had scant experience a) leading teachers to work collaboratively to develop curriculum and assessments with or without standards, b) observing and providing their teachers with instructionally-focused feedback, and c) working in Tanakh programs that had explicit outcome goals for students that drove the development of curriculum and instruction. Therefore, in order to achieve the goals of the Project, the Jewish Studies Heads would need to acquire considerable new knowledge and skill. The TEC role was developed to provide this necessary standards-based coaching to the Jewish Studies Heads at their schools.

The TEC role did not exist prior to the start of the Project; it needed to be developed and then suitable educators needed to be recruited and prepared. We concluded in our July 2006 evaluation report that the Project Director succeeded in developing the role, recruiting suitable educators for it, and providing them with high quality professional development that enabled them to implement this new role with reasonable success during their first year.<sup>23</sup> We also reported that the schools were pleased to have the TECs available to them.

As she observed and coached the TECs' work during the 2005-2006 school year; however, the Project Director realized that she needed to provide the TECs with additional professional development that would strengthen their knowledge and skill. These observations suggested that the TECs had a tendency to work with teachers as much as with the Jewish Studies Heads. Although this work was seen as valuable by the schools, the goal of the Project and the TEC role was to prepare the Jewish Studies Heads to work with the teachers, to increase the capacity of the *Jewish Studies Heads* to continue the work. The result was reconfigured professional development designed to provide the TECs with a) a greater focus in particular areas of the process and b) guidance about how to increase the knowledge, skill and leadership capacity of the schools' Jewish Studies Heads. The emphasis of this revised professional development was on the TEC's role with the Jewish Studies Heads rather than with the teachers. The TECs were guided in their school-based work by the Goals for Judaic Studies Instructional Leaders. (See Appendix C)

The additional TEC professional development took place immediately before the Jewish Studies Heads assembled at JTS for their professional development. The subsequent professional development sessions for the Jewish Studies Heads also included reminders for the TECs about how they were to help these leaders develop their roles.<sup>24</sup>

Implementation of the TEC role provided much-needed support to the Jewish Studies Heads. Nonetheless, it was not sufficient to insure that the Project would be well-enough understood let alone internalized to insure its continuation once the TECs were no longer available at the end of one year. We concluded the following regarding the TECs role in the context of elaborating the considerable successes of the Project in a short period of time.

- Cohort II schools demonstrated that targeted coaching focused on the Jewish Studies Head could accelerate the process by which a school developed its initial knowledge and skill for using Standards and Benchmarks.
- Implementation at the Cohort II schools demonstrated that one year of four on-site TEC consultations coupled with weekly phone consultations and e-mail exchanges was sufficient to achieve many of the Project's goals, but

insufficient for fully preparing most Jewish Studies Heads to continue the Project on their own. Jewish Studies Heads shared this perspective; they agreed that one year of support was not sufficient given the complexity of learning how to use the standards and benchmarks and the new approach to teaching and learning.

In light of these findings, AVI CHAI began funding half of the cost of a second year of TEC support with Cohort III schools if those schools could also fund half of the cost of the TEC. While this was a distinct benefit to schools with the requisite financial resources, those without such resources were unable to take advantage of this opportunity.

What did the Jewish Studies Heads and teachers gain from an additional year of professional development from their TECs? Fundamentally, TECs a) provided them with expert, needed feedback on the units they had developed and used and on the new ones they were developing, b) reviewed the components of standards-based curriculum design, c) helped teachers and Jewish Studies Heads focus their work in light of the standards they had chosen, d) introduced new teachers to the work of the Project, and e) created enthusiasm for the Project among new teachers and reinvigorated those who were already involved. TECs offered these supports whether on-site or via scheduled telephone conversations. On-site support was preferred in that it enabled the TEC to provide more complex support to a range of teachers and the Jewish Studies Head.

All of the schools made good use of the second year TEC support they were able to garner. Given that most of the schools do not have the financial resources to hire the TECs on their own, however, the absence of second-year support for this needed professional development reduces the Project's potential extent and fidelity of implementation.<sup>25</sup>

The TEC role was developed to support the growth of the Jewish Studies Heads' capacity to lead the Project at their schools. Without question, their advent greatly increased the Project's ability to achieve implementation. But, even with this on-site support, the Project Director and the TECs realized that the Jewish Studies Heads needed more opportunities to learn what they needed to know more than what was provided in the 2.5 day institute and the TECs' on-site work. The Tanakh Standards and Benchmarks Project required the adoption of new ways of thinking about curriculum, teaching, and learning as well as changes in the Jewish Studies Heads' roles. The ILI was developed to address these learning needs.

<sup>23</sup> See Neufeld, B., Final 2005-2006 Evaluation Report: TaNaKH Standards and Benchmarks Project, July 20, 2006 for a more detailed discussion of the TEC role and its impact during the first implementation year.

<sup>24</sup> See Neufeld, B., Focus on Preparing the Jewish Studies Heads in Cohort II Schools: Evaluation Findings: Cohort II, April 2007.

<sup>25</sup> Schools in Cohorts IV and V also wanted a second year of TEC support. A few were able to fund it.

## C. The Contributions of the ILI to the Knowledge and Skill of the Jewish Studies Heads

The ILI were developed to address limitations in the knowledge and skill of most Jewish Studies Heads, limitations that became visible as they strove to implement the Project at their schools. For example, the Project Director and the TECs learned that their initial introduction of the Project's rationale and procedures during a 2.5 day professional development session were not sufficient to enable the Jewish Studies Heads to fully understand what they needed to know and then transfer that knowledge to teachers. The Project Director and the TECs also learned as they worked with the schools that many Jewish Studies Heads did not have appropriate knowledge about what needed to be included in lessons that were standards-based or how to help their teachers learn to design them. Therefore, although the Jewish Study Heads were learning how to develop units of instruction by working with their TECs, they were not learning how to help their teachers develop associated lesson plans. And, the Project Director and TECs learned that many Jewish Studies Heads had scant formal professional development in observing teachers, providing feedback, and coaching them to higher levels of performance. Indeed, some of the participating Jewish day schools lacked formal supervision and evaluation programs altogether.

These realizations, gleaned from the first few years of Project implementation, meant that the Tanakh Standards and Benchmarks Project could not achieve its goals unless it was able to provide the Jewish Studies Heads with more professional development. The ILI were a response to the Project's growing awareness of its knowledge demands on the Jewish Studies Heads. They were designed to provide the Jewish Studies Heads with multiple opportunities to learn and internalize what they needed to know. TECs would continue to support the transfer of this learning to the schools and coach the Jewish Studies Heads to maximize the impact of the Project in light of their school's unique context.

As a result of changes in the orientation provided to schools new to the Project and the addition of the ILI, Jewish Studies Heads participating in Cohort IV and V had multiple opportunities to learn what they needed to know. For Cohort V, this learning began with the orientation session for Heads of Schools and Jewish Studies Heads held in June 2009 that included the following:

- Overview of the Jewish day school standards & benchmarks project
- Rationale for standards-based curriculum design
- Introducing the project to the faculty and the school community
- Developing a vision for the teaching of tanakh

After the June 2009 meeting, Heads of School and Jewish Studies Heads reported that they were able to present the Project to teachers and work with them to collaboratively select the Standards on which the school would focus during the coming year.<sup>26</sup> The following comment is typical of what we heard.

