Foreword
Carolyn Keller
Director, Continuity and Education
Combined Jewish Philanthropies of Greater Boston

We are proud that Boston's Commission on Jewish Continuity designed one of the country's pioneering initiatives to enhance Jewish families' involvement in Jewish learning, living and celebration. This report demonstrates that we have accomplished a great deal towards our goal and our vision—and that there is much more work to be done.

*Sh'arim*/Gateways to Jewish Living: The Family Educator Initiative, provided new personnel and programmatic resources to enable synagogues, community centers and day schools to bring parents not just to the doors but into their institutions to become effective partners in the education of their children. Beyond that, it started a vision-driven educational process of engaging adults in their own search for Jewish meaning. We now see that *Sh'arim* laid the foundation for vast changes in the Boston Jewish community. Jewish education, once primarily for children, now attracts Jews of all ages. Learning congregations and communities have become a central force in the adult Jew's journey towards Jewish literacy and in the family's increased participation in Jewish activity and Jewish life.

This assessment of *Sh'arim*'s progress over the last seven years reveals several outstanding examples of substantive change in the quality of our community's Jewish life:

* More families are attending synagogue services regularly and are engaged in Jewish educational activities.

* Families are taking a more active interest in their own and their children's Jewish development.

* Parents and children are engaging together in a greater variety of Jewish and general activities, creating a positive set of values and experiences linked to their Jewish identity.

And, perhaps most extraordinary,

* An overwhelming majority of Jewish parents want more involvement in Jewish life.

*Sh'arim* has created a new cadre of Jewish educational professionals—full-time Jewish family educators. Family educators have established themselves in the Jewish communal world as professionals who care about the development of individual Jewish families and the vibrancy of their communities. Their work is being recognized and appreciated by their institutions, with increased stature, responsibilities, and compensation. They set a standard for all Jewish educators in their commitment to ongoing professional growth and development and they serve as attractive role models for today's Jewish families. In their institutions, which took risks to support their pioneering efforts, the Family Educators serve as integrative forces, skillfully creating holistic Jewish environments.
The models of professional development, career growth and institutional change have become the paradigms on which Boston's other communal initiatives are based. We are grateful to the educators, their supervisors and host institutions, as well as to the partnership of agencies, congregations, schools, and the federation that have contributed to the success of Sh'arin to date. The community's generous support of Sh'arin, through Combined Jewish Philanthropies, has made all of this possible.

One of the hallmarks of this initiative since its inception is its commitment to systematic research and assessment of impact. Over the years, this process has enabled us to make substantive changes in the way we have implemented the program. Participating institutions have become increasingly comfortable with the research process and committed to using the information generated to reflect on their practice and adopt new approaches.

This unique longitudinal study also points to several areas where more could be done in the future for family education to fulfill its mission of creating meaningful Jewish experiences and memories:

* Family education can become a more effective tool to create the expectation of children's continued involvement in Jewish education post bar/bat mitzvah.

* Family education should strive to enhance adults' feelings of "belonging" within their Jewish community.

* Family education, already succeeding at connecting families to the synagogue, needs to tackle the frontier of enhancing Jewish activity and practice in the home.

With the publication of this report and its findings, we celebrate the achievements of Sh'arin, as well as its potential for continued development and contributions to the vitality of our Jewish community!

Adar 1 5760
February 2000
SH'ARIM—Building Gateways to Jewish Life and Community
A Report on Boston’s Jewish Family Educator Initiative

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KEY FINDINGS

This study tracks the development of Sh’arim, the Jewish Family Educator Initiative sponsored by the Commission on Jewish Continuity. The research is based on bi-annual reports completed by the family education teams in 11 synagogues; surveys completed in 1995 by 2nd and 5th grade parents and in 1998 by 2nd, 5th and 8th grade parents; exploratory focus groups with 5th grade parents; and focus groups with the congregations’ family educators, rabbis and directors of education.

* Jewish family education has become an accepted part of the congregations. In most of the congregations, family education now has an active lay committee, representation on the synagogue board of directors and strong board support. As the Commission’s contribution to the family educators’ salaries has declined over the years, boards have voted not only to assume the difference but also to add sizeable increases.

