

# JEWISH COMMUNITY CENTERS AND JEWISH SCHOOLS THAT SHARE A BUILDING OR CAMPUS:

## Toward a Cooperative Educational Effort

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*Twenty-eight JCCs in the United States and Canada share a building or campus with a Jewish school. Benefits of such interagency cooperation include shared facilities, equipment, staff resources, and programs; and increases in membership and participation.*

*How can Jewish Community Centers (JCCs) and the Jewish schools located in their building or on the same campus cooperate to better serve the formal and informal Jewish educational needs of their community?* This research question deals with a specific example of a much broader issue—the need for interagency cooperation and communication. Jewish community organizations are currently being called upon to reinvigorate and reengineer themselves. In this context, improvements in interagency cooperation are viewed as a means of providing more seamless Jewish community services and perhaps being more efficient in the process.

JCCs and Jewish schools located in the same building or on the same campus are a logical case in point for interagency cooperation. They *should* cooperate.

Twenty-eight JCCs in the United States and Canada share a building or campus with a Jewish school. I interviewed eight of these JCCs' executive directors and executive vice-presidents regarding their perspectives on the relationships between their JCC and the Jewish schools. I also mailed brief questionnaires to those executive directors not interviewed and received responses from all but two. Although it is possible that more such centers exist, neither my contacts at the Jewish Community Center Association nor any of the JCC executive directors who responded produced any additions to the list.

My impressions are far from conclusive. Rather, whatever conclusions I may draw are necessarily tentative and fragmentary. My intention is to highlight what seem to be

trends and indicators of certain directions, and to open areas for future research. It is hoped that this may be the first step toward identifying models of cooperation by which JCCs and Jewish schools can be mutually supportive in serving the formal and informal Jewish educational needs of their community. Due to confidentiality concerns, I have tried not to discuss individual JCCs in an identifying manner.

The memberships of these 26 JCCs range from 1,200 to 10,000 individuals. Slightly more than half of these JCCs (15) have memberships of less than 5,000. The Jewish communities that these JCCs serve range in population from 1,650 to 150,000. However, most of these JCCs (17) serve relatively small Jewish communities with under 20,000 Jews.

Thirty-four Jewish schools are located in the same building or on the same campus with these 26 JCCs. Of these 34 schools, 25 are Jewish day schools, 7 are supplementary/Hebrew schools, and 2 are one-day-a-week schools. The schools range in size from 40 students in a one-day-a-week school to 1,500 students in a day school. The large majority of the schools have a current estimated enrollment of 200 students or less.

The relative smallness of most of the JCCs, Jewish schools, and Jewish communities is significant in that Jewish educational resources—Jewish educational professionals, curriculum materials, and financial resources—are likely to be more limited and the benefits from cooperation are likely to be greater. Also, small communities usually can only sustain one Jewish day school, and that sole Jewish day school is frequently located in

proximity to the JCC.

Because the nature of the school's mandate can affect the degree of cooperation between the school and the JCC, the number of schools considered "community" schools is noteworthy. Most of the day schools (16 of 25) and the supplementary and one-day-a-week schools (7 of 9) are affiliated with a Jewish community agency—the federation, the Board of Jewish Education, a consortium of Jewish movements, or a combination of several Jewish agencies—or are a JCC program.

### **BENEFITS AND PITFALLS OF JCC-SCHOOL COOPERATION**

JCCs and Jewish schools have developed relationships that tend to be mutually beneficial in several areas. All of the JCC directors interviewed report at least some of these benefits.

JCCs and schools with relationships that are characterized by tension or competition tend to experience the least benefits, whereas those with positive and cooperative relationships tend to experience the most benefits. Similarly, where relationships between the two organizations are poor, some areas of potential benefit become centers of conflict and sources of tension. And even when the two organizations are seemingly on the best of terms, potential risks—about which both organizations should be aware—remain.

#### **Shared Facilities and Equipment**

Sharing facilities and equipment is viewed as an extremely important benefit of JCC-school cooperation. Schools used the JCCs' auditoriums, gyms, pools, ball fields, courts, and equipment. JCCs used the school classrooms and meeting room space and equipment for evening meetings, as well as for JCC day camp held during the winter school break and over the summer.