*We talked a lot about how we were going to select our standards, and have a faculty deliberation. And, we shaped that very clearly, I remember. And so, that was good. I felt very prepared to do that. I felt prepared to figure out, like, what steps we were going to take, in terms of identifying which teacher was going to start working on which unit. Jewish Studies Head F<sup>27</sup>*

Then, with their standards selected, from August 2-6, 2009, Cohort V Jewish Studies Heads/teacher leaders participated in the first ILI which involved them in five days of professional development that focused them on:

- Examining the role of the instructional leader
- Learning the process for developing standards-based tanakh units
- Developing performance assessments
- Planning bi-weekly faculty meetings
- Aligning curriculum to the vision for teaching tanakh

According to the Project Director, all of the ILI are designed to develop the Jewish Studies Heads' leadership skills and ownership of the Project. The Project Director, the TECs, and the consultant all have leadership roles in the sessions.<sup>28</sup> The first one, begins the process.

*The first one, which is five intensive days of learning the process and the rationale for the process – how the process works and how it's aligned to vision – made them feel secure about what the project was going to involve. That really gave them a strong sense of structure. When we used to have this in for 2.5 days it was good, but we learned that people don't really "get" it until they do it for a while. [With the additional time], Jewish Studies Heads can look at an existing unit; work on a unit together and then develop their own unit for their own school. So they feel pretty fluent in the work by the end of the five days. Project Director*

<sup>26</sup> The data Education Matters® collected at the schools confirmed that teachers, the Jewish Studies Head and sometimes the Head of School were involved collaboratively in selecting their Standards.

<sup>27</sup> Although there are five schools in our sample from Cohort IV and V, there are seven Jewish Studies Heads due to some schools having one, for example at the elementary level and one at the middle school level.

<sup>28</sup> Due to an illness, the consultant from the Center for Performance Assessment was replaced by a consultant who did not know Tanakh but was skillful in the areas of coaching and mentoring. The Project Director and the TECs were able to provide the Tanakh knowledge required by the Project.



To be specific, during the five days, the Jewish Studies Heads reviewed the purpose of the Project and explored the processes used in working with the Tanakh standards and benchmarks. They learned the steps necessary for developing a unit of instruction based on standards and benchmarks, worked on a unit as a group, and then developed a unit for their own school based on the standards they had chosen the previous June. These units included assessments of student learning and scoring guides, components of the units that had been challenging for the Jewish Studies Heads and teachers in previous cohorts to master. In addition, those leading the ILI sessions and the TECs constantly asked the Jewish Studies Heads to consider how they were going to use what they were learning back at their schools. This emphasis on transfer from the ILI to the schools was essential for increasing the likelihood that the Jewish Studies Heads could and would use what they learned with their teachers. Jewish Studies Heads commented on the value of the first ILI.

*I was very pleased that at the end of that ILI, I was able to sit down and to write a unit. We all had to do it. Mine was one of the first to get up there [to be discussed]. I believe that for me, my background with UbD [Understanding by Design] kind of blossomed. I had always kind of struggled with UbD, but I found this time that I really got it. Jewish Studies Head A*

*The frame for building a unit was new [to me]. Like, how you do the unwrapping and how you check for alignment with all the pieces. I knew the big ideas and essential questions, but my understanding sharpened about them. And then connecting that with the unwrapping and with the standards was sort of new for me. Kind of putting it all together in terms of designing a unit, that was new. So it's sort of like my knowledge of these things had been disparate and more self taught before, not systematic. Jewish Studies Head B*

*And, that's one of the things, I will say, about the ILI. What I felt was a great focus on everything I went to was, "Okay, now we've done this. But, how are you going to bring it back? How are you going to set it up for your staff, now that you know the direction, which you think would work for your school?" And, the role playing, and the action plans, like, they were very helpful, really, really great. Jewish Studies Head C*

The first ILI provided multiple opportunities for the Jewish Studies Heads to learn the components of the Project and to practice the work they would be doing at their schools. When these components were addressed by the TECs during their first visits to the schools, the Jewish Studies Heads were hearing them as review and reinforcement rather than as totally new material. This was a distinct advantage to the Jewish Studies Heads as they continued their work in the bi-weekly meetings after the TECs' visits. The first ILI also provided them with opportunities to work with the TEC who would come to their schools and to meet and work with a number of other Jewish Studies Heads who were learning how to use the Standards and Benchmarks.

The second ILI held from February 7-9, 2010 focused on:

- Coaching and mentoring faculty
- Applying effective teaching strategies
- Creating standards-based lessons and learning activities<sup>29</sup>

The ILI began with a focus on the ways in which unwrapping – figuring out what students will need to know and to do in order to achieve the unit's goals – is key to successful lesson planning and insures that the focus will be on student learning. After participating in the process of unwrapping some agreed-upon generic standards and benchmarks, the Jewish Studies Heads were asked to apply the process to a piece of text and to add text specific content and skills to the generic unwrapping. As they proceeded, they were asked to "chunk" the chosen text into meaningful components for the purpose of teaching and learning. This activity was important in helping the Jewish Studies Heads link the generic process, which is tied to the standards and benchmarks, to the more specific process that occurs once a piece of text has been selected as the vehicle for teaching to the standards and benchmarks. After working on the process with text chosen for this purpose, the Jewish Studies Heads were required to do it again with their own schools in mind and were asked to add formative assessments to each segment of the unit they were developing/ adapting. Their TECs coached them as they went through the process. At the end of the day, they were asked to consider:

- How will you bring this back to your teachers?
- What has been valuable for your own learning?
- How do you integrate chunking strategies into the whole unit process?
- When and how will you introduce this (chunking, lesson planning elements) to your faculties?
- What do teachers have to have in place before you introduce a lesson planning model?

For much of the second day of this ILI, Jewish Studies Heads continued the focus on lesson plans, this time with attention to the direct instruction model and how it can be used effectively in standards-based lessons. The ILI consultant guided the Jewish Studies Heads through a discussion as well as experience of the components of a direct instruction lesson: orientation, presentation, checking for understanding, guided practice, closure, and independent practice. She then described and provided examples of the instructional strategies associated with each of the components. After a break, the Project Director asked the Jewish Studies Heads to consider

<sup>29</sup> Education Matters® attended this second ILI and, therefore, we include some descriptive information about the ways in which it was organized to support the Jewish Studies Heads' learning.



how the lesson planning and direct instruction model would connect to the unwrapping they had done. This was just one example of the ways in which the ILI connected all of the components of the standards-based approach for the Jewish Studies Heads so that they, as fully as possible, understood what they were being asked to lead back at their schools.

Jewish Studies Heads then spent an hour and a half in the morning working with their TECs to align lessons and learning activities with their own units of instruction. Later in the afternoon, the Jewish Studies Heads created standards-based lessons using a direct instruction lesson plan template, and they discussed the question: How do we present standards-based lesson planning to our faculties?