* The family educator’s role in the congregation has taken hold and, in some places, has expanded. Family educators are now expected to design and implement more programs, work with more staff members and involve themselves more frequently with other arms of their congregations. The linkage between the religious school and family education has been re-examined, and each congregation has arrived at its own definition of family education’s primary target audience. Some of the family educators now report to rabbis or vice presidents of education, in addition to or instead of the education directors or school principals.

* Family education is part of an enhanced climate of learning in the synagogues. Family education has provided an increased number of educational opportunities within congregations, offering an average of 25 family education programs a year. The great majority of parents in the Sh’arim study participate in the congregations’ family education programs, a marked increase from three years earlier. For over a third of these parents, these programs were their only source of formal Jewish education that year. An equal number rate family education as “very important” in bringing them into the congregation and involving them in its activities. Whatever their level of participation in Jewish education, two-thirds of the parents want more. Only about one-third are engaged at the level they want to be.
* Parents derive a number of benefits from family education. Parents in focus groups said that family education helps them understand what their children are doing in religious school, it involves them in their children’s education, it offers a “hands-on” Judaism and it supports practices in the home. They also said that the quality of these programs is uneven. They find some programs highly effective, while others lack creativity and have less impact. Level of instruction, style of presentation, cost, relevance and size are all factors that draw people in or turn them away from family education.

* Close to half of the parents in the Sh’arim study say that their attachment to Judaism and commitment to living a Jewish life are greater than they were three years ago. Data show significant increases between 1995 and 1998 in parents’ participation in Jewish education and in their attendance at worship services.

* Parents' sense of connection to the congregation, however, increased only slightly during that time. The challenge of building community appears particularly acute when we consider that close to half of all of the programs offered by the Sh’arim educators are explicitly intended to build community.

* Parents place preeminent importance on transmitting a love of Judaism to their children and observing the Jewish holidays. Children’s connection to Judaism is so central to parents that their children’s education surpasses in importance their own Jewish education and spiritual exploration.

* Although it has done much to engage families in Jewish education and increase participation in some aspects of Jewish life, there is little evidence to date that Sh’arim has had widespread impact on the Jewish quality of families’ lives at home and in the community. Most aspects of Jewish family life measured by the Sh’arim Parent Surveys show little change from 1995 to 1998.

* As it pursues its potential to affect Jewish families and synagogues, Jewish family education faces four challenges: producing programs and services of consistently high quality, addressing professional concerns, dealing with organizational issues and nurturing a sense of community within congregations. Critical to success will be the ability of the family educators to work with individual families—to understand their unique Jewish journeys, histories, feelings about Judaism, and Jewish needs and aspirations.
INTRODUCTION

Research and evaluation have been an integral component of Sh’arim from its inception. The Commission on Jewish Continuity is dedicated not only to establishing family education within the community’s institutions but also to tracking its growth, development and impact. The Sh’arim research has been ongoing and multi-faceted, gathering data from the family educators, rabbis, professional staff, lay leaders and parents. This report presents findings from the beginning of Sh’arim through 1998. It summarizes what we have learned about synagogue family education and about the families targeted by this initiative. The report offers the community an opportunity to reflect on the Jewish Family Educator Initiative—its accomplishments, shortcomings and challenges, as well as its future potential.

Over the past decade, Jewish family education has evolved as an educational approach.1 It has taken on a variety of forms in diverse institutions. In Boston and throughout the country, its most prominent setting has been within congregations in conjunction with synagogue schooling.2 Although Sh’arim also operates in day schools and Jewish community centers, this report focuses solely on the congregational setting.

Family education intends to reverse the “gas station” model of Jewish education in which parents drive their children to the synagogue to be “filled up” with Judaism. It regards the family unit as the learner and the parents as important partners in their children’s Jewish education. It assumes that the family educator will create conditions under which the whole family will acquire Jewish knowledge, skills, values and a love of Judaism. It further assumes that the families who take part in these opportunities will translate these educational experiences into greater engagement in Jewish life.

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The research report looks at each of these assumptions. It examines the Sh'arim family educators' work and the extent to which parents take advantage of family education offerings, and it looks at various aspects of Jewish family life over time. Although many communities have promoted Jewish family education, there has been little sustained evaluation of its impact on families. The current study, however, extends over several years, enabling us to look for changes in Jewish family life that might be linked to the work of the Jewish Family Educator Initiative.