The most benefit existed when the exchange of rentals was reciprocal or approximately equal in value. In those cases, no rental fees were changed to either organization. The JCC or Jewish school would pay

out-of-pocket, reimbursable expenses only; for example, the cost of custodial staff to open one building for another institution's exclusive use on a Sunday night.

In one community, the Jewish community day school was housed in and paid rent to a JCC whose building was too small and no longer appropriate for either institution. The community joined forces to conduct a multi-million dollar fund-raising campaign for the purpose of buying a new JCC building. School parents raised sufficient monies to pay for an addition to the new site, thus providing themselves with the extra space that they needed. The JCC now leases this new wing to the day school for no rent. The school pays its own utilities, maintenance, and some insurance costs. The community as a whole has benefited from the cooperative effort.

However, sharing facilities and equipment can also lead to conflicts. Two typical problems are (1) abuse or damage of the facilities of one organization by members of the other due to carelessness or negligence and (2) space constraints that result in competition for use of the auditorium, gym, or classrooms and that restrict the growth of one institution or the other. Sometimes, these conflicts are avoidable. Others take long-range planning to prevent.

Resentments also developed when there was a feeling of a lack of reciprocity. For example, in some cases, financial problems, resentments, and sometimes simple administrative inefficiency on the part of one side resulted in delayed or even purposely withheld rental fees or reimbursements for expenses to the cooperating institution. In one case of reciprocal building usage, one side decided to unilaterally change the rules and begin charging rental fees to the other. The obvious result was an upgrading of tensions (i.e., reciprocal rental fee charges by the other side) until the issues were resolved.

#### **Shared Staff and Lay Leadership**

Especially in small communities, Jewish professionals tend to wear several hats. The advantage is that community organizations

are able to share scarce Jewish professionals and are thus able to best coordinate that community's limited financial resources. For example, the director of one JCC may serve as the administrator of the community's Jewish schools. The principal of one afternoon school is also the director of the community teacher center. In some centers, JCC staff may substitute for Jewish school staff and vice versa. In other centers, JCC staff volunteer to speak at Jewish school parent programs, and the Jewish school principal or teachers might volunteer to participate in a JCC program. In yet other centers, JCCs provide their specialized physical education staff to the Jewish school on a fee-for-service basis.

Cooperation also provides the opportunity for two institutions who could not normally afford to hire an additional well-qualified full-time staff person to share that individual's salary and benefits. For example, in one center, the half-time JCC Jewish teen director also works half-time for the Hebrew school. Although the JCC continues to be reimbursed for half his salary and benefits monthly, the jobs have merged to such an extent over the years that one can hardly distinguish between what is a JCC and what is a Jewish school program. Future plans for several JCCs include proposals to share a community family educator with their on-site Jewish school.

In larger centers where Jewish professionals are more available and JCCs can afford to hire Jewishly competent staff, the sharing of professional staff is less of an issue. In some cases, directors prefer to use their own informal educators whom they feel are more suited to JCC programming than formal Jewish educators. In other cases, they are pleased to share staff whenever doing so is of benefit to either institution.

A number of JCCs unofficially share lay leadership with Jewish schools and other Jewish community organizations. The reputation of the nursery committee structure in one JCC is known to be so excellent that it acts as a "farm team," training parents to be active in the day school as their children grow up.

Conflicts occur when one organization "steals away" staff (1) without consultation

with the other organization's administrator, (2) by offering a higher salary than the other organization can afford to pay, or (3) after a contract agreement has already been reached with the other organization. Likewise, tensions result when lay leaders or particularly central volunteers are "enticed" away from one organization by the other.

### **Membership, Enrollment, and Participation**

JCC directors believed that physical proximity to one or more Jewish schools increased JCC membership, program enrollment, and participation in JCC activities and also increased enrollment for the Jewish schools. According to one director, "A symbiosis of programs exists, not because of joint programming but because our programs feed one another and there is mutual benefit." All the JCCs had preschool, nursery, or day care programs, and these programs were viewed as an excellent source of students for each year's Jewish school kindergarten. In many cases, the kindergarten students coming from JCC preschool programs formed the critical base population of the Jewish schools. One Jewish school came into existence, in large part, because parents wanted a continuation of the JCC preschool. Likewise, the Jewish schools provided the JCC with on-site clientele for their after-school cultural, athletic, and day care programs.