During the last two hours of the second day and for most of the third day of the ILI, the focus was on the knowledge and skill the Jewish Studies Heads would need in order to coach and mentor teachers as a component of developing a collaborative, instructionally focused culture in their Jewish Studies departments. This culture included the ways in which faculty worked together to develop their units of instruction and then debriefed with one another after teaching them. It also involved more attention to the role of the Jewish Studies Head observing the teaching of the units and providing feedback to teachers. In some schools, the collaborative culture was also developing into one in which teachers observed and provided feedback to one another. The ILI consultant leading the sessions and the TECs engaged the Jewish Studies Heads in a number of learning opportunities, including role plays in which they provided feedback to a "teacher." Again, at the end of the session and the end of the ILI, Jewish Studies Heads were asked to reflect on their experiences and learning and also on how they were going to take what they learned back to their schools.

When interviewed about the lesson planning segment of the ILI later in the school year, Jewish Studies Heads made the following kinds of statements about this learning opportunity and its impact at their schools.

*Every workshop was the most amazing. And, there was one that they gave us a whole list of possible ways to format a lesson. You came back with a list of different ways you could actually change it so the kids have different kinds of experiences. So, it was really amazing to have that in hand. It was very practical. We really came out with a lot of things that we could do.*  
Jewish Studies Head D

*We were able to really have a uniform system for everybody to create lesson plans. And I still do this, every week I collect their lesson plans, I go to them and we have a conversation about it. So it's creating that dialogue through lesson planning, which has been really, really helpful, and now we're passing this on to the Hebrew studies department, so they can do a similar process where everybody's doing the same thing, then there's less suspicion and more trust. So it really builds trust in the school, of being able to learn and grow together.* Jewish Studies Head E

*What did I take away from the ILI? The generic unwrapping, the piece on coaching and mentoring, and the piece on lesson plans. Which is pretty much the whole thing! I'm going to share some of the stuff about lesson plans [with the teachers in the next bi-weekly] like what we did at the last seminar: awakening, activating, background knowledge, direct instruction, guided practice.* Jewish Studies Head F

Despite the considerable level of attention to the development of lesson plans at this second ILI, we note that one Jewish Studies Head reported the desire for even more knowledge in this area.

*I would love more guidance on how to look at a lesson and give feedback on a lesson. For how to look at lessons and how to break it down. So we did this chunking of lessons in the ILI. Like, you take your material, you chunk it out, you calendar it out. But that's different. That's saying when am I teaching each part of the text? It's still not what should the lesson look like. We talked a little bit about a model of direct instruction and we had someone give a model lesson, but it wasn't enough. I feel we need more of that. They should be videotaping excellent teachers at schools and we should be analyzing those tapes as part of the ILI. We really need to look on the more micro level of lessons because I don't feel there's been much direction about that.* Jewish Studies Head B

With respect to coaching, to observing teachers and providing feedback, Jewish Studies Heads said the following.

*I found the sessions about coaching teachers and providing feedback most useful. I think that really having real applications for that, for setting goals around teacher feedback was great. In one of the sessions, [the consultant] gave us a fill in the blank form and said, "Take five minutes now and fill out this positive feedback form based on a teacher observation you've recently done." Stuff like that really helped me to get it better and to integrate it better with my leadership. That and also collaboration, collaborative goal setting.* Jewish Studies Head G

*I think just having the opportunity to reflect with an expert on the dimensions of the work, to see different ideas about classroom observations and getting to know your faculty, and the sense of shared plights that a lot of leaders feel. It just seemed practical. There were tips. I think I would be sure to give feedback every time I visit. [After the ILI] I actually went and visited all the teachers and wrote little notes. I think they reacted favorably. It forced me to stay until I saw something that I liked. I found something good for everyone. And I lifted one of the questions about, "How do you see our team?" from the materials and I've put it into the template that I was using. Jewish Studies Head F*

*[My TEC] would challenge me [during the ILI]. "No, that's not good enough. How are you going to say it differently?" So it was very much putting me on the spot, and making me rise to what I needed to be doing. It gave me the words and I needed the words. The vocabulary. For example, when I'd walk into a classroom, instead of saying, "Well, I don't like what you did over here," to say [instead], "What were you doing beforehand? What was the goal you wanted? What did you want the children to know, what did you want them to do? What was the goal of your lesson, what was the idea? How did the essential questions get you to that goal?" So it really helped. Jewish Studies Head E*

*I remember that we brainstormed about how do you get your real point across [to a teacher], without sounding like a villain? We did a lot of that. Also, being clear, at the same time. I remember, there was a lot of talking about dealing with the tension of how do you deal with someone who isn't fully onboard? We talked a lot about that and I think we also talked a lot, which was helpful, about effective communication. Jewish Studies Head C*

*[Our consultant] this year, has a lot of wisdom to share about the coaching and mentoring and how to talk to teachers. And even though I've been in this for a long time, over ten years I've been in this kind of role, not just at the school, there's still a lot to learn and I found that very, very helpful. Jewish Studies Head B*

By focusing on lesson planning, observing and providing feedback to teachers, the second ILI continued to develop the Jewish Studies Heads as leaders of instructional improvement in their schools. All three areas of focus were essential because, as we have written in previous evaluation reports, most Jewish Studies Heads spent scant if any time observing in classrooms, providing feedback, and coaching and mentoring faculty. Most reported they were unfamiliar with the kinds of lesson plans and teaching strategies designed to make the best use of a standards-based curriculum. The data we collected from those attending the ILI led us to conclude that the second ILI was effective in teaching these areas of knowledge and skill which were, once again, reinforced by the TECs' visits.

The third ILI for Cohort V, like that provided for Cohort IV, would take place at the end of the school year after the data for this study was collected and would focus on considering the future of the Project at the schools and planning for its continuation. The Jewish Studies Heads would be engaged in action planning for their schools based on assessments of what had been successful in their first year. According to the Project Director,

*We will do a piece on appreciative inquiry. What are our successes? How do we build from our successes? How do we create statements of what we want to happen next. The Jewish Studies Heads will sit with their TECs and say, "How are we going to make this happen? Who are the people? What are the things we need to put in place? When? What are our priorities?" [The Consultant] will do a big chunk, two days, on the coaching/mentoring/collaborative coaching piece. And, we will spend some time with them learning how to use protocols so they can use them to get together and share units back at their schools. It takes time to explain. We do a fishbowl where the TECs are in the fishbowl and one of the TECs will bring student work and the question will be: Is the assessment really aligned to what we were trying to do? We'll do a protocol. And then we have two opportunities for the Jewish Studies Heads to present their own issue using a protocol. It's a way for them to network and structure their conversations.*

The three ILI's, taken together, greatly strengthen the opportunities to learn provided to the Jewish Studies Heads. They were well-designed to enable the Jewish Studies Heads to engage with the components of standards-based instruction multiple times and in a variety of ways designed to enable them to better use what they were learning at their schools. The data we collected from the Jewish Studies Heads and from the teachers participating in Cohort IV and V schools support the conclusion that the ILI is an important, indeed a necessary addition to the Tanakh Standards and Benchmarks Project.

To review, this section of the report focuses on what we learned about factors that influence the extent and fidelity of implementation in participating Project schools. We began the section noting that there are a number of school-based factors and two Project supported professional development factors that most influenced extent and fidelity of implementation. Up to this point, we have reviewed one critical school based factor – the Jewish Studies Heads' leadership skills, and the two Project supported professional development factors – the TECs and the ILIs. We turn now to the remaining set of school-based factors most associated with fidelity of implementation.