Chapter 1 is a brief history of Sh'arim and a description of the initiative's goals and strategies. Chapter 2 describes the research method. The next three chapters present research findings related to the Sh'arim educators, the families in the Sh'arim congregations, and the parents' views of family education. Chapter 6 focuses on changes between 1995 and 1998 in the implementation of family education and in the Jewish behaviors of participating families. The final chapter discusses the implications of the research findings and the challenges facing Sh'arim as it moves into the future.

3 For example, see Arnold Dashefsky and Alyson Bacon, Who's JEFF? What's JEFF: A Formative Evaluation of the 'Jewish Experiences for Families' Program in Metrowest, New Jersey. (Metrowest, NJ: Jewish Education Agency, 1997).
CHAPTER 1

HISTORY OF SH’ARIM

Sh’arim, the Jewish Family Educator Initiative, aims to support a traditional Jewish model of education—preparing parents to be the transmitters of Jewish knowledge to their children and, with them, the creators of Jewish family life.

The mitzvah in the first paragraph of the Shma, “v’shinantam l’vanekha”—that you must teach the laws and values to your children—is a core tenet of Jewish life. This tenet was undermined in the modern period by the disappearance of traditional Jewish neighborhoods that organically conveyed Jewish culture and by the rise in the number of Jews who felt insecure in their Jewish knowledge or uncomfortable in Jewish settings. As parents were unable to convey to their children the practice and meaning of Judaism, the Jewish “supplemental” school assumed this responsibility. But without the active support of parents, what the children learned in school had little relevance or impact; it could not readily take root.

Jewish educators soon recognized that religious school education alone could not create vigorous Jewish life in the community. They were concerned with parents’ limited support of their goals and wanted parents to be active partners in the education of the children. A similar trend was occurring in American education. In the 1970s, public schools began efforts to involve parents in school and classroom activities and to motivate them to read and work with their children at home. Educational research validated these efforts, conclusively showing that parental involvement was a critical factor in the educational success of children.

In 1989 the Commission on Jewish Continuity convened to address the future of the Greater Boston Jewish community. The Commission decided that one of its foci would be to strengthen the Jewish family. Seeing synagogues as “gateway” institutions for Jewish life set a new course for Combined Jewish Philanthropies (CJP) and other federations. CJP charged the Commission with forging a special partnership with synagogues in support of Jewish education.

At this time, some Jewish educators and institutions were already offering programs specifically geared to parents and families. Combined Jewish Philanthropies’ Task Force on Supplemental Education supported these programs with grants that, over five years, reached a cumulative total of $256,000. Jewish family education was taking hold: Nationally known leaders in the field were working at local congregations, schools, and the Bureau of Jewish Education; and federation leaders were becoming vocal proponents of the approach. The scene was set for the Commission’s first project, Sh’arim—the Jewish Family Educator Initiative.

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4 A more detailed discussion of the motivations involved in the creation and growth of supplemental religious schools can be found in Wertheimer, American Jewish Year Book 1999, 3-115.

5 The Commission on Jewish Continuity is a joint project of Combined Jewish Philanthropies and its agencies, Union of American Hebrew Congregations, United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism, the Council of Orthodox Synagogues and the Synagogue Council of Massachusetts.

"One of the problems is that we are allowing the families to rely on the synagogue almost exclusively for their Jewish living and their Jewish learning. What we need to do is empower them to do Jewish living and Jewish learning by themselves as a family or as groups of families."

Sh'arim’s Goals

Sh’arim’s stated goal was to strengthen Jewish family life at home, in synagogues, in other Jewish organizations and in the community. Five paths were proposed for approaching this goal:

1. Involve family members in their children’s Jewish education so that the whole family can support and enhance the children’s learning.

2. Establish contexts for Jewish learning that will help family members find Judaism accessible and Jewish organizations and synagogues comfortable places to be.

3. Establish programs for joint family involvement in Jewish learning, thereby providing families with “quality time” together in Jewish pursuits and creating shared Jewish memories.

4. Build community among families in order to strengthen their connection to each other and to their Jewish institution (synagogue, community center or school).

5. Adapt Jewish learning to the home by empowering family members to become Jewish models and teachers for their children.

The Commission laid out these paths as a framework, expecting that family education would develop in unique ways at each site.

