

# Why Applied Research Is Integral to Advancing Jewish ECE

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By Michael Feuer and Mitch Malkus

Diana Ganger, a coach/consultant in Organizational and Educational settings and a long-time Jewish educator, [published a piece](#) in *eJP* discussing the importance and potential of Jewish early childhood education (ECE) and – conversely – the limited investment being made to attract, retain, and professionally develop educators in this field. We have seen a [recent reader's response](#) and want to add our voice to this important discussion. Two of CASJE's ([Consortium for Applied Studies in Jewish Education](#)) projects directly address the needs Diana, we believe correctly, pinpoints.

First, in CASJE's area of focus on Jewish ECE, we are overseeing a research program funded partially by The Crown Family to explore how Jewish early childhood education may serve as a gateway for greater and long-term involvement in Jewish life. The three-year research program – co-led by Dr. Tamara Halle, Senior Scholar at [Child Trends](#), a nationally-recognized nonprofit research organization specializing in the study of children, youth, and their families, and Professor Mark I. Rosen of Brandeis University, who has been studying Jewish families with young children since 2003 – focuses especially on better understanding opportunities around interfaith families and families that are not currently involved in a synagogue or other Jewish institution.

Over time, a series of studies that are integrated and replicated can inform the development, training, practice improvement efforts, and impact of Jewish educational leaders and leadership in Jewish ECE settings. This applied research would be available to any ECE director, educator, and center so that the entire field has usable information and resources to raise its level of excellence – thereby welcoming more families into Jewish life.

Having usable knowledge is not enough. As Diana explains, “We all intuitively know what the research makes clear: teacher quality hugely affects learning. Yet, we routinely tie the hands of Jewish early childhood directors in that they do not have the funding to attract and hire high quality educators.” To this end, CASJE is seeking funding for a program of research to explore *Recruitment, Retention, and Development of Jewish Educators*. Already, the Consortium has convened a day-long gathering of scholars, practitioners, and funders, supported by the William Davidson Foundation, who have a keen interest in identifying areas of inquiry and methodology to address this question: **What would it take to recruit significantly greater numbers of talented people to the field of Jewish education, and what would be needed to sustain and retain those personnel once they have launched careers in the field?**

Research-based knowledge addressing this question not only can inform how and why funders invest in the field, it also can serve as inspiration and as a resource towards addressing challenges in Jewish ECE. This includes motivating young people to enter the field; offering effective professional development and training; compensating them fairly; and understanding the field's and employers' needs over the next years.

CASJE's mission is to address needs, challenges, and questions on the ground that the field of Jewish education is experiencing through improving the quality and quantity of applied research. While we know the issues raised by Diana here are significant, we also know that applied research can be a part of the solution – in this case by providing research related to the field of Jewish ECE and understanding better the high-quality educators in the field.

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