## D. School-Based Factors Associated with Implementation

In addition to the Jewish Studies Heads' leadership of the Project, four school-based factors influenced the extent and fidelity of implementation. All of them – time, teacher turnover, scheduling at the high school, and school administrator's unwillingness to confront resistant teachers – were present to different degrees in the schools in all four cohorts.

**1. Time.** As reported by the teachers and Jewish Studies Head, *time – or the lack thereof – influenced participation in TEC-provided professional development and the scheduling of Jewish Studies faculty meetings.* Some of the time-related challenges were associated with the inability of the schools to find qualified substitutes to cover for Jewish Studies teachers on the days the TEC was on site. Other challenges arose in schools that had part-time teachers who were not on campus each day or who worked only half of the day. Teachers with such schedules were not always able to leave another job, for example, to participate in TEC-provided full-day professional development. However, all 13 schools were able to provide teachers with coverage during at least part of the TECs' Year I visits.

Schools also varied in the extent to which they could hold regularly scheduled Jewish Studies faculty meetings that focused on Tanakh. If a school were organized so that the same teachers taught general and Jewish Studies, there was never a time when Jewish Studies teachers as a group could meet on a weekly or bi-weekly schedule. In such schools, the Jewish Studies Head might meet on a regular basis with grade-level teachers, for example, or teachers who taught sections of the same course and who had common planning times. Skillful Jewish Studies Heads, sometimes with the support and advice of their TECs, were able to develop alternate meeting strategies in order to support teachers' learning. Time was in short supply in many of the schools, however, regardless of how well and extensively they were implementing the Project.

As a result, in all but two of the schools that continued their work with the Project, *teachers reported devoting a great deal of their own time to the development of units of instruction.* Some worked after school; some stayed at school longer than their part-time appointment required; some used summer days to develop curriculum units. Finding time for this work was challenging. Finding time to develop units with colleagues, the arrangement all of the teachers desired, further challenged teachers. Without question, teachers devoted their own time, mostly without pay, to develop their units. In only a few schools were funds available to pay teachers for their time. As a result of the challenges posed by time constraints, some schools developed fewer units than did others.

However, all of the schools developed multiple units during the 2007-2008 school year and realized that, in the future, as their curriculum became more fully-developed, they would not have to spend so much time developing new units. In the Cohort IV and V schools, most participating teachers developed more than one complete unit during the first year with some teachers teaching more than one completed unit as well. As a result, teachers new to these schools the next year often had a prepared unit or two to use in their Tanakh classes.

*Finally, the schools in this sample varied greatly in the amount of time available for teaching Tanakh.* Schools allocated between two to three short periods each week to four or five weekly, full-length classes to Tanakh. Variation occurred in high schools as well as in K-8 schools and across denominations.<sup>30</sup> Teachers and Jewish Studies Heads pointed out that it was difficult for them to develop an effective instructional program with significant learning goals for students with scant time available for their subject. Nonetheless, our data lead us to conclude that regardless of the amount of time available, teachers and Jewish Studies Heads used the Project to improve their use of that time.

And, it is encouraging to note that two of the schools in our sample that began the Project with quite limited time for Tanakh have increased the amount of time devoted to the subject. The increased time coupled with teachers' work developing standards-based units improved the schools' teaching of Tanakh even if their program did not yet include the amount of time they would like to dedicate to this area of Jewish Studies.

**2. Teacher Turnover.** Significant teacher and Jewish Studies Head turnover negatively influenced the extent and fidelity of implementation. Four of the implementing schools in the sample experienced turnover in half of their teachers. Teachers who remained were committed to the standards and benchmarks Project; those who were new needed time to develop their understanding of the Project and then develop their own units of study or learn to use some that were developed the previous year. Thus, the extent of implementation was limited by the time needed for the new teachers to participate in professional development and complete the required curriculum development.

Extent of implementation was also limited or enhanced by the role the Jewish Studies Head played in supporting new teachers or teachers new to the Project. For example, if a school had developed a collaborative, instructionally-focused culture within the Jewish Studies program and had a Jewish Studies Head who was effectively leading the Project, that school had more capacity to bring new teachers into it.

<sup>30</sup> The Schechter schools in the sample tended to have sufficient time devoted to Tanakh according to teachers and Jewish Studies Heads.

And, those new teachers could also garner support from their colleagues as well as from the Jewish Studies Head. One school with strong Jewish Studies Head leadership and continuing support from principals was able to have the Project Director and the TEC implement an on-site institute for teachers new to in the second year. Finally, the Project Director was able to implement a New Teachers Institute held at JTS each year for teachers new to the Project in continuing cohort schools. All of these developments suggest that the well-implemented Tanakh Project can withstand some of the negative challenges associated with teacher attrition.

**3. Scheduling Classes at the High School Level.** High Schools can design a coherent, standards-based scope and sequence for their students but they often face challenges implementing it in light of the idiosyncratic outcomes of a) priorities associated with creating students' course schedules, b) school policies related to mid-year and mid-high school admissions, and c) students' knowledge and skill of Jewish Studies and/or Hebrew when entering ninth grade.

**First**, in order to retain their students, Jewish high schools must provide them with opportunities to take high level general studies classes that increase their odds of being accepted at desired colleges. To accommodate students' and parents' requests for these courses, many schools place priority on developing their schedules around them. These general studies scheduling priorities in what are small Jewish high schools can play havoc with scheduling students into appropriate Tanakh classes based on the school's standards-based scope and sequence.<sup>31</sup>

**Second**, at three of the four high schools in our sample, we were told that admissions policies created challenges for Tanakh teachers.<sup>32</sup> For example, some schools admit students at almost any point during their high school years. As a result, students may arrive unprepared to participate in the school's Tanakh curriculum. Students who may begin in a Jewish high school mid-high school or mid-year but have no prior day school background may be unable to participate in a Tanakh course that assumes students know some amount of Hebrew or have some background in the subject. Schools struggle to develop and/or adapt courses to meet these students' needs. At times, the changes they make compromise the standards and benchmarks approach they are trying to use.

**Third**, we were told that some students begin ninth grade, with little knowledge of Tanakh or Hebrew despite the fact that they attended day school for most of grades K-8. This, too, poses challenges for teachers who are attempting to create a finite number of courses and sections of Tanakh with which they can meet all students' learning needs.

These high school-specific factors are worth recognizing because they pose challenges to the overall impact of the Project and, most importantly, to the any high schools' ability to provide the standards-based curriculum they are working to develop. They are not, however, factors that can be changed or improved by the Project.

**4. Administrators' Roles.** In a small number of schools, implementation varied because there were teachers on the Jewish Studies faculty who did not agree with the standards-based approach supported by the Project and, as a result, declined to participate with their colleagues in the school-based professional development and/or in the bi-weekly meetings. On occasion, such teachers were deemed disruptive to the collaborative work of the Project and were permitted not to participate. This created internal tensions in these schools, particularly when a) two teachers were teaching the same courses/grades but only one was participating in the Project, and when b) the Jewish Studies department was attempting to use the Project to build an aligned scope and sequence for Tanakh. Administrators in these schools recognized the challenges posed by resistant teachers and reported that they planned to address them in the second year of the Project.