Reciprocal publicity of each other's programs seemed to increase this benefit of enhanced participation. According to several directors, JCC nursery school parents who are informed early on about the Jewish school on-site tend to view the Jewish school as a natural extension of their nursery school experience, especially when that experience has been a positive one. Likewise, consistent publicity of JCC programs at the school increased participation not only in after-school programs but also in other JCC programs.

Even nominal cooperation between the two organizations can have positive results. For example, one JCC sends a staff person to pick up students for JCC day care and after-

school programs from their on-campus Jewish day school. Another holds family programs at the dinner hour, designed to be most convenient for parents picking up their children from the JCC after work. Sometimes, the Jewish school principal asks for specific JCC programs to suit their students' needs; for example, a course in computers or piano lessons. Some JCCs hold regular meetings with Jewish school parents to determine program interests for the coming year.

However, the interdependence between school enrollment and JCC membership and program enrollment can also have its down side. For example, when one Jewish school had an internal crisis, many parents transferred their children to schools in other areas of the city, also removing their children from JCC after-school programs, withdrawing the younger siblings from the JCC preschool programs, and dropping their JCC memberships. The JCC camp enrollment also declined radically. The result was financial hardship for both organizations. According to the JCC director involved, "You don't realize how intertwined the two organizations are until you have a crisis in one."

Other problems may result when either the JCC or school fails to reciprocate publicity of the others' programs or even opens its own competing programs. For example, in some cases, the school stopped promoting the JCC's after-school day care, club programs, and music programs and started its own. In another, the school failed to give priority to publicizing JCC camps, and as a result, many of their students attended non-Jewish summer camps. In such cases, the JCC might retaliate, for example, by not publicizing the school to its nursery parents or by opening a kindergarten in competition with the school. Non-promotion of Jewish programming hurts the community as a whole. In communities where the market is not big enough for two competing programs, both the JCC and Jewish school suffer.

#### **Shared Resources and Programs**

JCC directors report that sharing resources

and co-sponsoring programs not only eliminates competition for clients and saves money but also enables the organizations to institute programs or buy resources they would otherwise not have. According to one director, cooperation means "there are now so many more things we can do." For example, in several communities, the Jewish school and JCC pool their book budgets to share one library with many more books than either could afford alone. Family dinners, book fairs, adult education series, lectures, and other joint programs are held in which the school and JCC split the costs. When weather conditions result in early school dismissal, at least one JCC cooperates with the school by providing child care.

Yet, not all JCC directors believed co-sponsoring programs with their Jewish school to be beneficial because "school parents want school-related issues" or "school families attend JCC programs because they are of interest, not because they're co-sponsored" or "we already offer enough programs and are short staffed and already working hard to keep up."

When the Jewish school does not share the JCC's mandate of being religiously pluralistic, shared or co-sponsored programs are rare. For example, joint Jewish family education programs are considered especially problematic by JCC directors when the school is affiliated with a specific movement within Judaism. And the less "mainstream" the movement, the more distance and distinctiveness JCC directors feel their programs must retain. According to one such director, "We could never co-sponsor programs because we want to be inclusive—to include all children together. We don't want to be perceived or identified as a (name of affiliation) building."

#### **Atmosphere of the Building**

Directors generally agree about the positive effects that the "hustle and bustle" of sharing facilities can have on the atmosphere of their building: "We have more use. More activity." "The building is active all the time. Walk in, it's never quiet."

Some directors commented about the sense of community that having the school children generated. "Kids start at the JCC preschool at six months of age and continue coming to the building regularly through grade eight. It's their building. They're very comfortable here." "We're able to have intergenerational programs during the day—seniors and kids get to know each other."

Others noted the physical changes to the JCCs. "We have more art work on the walls, including more Jewish art work. We may open a museum of the children's art."

Concerns generally had to do with the building being perceived as only child oriented and the worry that some adults might be put off by the high level of activity. In addition, when asked what he would change if he could, one JCC director remarked, "I'd like the kids not to destroy the property!"