## A Reminder About Implementation

Because we have ended this section with a discussion of school-based factors that may limit the extent and fidelity of implementation of the Tanakh Project, we want to remind readers that we began the section reporting that in 12 of the 13 schools the Project was being implemented with fidelity by which we meant that a) teachers were working collaboratively to develop units of instruction that were tied to their schools' selected standards and benchmarks, b) teachers were using the units when teaching Tanakh, c) big ideas and essential questions were posted in classrooms and teachers reported using them during instruction to focus students' attention, d) Jewish Studies Heads were supporting their teachers' work in multiple ways, and e) teachers and Jewish Studies Heads were using the language associated with the Project. This is a significant and meaningful outcome for a complex Project that provides schools with just one year of formal professional development. The fact that school-based factors influence the extent of implementation fidelity does not minimize the finding. Rather, the articulation of the factors can help the Project develop "next steps" designed to address those factors that are amenable to change.

<sup>31</sup> For a more detailed discussion of scheduling issues as well as the next two points related to high schools see Neufeld, B. Final Tanakh Evaluation Report: 2007-2008, July 2008.

<sup>32</sup> The policies we note create challenges for other departments, as well. Our focus in this report, however, is on their impact to implementation of the Standards and Benchmarks Project



## Impact of Implementation

Across the 13 schools, regardless of any challenges associated with implementation, teachers reported that the Project was having a significant impact on their knowledge and skill as teachers and on their students' learning. The examples of this impact that we presented in our July 2008 report on Cohorts I and II were similar to those reported by teachers in Cohorts IV and V. Jewish Studies Heads agreed with their teachers.<sup>33</sup> The Jewish Studies Heads represented in Cohorts IV and V, however, were able to report in greater detail about the impact of the Project. We are confident in linking their ability to report in greater detail to the fact that they had been prepared to take a greater role in the Project through participation in the ILI. Their teachers, too, were more detailed in their descriptions of the Project's impact.

The Jewish Studies Heads, regardless of Cohort, reported that they learned a great deal from their participation and honed their leadership skills. Our data support this conclusion. Our data also support the conclusion that the Jewish Studies Heads who had the advantage of participating in the ILI learned more about a) the underlying rationale for the Project, b) the strategies necessary for building standards-based units along with associated lesson plans and assessments, and c) how to lead the work at their schools by organizing and implementing the bi-weekly meetings and observing and coaching their teachers.

What did teachers report about the impact of the Project at the end of the 2007-2008 school year? Teachers reported that the Project's curriculum development process required them to be clear with themselves and their students about *what* they were teaching and *why* they were teaching it. They noted that the standards-based approach required them to plan more fully and be more structured in their teaching. Teachers considered this to be a benefit of the Project noting students' positive responses to having a clear idea of what they were learning, why they were learning it, and the direction that lessons would take. This finding was a surprise to some teachers, especially those teaching high school who expected their students to prefer a "looser" approach to curriculum and instruction. A small number of teachers were also able to articulate the shift they were making from a focus on *teaching* to a focus on *student learning* as they talked about the impact of the Project on their instructional practices and orientation. Without question, these were positive findings.

Jewish Studies Heads, all of whom recognized that they and their teachers still had a long way to go to fully implement the Project, also reported on the positive impact they saw by the end of the 2007-2008 school year. They reported that teachers understood much of the rationale for the Project and that they were all talking the same language and, where appropriate, were sharing the same lessons. Jewish Studies Heads reiterated what teachers reported about the positive impact of the structure of units and lessons on students' feelings about their Tanakh classes and about their learning.

They also reported positively about the impact of having curriculum-specific assessments that provided them and students with feedback about whether they were achieving the goals of their Tanakh classes.

However, having collected samples of units and talked with the TECs and the Project Director about their completeness and quality, we reported that, although

*...teachers in all seven of the schools had developed units of instruction but their completeness and coherence varied.<sup>34</sup> Most units reviewed identified the Standards and Benchmarks that were the focus of the unit and indicated the "to know" and "to do" categories. Most also indicated some examples of assessments, although in more than half the units these were not fully developed. Units tended to lack scoring guides for the assessments and, when they were included they did not always match well the desired outcomes for the unit. Units tended not to have associated written lesson plans. Across all schools, teachers and Jewish Studies Heads reported that they needed more help in learning to develop and use formative assessments and scoring guides.*

These data support our conclusions about fidelity of implementation; they also indicate the areas in which the Project needed to provide additional professional development to the Jewish Studies Heads who were leading the development of the units and their associated lesson plans and assessments. The ILI was the response to these findings.

Teachers in Cohorts IV and V, as we noted above, reported many of the same Project impacts. But we know that their instructional units included better alignment between the units' goals and the lesson plans and assessments. And, their comments suggest that the Project, during its first year, led them to understand the Project's underlying rationale, its components, and its potential for schoolwide impact in the teaching of Tanakh.

*I loved the idea of having the alignment. I love feeling like I'm actually going somewhere and I have an end goal in mind when I get there. Because, until this unit, the whole year has just kind of been like teaching whatever I feel like teaching, whenever I feel like teaching it, just to kind of fill up the days. Which is hard because when it comes down to it, it's: what am I going to do with these kids every day for 45 minutes? So, it's nice to come into something knowing there's an end goal in mind, and knowing*

<sup>33</sup> Although we have no direct observational data to support teachers' and Jewish Studies Heads' conclusions about the impact of the Project, the detail with which they describe its impact leads us to trust that their comments reflect actual changes.

<sup>34</sup> We attempted to collect units from each teacher interviewed for the study. Not all teachers were willing to let us have sample units for purposes of analysis but most were willing to discuss and display them during interviews. We collected 14 units and discussed their coherence and quality with the Project Director. Our conclusions related to the units are based on examination of the collected units and those shared during interviews.

that I have the collaboration of the people around me. It makes me feel like I have to do what I said I'm going to do. There's definitely more accountability. That's been useful and helpful and nice. I think it's similar benefit for the kids. I'm not as vague with them, knowing that I've kind of thought through everything. Teacher X

I think where I really got hung up is my thought process was, "Well, I should start with the text. And, the text should lead where I'm going." But then I realized as we went through the unwrapping, that no, it's sort of the marriage between the text and the standards. That way, not only are you teaching the text, but you're teaching the text in such a way that you're framing it along the standards. And maybe, when I say that, it sounds completely obvious. But, it didn't sound obvious when we started. Teacher Y

I think this is a great approach. One thing I think is great is that we're obviously not going to teach Tanakh every day of the year. And so, when we do, this is a great method to teach it because these are units that can really be developed and then enhanced from year to year. And, because it is documented so well, everything that we do with it has to really be complete so that it will work, so that it will be a good unit. It's nice, because then you can take that and really change it from year to year as you see it needs to be changed. And, it also will help us to create that level of continuity: Now I'll be able to say "I'm teaching these three units of Tanakh in fifth grade. And, these are the three or four or five units we're going to teach in sixth grade. And, these are the units we're going to look at fourth grade. What am I going to develop for fourth grade? And then, what am I going to develop for third grade?" And we can work our way backwards, at least, in the lower school. Teacher U

And that's something else that's very helpful – all the teachers are using the same style and method of teaching. I can go to another teacher and say, I need help with a particular issue. Very often you've got every teacher in their classrooms using a different teaching style, and so on. Here, something that's extremely helpful is that everybody's using the Bloom's Taxonomy, everyone's using essential questions, everyone's got a lesson goal up on the board. So you can go to a general studies teacher [in this school, too] and say, Here's what I'm teaching, can you help me compose an essential question or a goal, what do you see as the goal? Teacher Z

When I work with the benchmark, when I choose benchmark, it makes my teaching so organized. And, the students know exactly what are we going to do in this chapter. And, even more, they know exactly what we are going to do in each lesson. So, we're both working for the same target. In addition to it, we have the big ideas and the essential questions that the kids know that lead us through the teaching. I love the assessment because it really gives me a tool to measure if the kids understand. In my time, we were only checked to see if we knew the facts. And now, the facts are only

a small part of the teaching. A very important part, but still a part of the teaching. And when I'm getting the assessment, the assignment that the kids are doing at the end of the unit, I can truly tell if they understood. And also, when I reach the assessment, we're already there. The students are there. The students are there. Teacher W

So, it's like perfect. When I need to write, the grades also I need to write with words. So, I opened it [the unit], and it gave me exactly what the student needs to know. So, I looked, and I said, "Okay, does he know already to find the roots of the words? Okay, he knows. I'm writing down he knows. When he reads, does he understand the storyline? Or, can he know the difference between the story and between a conversation and things like this? I can write it down." So, the way the program lays it down, it's like you can open what we were to teach and see exactly: Did I teach this? And, it helps you. Did they learn it? Did I teach it? Teacher V

Jewish Studies Heads were also explicit about the impact of the Project on their teachers and on students. We include comments from Jewish Studies Heads who were in their first and second year of implementation to indicate the way in which the Project's impact develops over time.

Previously, students had felt very uncomfortable with even using a Tanakh, even in English. Now we're now to the point, two years later, that they're using the Hebrew, they're comfortable with it – a huge jump, huge jump. If I may say, I've never seen a program that has been so monumental in change. I think part of that is that we have had the total backing of [our principal], and she's an amazing principal in that she really follows through, and she supports you every step of the way. It was a huge project to undertake. It was many hours, which are often hard to find in a school, but we really built it into the system. And [the TEC] was superb, absolutely superb. We were so sad to see [the TEC] go. I had teachers who were totally negative to begin with, and they've done a total turnaround. Total turnaround. Jewish Studies Head E

Of my three teachers that are involved, I have two who are now regularly committed to some form of it. Even [Teacher R] who, I mean, the man's been teaching twenty-some years, and he raved about how this experience was qualitatively better for him, for his students, so much more rewarding. He felt it really did the trick, as much as he said it was hard work to plan. And [Teacher R] is very responsible, because he really took a lot of the work on his own shoulders, as much as it was supposed to be collaborative, he did a lot of it. And every curriculum conversation I have with [Teacher S] begins with, "What do you want the kids to learn?" So two out of three of them, I think, have had a paradigm shift in terms of how they teach. [Teacher Q], not so much, and I talked to [the TEC] about small steps, small gains for [Teacher Q], and working with her. I am completely sold on it. So where do I see the future of it? It's going to grow. What form it will take will depend on how much direction we give it. Jewish Studies Head A



*I think [we are better with] the language, the terminology and the structure of the units. We now know, as a department, how to do it. I could see that yesterday. We picked a topic. We picked a content that we want to work on. And, the flow was much, much quicker. There is no need to explain unwrapping or the "need to know," or what is the difference between "need to know" and what the students will be able to do? So, the flow was much quicker. We share the same language. Everybody knows what's an essential question and what's a big idea. And, everybody knows that we need to complete the unwrapping, you know, in the right way. Otherwise, we're not going to get anywhere. And so, the language is all shared, and it's much, much quicker. And, everybody is on the same page. The assessment has to be carefully crafted. And, we know where we're going. It's not just like all over the place. Like, we knew where we're going. We had specific standards we wanted to get. So, the assessment also matched exactly what we wanted to get versus, in previous years, we would teach a chapter. And then, "Okay, we have to do a test. We have to prepare a test." There was no connection where you're beginning and where you are ending. Jewish Studies Head H*

*I was just saying to [the TEC] and the whole group last week: going through it the second time was amazing. I was more confident. The kids were more confident. The teaching was better. The teaching was just so, like, more concise. I knew what I was doing. I knew what the outcome was. I just was like so happy when I was teaching that unit again. I love this program, I have to say. I feel like I've always had a passion for Torah. But, this has really been wonderful, in terms of moving my teaching and making it so accessible for all these kids. I think we're getting better at it year two. I'm trying to make sure that [our administrators] know that this has been a tremendous experience for us, and that we would love to continue in whatever form that we can. I'm a real believer in this. I feel that it's so worthwhile, unbelievable, exciting, you know, exciting. And, it continues to grow. That's the nice thing about it. Again, it's not just like learning something and then we're done. Jewish Studies Head C*

*The teachers value it and speak openly about how they value it. They're very articulate about how they value it. Again, to a teacher in these Thursday presentations, every single person talked about the fact that they actually got to study text together, that it changed their perspectives on the text and gave them new insights into the text. And that they got to know each other better through learning together and collaborating together. And, of course, that they get to know the entire curriculum, kind of the entire scope of the curriculum better by developing units together. That's not a small thing. Jewish Studies Head G*

The schools involved in Cohorts I and II demonstrated fidelity of implementation given what had been their opportunities to learn with the support of the 2.5 day institute in which they participated and with their TEC. Those involved in Cohort IV and V, however, had greatly increased opportunities to learn and, as a result, demonstrated greater extent and fidelity of implementation. The comments by teachers and by Jewish Studies Heads in these cohorts indicate their increased knowledge of, a) the underlying rationale and goals of the Project, b) the potential to develop an aligned, coherent curriculum for their schools, c) the benefits of sharing a common set of ideas and language with their colleagues, d) the benefits to themselves and students from having clear and explicit goals, teaching strategies, and assessments, e) the continuous learning opportunities provided by the Project – the opportunities to get better over time at teaching Tanakh, and f) the importance of administrative support for the Project's success.

The Tanakh Standards and Benchmarks Project is an ambitious enterprise that requires a great deal of the Project Director, the TECs, the Jewish Studies Heads, and the teachers. The Project engages Jewish Studies Heads and teachers in changing fundamentally what they teach and how they teach. By requiring them to go through the process of developing curriculum units that include assessments and lesson plans, it highlights what they know and can do and what they still need to learn. Over the years of Project implementation, it has been clear that Tanakh teachers and their Jewish Studies Heads, for the most part, had little experience with developing curriculum, designing lesson plans, and developing formative and summative performance assessments and rubrics. It is always challenging for professionals to confront their own lack of knowledge. This was as true for the Tanakh Project's participants as it would be for any set of teachers confronted with the limits of their knowledge and skill.

To their credit, the teachers and Jewish Studies Heads in the schools in this sample accepted the challenge of participating in the Project, learned a great deal, and made meaningful improvements in Tanakh curriculum and instruction. With the support of the Project Director, the TECs, the Heads of Schools, and professional development, Jewish Studies Heads in Cohorts I, II, IV and V and their teachers demonstrated that it is possible to use standards and benchmarks to establish an instructionally focused, collaborative culture in Jewish day schools that leads to desired improvements in the teaching and learning of Tanakh.