#### **MOST RELEVANT INDICATORS OF COOPERATION**

##### **Key Individuals**

Most directors reported that key professional and lay people of both organizations played crucial and pivotal roles in (1) recognizing the common needs and initiating the cooperative process between the two organizations and (2) forging positive, trusting working relationships.

Certain characteristics of key lay people seemed to be most effective in promoting positive inter-institutional cooperation. First, they were diplomatic and discreet, both within and outside of the context of negotiations, and understood the workings of board and committee structures. Persons whose manner of speech and demeanor seemed to encourage conflict or who leaked information from board or other high-level meetings in order to garnish constituency support were seen as problematic. Second, effective professional and lay leaders were not parochial, but rather viewed the relationship from the perspective of "the greater good," understanding the needs for balance and reciprocity.

The professionals involved were also viewed as requiring certain personal characteristics—mutual respect, courtesy, and a willingness to forgo self aggrandizement—for the relationship to be most positive. According to one director of a JCC with extremely positive and close community relationships, "There are no kings in a community like this. There's no ego involvement of who's running this or that.... Relationships (between professionals) are important, but we're not all best friends. What we do have is a sense of respect for each individual's area of expertise."

Conversely, in several cases, tense or deteriorating interorganizational relationships were attributed to ineffective administration, especially by the school principal. The ineffective administrator seemed to negatively affect the day-to-day functional cooperation between the two organizations, but also may be "principal" in sabotaging lay board approval of contract or other arrangements. For example, some principals were viewed as being inefficient or incompetent in moving motions regarding the relationship through school committee or board structures. When an ineffective administrator was replaced, the level of cooperation tended to increase. However, high turnover of people in key roles, especially the principal of the school or the executive director of the JCC, also seemed to be associated with severe problems, both for the organization itself and its relationship with the other. According to one director, when there is high turnover of key staff, "problems become endemic." Because one organization has little direct control over the professional or lay staff of the other, potential interorganizational problems related to key individuals are not easy to prevent.

##### **The Jewish School's Educational and Religious Mandate**

From the perspective of JCC directors, both the Jewish community's perception of the Jewish school's religious mandate and the Jewish school's own understanding of its Jewish educational mission affect the level of

cooperation between the two organizations.

First, cooperation seemed to be more likely when the JCC, as well as the wider local Jewish community, viewed the school as a "community" school; that is, when the student population is inclusive or the school is at least open to accepting children from the full range of families who live in the community and the philosophy of the school is perceived as at least somewhat pluralistic.

Conversely, cooperation appeared less desirable when the Jewish school did not appear "pluralistic" because (1) JCC directors were less likely to envision the Jewish school's mandate as complementing their own, and (2) there was a concern that the JCC would be "painted with the same brush" by its association with the school, thus giving the impression to other segments of the Jewish community that they were less valued or less welcome as members. According to one JCC director, the simple physical proximity to such a school "affects how the community views the JCC" and causes parts of the community to feel "excluded and uncomfortable because of this perception."

Second, cooperation seemed to be more likely when the principals and lay leaders of the Jewish school understood their students' participation in informal Jewish educational programs, such as the after-school programs, youth groups, and camps offered by the JCC, as a meaningful component of the development of their Jewish identity. JCC directors reported that this was not always the case, particularly with Jewish day schools. Some JCC directors characterized Jewish day schools as having "the most parochial" principals and lay people they had ever encountered. According to one director, "It's a sense of superiority. They (Jewish day school principals and lay people) think they have the only answer to Jewish survival and Jewish continuity. This (the Jewish day school) is the future of the Jewish community. The rest of you play at it." It's likely that Jewish schools who devalued Jewish educational experiences other than their own are significantly less motivated to cooperate in a posi-

tive manner with JCCs, which may affect the balance of reciprocity in the relationship.

### Reciprocity

Interorganizational cooperation is the act of at least two organizations working together for a common purpose. A necessary first step for interorganizational cooperation therefore, is some mutual/reciprocal agreement about the nature of that common purpose. When no such agreement exists, one organization can not unilaterally cooperate, as much as it would like to do so.