What can we conclude about the impact and value of the Tanakh Standards and Benchmark Project? To reiterate what we highlighted at the beginning of this report:

- Adopting standards and benchmarks can, indeed result in a coherent *vision for teaching Tanakh, meaningful curriculum, and improved teaching* but that the simple word “adopting” masks the complexity of the enterprise. The story of the Standards and Benchmarks Project is the story of what is required to “adopt” standards and benchmarks and use them to good effect.
- The improved teaching that results from adopting standards and benchmarks and leads to better student outcomes is characterized by the presence of a) standards-based units of instruction and associated lesson plans, b) formative and summative assessments, and c) pedagogical practices that focus on student learning outcomes. Each of these components of improved teaching were in scant supply when Jewish Studies Heads and teachers began to participate in the Project. They are now present in the schools participating in the Project.
- Creating the characteristics associated with improved Tanakh teaching depends on the presence of a professional, collaborative, instructionally-focused culture among teachers and Jewish Studies Heads. Developing the culture in which these characteristics can flourish requires hard work that, ultimately, depends on the knowledge and skill of the Jewish Studies Head. When such a culture becomes standard operating procedure in a school, however, teachers have a structure in which to continuously improve their curriculum and pedagogy. When new teachers join the faculty, they can be brought into the standards and benchmarks culture of curriculum, instruction, and assessment. As a result of participating in the Project, these schools have developed professional, collaborative, instructionally-focused cultures that were focused on improving the teaching and learning of Tanakh.
- Most Jewish Studies Heads did not begin the Project with the requisite knowledge and skill about how to use standards and benchmarks to improve teaching and learning. Therefore, the Project needed to design a high quality, multi-faceted professional development program and a Tanakh-specific professional development role, the TEC, in order to increase the opportunities for successful Project implementation. The Project succeeded in this effort.

We can also conclude that for schools to reap the benefits of the professional development provided by the Project they need to implement the Project’s components with reasonable fidelity. To this end, they need, first and foremost, a Head of School who supports the development of a skilled, knowledgeable, committed Jewish Studies Head. The role of the Jewish Studies Head is the most essential school-based factor linked to high quality implementation of the Tanakh Standards and Benchmarks Project. Skillful Jewish Studies Heads need to have the capacity to a) insure sufficient, consistent meeting time with teachers, b) make good use of that time, c) encourage teachers to persevere in the hard work involved in changing their perspective on teaching Tanakh and developing their own standards-based units of instruction, d) provide teachers with feedback on the units and on their teaching of them, and e) understand the value of a collaborative, instructionally-focused culture and support its development for the Tanakh Project and, perhaps, for other areas of Jewish Studies. Skillful Jewish Studies Heads must be eager to learn and use what the Project has to offer and they must be provided by their schools’s administrators with sufficient time to devote to the Project. Previous sections of this report have identified other school-based factors that influence implementation but none, in our view, is more significant than the knowledge, skill, and capacity of the Jewish Studies Head.

The schools in Cohorts I and II, with the JTS-based professional development and the support of their TECs implemented these Project components and demonstrated improvements in curriculum, teaching and learning. The schools in Cohorts IV and V, with their TECs and the additional professional development provided by the ILI, implemented the components with greater success and reported an even greater impact for the Tanakh Standards and Benchmark Project. These findings strongly suggest that the professional development provided by the ILI and the TECs coupled with school-based commitment to implement the Project resulted in achievement of the Project’s goals.

The Tanakh Standards and Benchmarks Project began because there was general agreement that most Jewish day schools did not have a coherent set of goals that guided Tanakh instruction and did not appropriately assess what students were learning class-by-class or year to year. There seemed to be little articulation by schools or by the Associations of what a day school graduate should know or be able to do with respect to Tanakh. At the outset, these conditions characterized the state of Tanakh teaching and curriculum in the day schools that participated in the Project. At the end of their participation, as demonstrated by the data presented, their Tanakh curriculum was well on the way to reflecting a coherent scope and sequence with clear outcome goals for students’ learning; their teaching was focused on engaging students in learning activities that would lead them to meet the standards. As we have said before, this is a great accomplishment.

Finally, we want to highlight several additional factors that contributed to the success of the Project.

**First**, it is important to remember that the Project Director undertook a careful, thoughtful process for selecting the schools. This meant that not all schools interested in participating were selected. Schools needed to demonstrate their capacity for engaging in the Project's work. Nonetheless, despite the careful vetting process, it is not always possible to determine which schools, which Jewish Studies Heads, and which teachers will ultimately succeed in implementing the Project with fidelity and to good effect. It is possible for the Project Director to select schools for participation based on criteria that *ought* to lead to successful implementation and it is possible for her to select schools knowing they might not be quite ready. But we have learned in the last few years that schools that appear to be good candidates for the Project may experience school-based changes – the loss of a Jewish Studies Head, a change in the Head of School – that alter conditions sufficiently to challenge the Project's implementation. And, we have seen schools that faltered in their first year of implementation regroup and develop extensive implementation with high fidelity in their second and third years. This suggests the importance of keeping two points in mind.

1. There is no perfect way to select schools that will insure their success with the Project. The Project Director can do her best, but there will always be some degree of uncertainty in the school selection process. This is to be expected; it is not a flaw in the Project or the Project Director. Furthermore, even schools that experience some significant negative change, may continue to implement the Project. We noted the presence of one school in our sample where teacher leaders were carrying the Project forward. Strong leadership from a Jewish Studies Head would likely have led to greater progress. But the school made good progress as a result of the support of the Head of School and the commitment of its teachers.
2. It is not possible to know, in the first year of implementation, whether a school will succeed with the Project over the longer haul. The first year is for learning the Project's rationale and processes. It does not provide sufficient elapsed time to make a judgment about future success. And, even if it is reasonably clear that a school will succeed, our data lead us to conclude that most schools cannot be ready to sustain the work of implementing standards and benchmarks with only one year of funded professional development support.

Given that we know it will take more than one year for all schools to become sufficiently knowledgeable to use the Project's processes effectively let alone learn enough to sustain them without external support, and given that we know curriculum innovation takes three to five years, the data collected from the schools adds evidence to the argument that the Project should be funded with no less than two years of professional development support for the schools. We are saying this not simply because the schools want a second year of formal support but because this is what it will take to create the greatest impact for the Project. The AVI CHAI Foundation is already supporting to good effect. This is what it will take for schools and for the larger day school community to reap the benefits of this well-designed, well-led and well-implemented Project.

**Second**, although we have not said much directly about the knowledge and skills teachers needed to implement the Project with fidelity, needless to say, teachers are essential to its outcome. The teachers interviewed for this study demonstrated their commitment to the Project and their increasing knowledge and skill with what they said in response to our questions. Given that in most schools we interviewed all of the Tanakh teachers, the responses presented in this report are not biased toward only the most effective teachers. They represent all of the teachers in these schools.

During the first year or two of the Project's implementation, it seemed as though teachers with deep knowledge of Tanakh were essential to fidelity of implementation. Certainly, knowledgeable teachers contribute greatly to its success. But we have learned that high quality Jewish Studies Heads can support their teachers in learning Tanakh along with learning to teach with standards and benchmarks. Learning Tanakh can become an integral part of implementing the Project.

While targeted, just-in-time learning of Tanakh may not be the ideal preparation for Jewish Studies teachers, we consider it a valid, valuable, and effective approach to a) using the standards and benchmarks, b) improving the teaching of Tanakh in a good number of day schools that do not have teachers with deep Tanakh knowledge, and c) supporting the range of schools that sincerely want to improve the teaching and learning of Tanakh.

**Third**, and also essential to the success of the Project was the Project Director's capacity and willingness to continually learn from the schools as she was developing the Project's professional development components. The early challenges that the schools faced in using the standards and benchmarks led to the development of the role of the TEC and TEC professional development. Continuing challenges led to the development of the ILI and, thereby, the on-going, targeted, high quality professional development for Jewish Studies Heads that was essential for their development.

**Fourth**, the role of The AVI CHAI Foundation as a learning organization was essential to the success of the Project. AVI CHAI was willing to listen carefully to what the Project Director was learning, consider the evaluation findings, and fund the Project's continuing development. As a result, the Project had the resources with which to put in place the professional development program that enabled schools to achieve their goals and those of the Project.

The Tanakh Project is a high quality professional development program focused on teaching and learning Tanakh. There is every reason to believe that similarly designed standards and benchmarks projects focused on other areas of Jewish Studies could likewise improve their teaching and learning in Reform, Conservative and Community day schools. No doubt it would be challenging to develop standards and benchmarks for teaching these other areas. No doubt there would need to be some adaptations to the professional development program provided to those who teach and lead other Jewish Studies subjects. But, the framework for moving forward has been developed and the outcomes from the Tanakh Project suggest the effort would be worthwhile and would contribute mightily to improving the quality of Jewish Studies in the nation's day schools.

## Appendix A: Rationale for Tanakh Standards and Benchmarks<sup>35</sup>

Development of sophisticated standards and benchmarks for Jewish studies is efficacious for a variety of reasons. School staff can:

- Use benchmarks to describe the knowledge and skills they want their students to acquire, aligning themselves with other day schools of Jewish studies excellence who take their Jewish studies mission as seriously as their general studies mission.
- Promote K-12 coherence by using the power of carefully constructed core-concept benchmarks to help make connections and relate linkages that make sense in a larger context of “big ideas.” Research shows that this approach helps learners make a personal meaning and retain learning more effectively than the often disjointed, unfocused, haphazard presentation of skills and knowledge in schools without benchmarks.
- Refer to benchmarks to design curriculum, instruction, and assessment. Decisions on what to teach, how to teach, and how to evaluate are among the most important choices educators make. Benchmarks can give coherence and rationality to this process.

Benchmarks can also enhance the day school movement in some other powerful ways:

- A nationally recognized list of benchmarks could inform teacher preparation and continuing professional-development efforts. It will help define a basis for teacher content knowledge and create a shared professional literature on which to base creative learner-centered instructional strategies. Thus, teachers in one school or community seeking to design instruction to move their students to mastery of a given set of benchmarks can share that successful effort with all others in the profession using the same core literacy set of benchmarks. This enhances faculty self-esteem and raises the level of the profession by creating a professional culture of teachers helping teachers.
  - Appropriate use of benchmark and performance-based assessments can help improve learning for all students, setting high standards for all, not just the elite, thus creating a more universal and democratic Jewish-communal policy.
- Families are more mobile than ever; with students constantly moving from school to school as families often look to relocate to an area where there is a strong, excellent day school. Shared competencies and benchmarks can help students make these transitions.
- A seriousness of purpose in Jewish studies, with well-articulated, nationally accepted standards, can enhance the status of Jewish studies in the eyes of constituents and put everyone in the school community on notice that the school adheres to high standards in both general and Jewish studies. Presently, because only general studies is the focus of testing (standardized state and national exams, SATs, achievement tests, and advanced placement examinations), Jewish studies is often relegated to second-class status.
  - Even if a school, because of denominational or ideological reasons, or as a result of a specific mission and vision, doesn't wish to embrace a specific standard and set of benchmarks, the staff would be well-served with a comprehensive list of important core concepts, texts, and Jewish values that can be adapted for its own purposes. Few schools have the time, expertise, or structure to permit the development of this master list of elements, which go into being a literate, understanding, striving, practicing Jewish person.
  - Publishers and centralized curriculum and instruction-preparation teams can have a much clearer sense of what the field requires for given grade levels, thus creating a more efficient research, development, and marketing enterprise for the creation of educational materials for use in Jewish studies, where a paucity of quality materials is currently the norm.

<sup>35</sup> This text can be found on the project's website at [www.jtsa.edu](http://www.jtsa.edu)

**Standard 1:** Students will become independent and literarily astute readers of the biblical text in Hebrew.

**Standard 2:** Students will be engaged in the learning of ancient, rabbinic, and modern modes of interpretation of the biblical text and will see themselves as a link in this ongoing chain of interpretation.

**Standard 3:** Students will appreciate Tanakh as a multivocal text with a complex history of development.

**Standard 4:** Students will view Tanakh as the formative narrative of the Jewish People – past, present, and future.

**Standard 5:** Students will, through the study of Tanakh, understand and value that the Land of Israel informs and shapes the historical, theological, and sociological experiences of the Jewish People.

**Standard 6:** Students will develop an appreciation for the sacredness of Tanakh as the primary record of the meeting between God and the people of Israel and as an essential text through which Jews continue to grapple with theological, spiritual, and existential questions.

**Standard 7:** Students will understand, through the study of Tanakh and its interpretations, the role of mitzvot in the shaping of the ethical character and religious practices of the individual and the Jewish People.

**Standard 8:** Students will develop a love of Torah study for its own sake and embrace it as an inspiring resource, informing their values, moral commitments, and ways of experiencing the world.

<sup>36</sup> For a list of the standards and related benchmarks that can guide the development of curricular units, go to <http://www.jtsa.edu/x1688.xml>



# Appendix C: Goals for Judaic Studies Instructional Leaders

## Guiding and Developing Judaic Studies Curricula

- Guides curricular decisions from an articulated vision of teaching and learning of *TaNakh*
- Explains the rationale for using a standards-based approach for developing Judaic Studies curricula
- Instructs teachers on each element of the standards-based curriculum design
- Is proficient in developing standards-based curriculum and units
- Guides teachers in developing lesson plans and strategies
- Applies a standards-based approach with existing curriculum such as *TaL AM* and *MaToK*
- Develops a strategic plan for on-going sustained in-school professional development

## Coaching and Mentoring Judaic Studies Faculty

- Observes and supervises teachers
- Provides effective feedback
- Uses language to encourage teacher learning and collaboration
- Builds trusting relationships
- Analyzes data with faculty
- Recognizes and addresses individual faculty learning in adopting a standards-based approach for the teaching of *TaNakh*
- Guides and teaches faculty how to create learning activities and performance assessments aligned with selected standards and benchmarks
- Develops timetables for applying standards-based units

## Creating Collaborative Faculty Learning Communities

- Creates a calendar of meetings for teams and whole group
- Plans and facilitates instructionally-focused faculty meetings
- Designs and guides faculty text study on selected texts for units
- Facilitates “looking at student work” and other protocols with faculty
- Fosters the collaborative development of lesson plans and performance assessments
- Creates a coherent curriculum with a well defined scope and sequence



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