When some sort of basic agreement does exist, cooperation between JCCs and Jewish schools in their building or on their campus offers tremendous potential for common benefit. However, many aspects of the downside of the relationships—the "pitfalls to avoid"—seemed to be associated with the initial incidence of hurt feelings which developed into long-lasting institutional positions that the other was "out to get all that they could." Directors tended to view conditions as lacking in reciprocity when either of the institutions "takes advantage" of the other. In the words of one director, "When the school wants something, they're our best friends—we're invited to lunches, meetings with parents, the board, and so forth. When they think they don't need us, we're ignored."

Examples of lack of reciprocity were most noticeable in the areas of contracts and lease arrangements, shared facilities and equipment, and shared staff and lay leadership. In each of these cases, awareness of the need for reciprocity may help to prevent or at least alleviate many of the difficulties.

### THE JCC'S VISION

A necessary but perhaps not sufficient prerequisite for organizational cooperation seemed to be the assumption that there is actual mutual benefit to such an endeavor—increased JCC membership, increased Jewish school enrollment, cost savings, more and better programs, etc. However, mutual benefit may be an irrelevant or at least an insuf-

efficient prerequisite for cooperation under at least two conditions. First, in the case of larger, successful JCCs and Jewish schools, increased membership, enrollment, and cost savings may be irrelevant. When both organizations are strong and doing very well, neither may have the motivation to entangle themselves in potentially risky relationships in order to theoretically do even better. Or, one or both of the organizations may feel that they do not have the physical or staff capacity to expand their services. Second, even where JCCs might have room for expansion, past problematic experiences with the Jewish school may temper the perception of mutual benefit. In other words, the increase in potential benefit to the JCC may be perceived as being outweighed by the potential risks involved in such a cooperative relationship. When mutual benefit is irrelevant or insufficient, the question is the one explicitly voiced by one director—"Why *should* the JCC and school cooperate?" The answer may lie in the vision of the JCC vis-a-vis the role it plays in its Jewish community.

In centers where high levels of cooperation exist between the JCC and a Jewish school, executive directors all voiced in some manner the strong opinion that in their community, all are responsible for one another. According to one director of a fairly large center that strongly promoted cooperation, "We're all in the same business. We need to support each other. We need to promote one another. We need to communicate with each other." This shared vision minimally included the JCC and the school, but especially in small communities, also frequently included the federation, Bureau of Jewish Education, and synagogues as well. Sometimes, this vision was based on an understanding of joint community objectives and the need for "seamless Jewish education." According to the director of a highly cooperative center in a small community, the limited Jewish community's financial resources need to be shared for the common good. Explaining why the Jewish schools in his building pay such nominal rent, he said:

The way I look at it in a community our size is that federation gives them (the Jewish school) an allocation, federation gives us an allocation. Which pocket do you want to take it out of... It's a commitment we have to make. We have to have this program in the community.

In this particular community, a Jewish community committee consisting of representatives of the JCC, Jewish day and supplementary school, federation, and synagogues met regularly to draft a plan of action. According to the director involved, "We all sat down and said, 'What do we need, what are the issues we're facing, and how are we going to make this thing work.'"

Where high levels of cooperation exist, the vision of shared fate seemed to supersede other issues, including potential risks, overcrowding, or even past negative experiences. One director of a very large, successful center spoke about his JCC's relationship with the school in his building as follows; "Our futures are linked. The school is our future. We could fill the space (the school occupies) and possibly make more money but we won't because this is the best use of our space." Another JCC director continued to highly value the "sense of community" the school in his building brings to his center and continues to maintain a close and positive relationship with the school, despite the fact that the JCC does not have sufficient space for its own current membership needs. Yet another director, of a center that had recently experienced a significant membership and financial loss because of internal problems of a Jewish school, recognized the significance of Jewish organizational interconnectedness and responsibility in good times as well as in bad. He stated this vision of a shared fate and responsibility as follows:

You don't realize how intertwined you are until you have a crisis in one. A center itself might be strong, but you're always impacted by what happens in terms of your sister agencies.... All of us together is what makes our community strong, and if one has a problem or one is not doing well, the others suffer.