Elements of Sh’arim

The Commission saw the full-time family educator as the major force that would move Jewish institutions along these five paths toward enriched Jewish family life. The family educators would thus need expertise in planning, programming and administration, as well as advanced knowledge of Judaic studies and family development. Sh’arim not only created positions for Jewish family educators but also provided training and support. In order that the family educator not stand alone in the institution, Sh’arim required sites to develop a family education team of lay and professional leaders and to organize a lay committee staffed by the family educator.

The elements of the Sh’arim initiative include:

Criteria for Site Selection: Sh’arim sites are required to have prior experience with family education programming and to have completed successfully a series of community programming and planning grants.

Funding: The Commission on Jewish Continuity, with funds from Combined Jewish Philanthropies, provides annual grants to institutions to subsidize the salary and benefits of half- to full-time family educators. Institutions initially receive a 50% match from the Commission, capped at $17,500. The Commission’s share is gradually reduced in subsequent years.

Training: New family educators participate in a part-time (four hours per week), two-year training program at Hebrew College, leading to a Certificate in Jewish Family Education. The tuition-free program, funded by Combined Jewish Philanthropies, includes study of Jewish texts,

7 Rabbi Barbara Penzner, Sh’arim/Gateways to Jewish Living: The Jewish Family Educator Initiative, (Boston: Commission on Jewish Continuity, March 1993).
theory and practice of family education, human development, family systems, organizational change and behavior, needs assessment and evaluation.

Consultation: Educational consultants from the Bureau of Jewish Education help the family education team at each Sh'arim site develop and implement the community's vision for family education. The teams receive assistance in defining goals, assessing needs and developing plans for family education. Consultation services are available prior to and throughout an institution's involvement in Sh'arim.

Support: The Bureau of Jewish Education coordinates a Jewish Family Educator Network. The Network meets several times throughout the year and provides family educators an opportunity to share program ideas, discuss professional issues, reflect on their own growth and learn together. Recently, veteran family educators, as part of their own professional development, have become mentors to those new to Sh'arim.

Research: Ongoing research and evaluation help sites examine progress towards their goals and provide the larger community with an understanding of family education and its role in the community.

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SH'ARIM TIMELINE 1985-2000

- 1985: CJP Task Force on Supplemental Jewish Education established
- 1986: Task Force Report recommending expansion of schools' involvement in family education
- 1987: Beginning of CJP direct grants for Family Education implemented by the Bureau of Jewish Education
- 1988-92: $256,000 in family education grants to schools
- 1989: Commission on Jewish Community convened
- 1993: Sh'arim/Gateways to Jewish Living: The Family Educator Initiative begins
- 1993-94: First year of Sh'arim—8 sites; certification program begins at Hebrew College; Bureau of Jewish Education begins consultation to sites and research and evaluation of the initiative
- 1994-95: Jewish Family Educator Network established by the Bureau of Jewish Education
- 1995-96: First administration of Sh'arim Parent Survey to establish baseline information about families and sites
- 1996-97: 14 Sh'arim sites: 11 congregations, one day school and two Jewish community centers
- 1998-99: Second administration of Sh'arim Parent Survey
- 1999-00: 17 Sh'arim sites: 14 congregations, one day school and two Jewish community centers; Sh'arim: Building Gateways to Jewish Life and Community: A Report on Boston's Jewish Family Educator Initiative, presented to the community

CHAPTER 2

SH'ARIM RESEARCH

Sh'arim is a complex initiative. It involves diverse organizations throughout Greater Boston. It is multi-faceted—encompassing the development of a professional specialty, the implementation of new classes and programs, the introduction of new professionals and lay committees, and the challenge of an enhanced educational mission for congregations. It has grand goals but few specified measurable objectives. It is an ongoing initiative, a moving stream certain to grow and change over time. As a result, Sh'arim's impact might be found anywhere—in areas both anticipated and unanticipated.

The Sh'arim research therefore required a complex approach. It needed information from the community, the congregations, the family educators, and from the families themselves. We needed to pursue specific hypotheses but also allow the unexpected to emerge. Measuring both the tangible and intangible aspects of Sh'arim required a variety of methods and the assistance of many people in the community.

Method

This report is based on data from congregations that were part of the Sh'arim initiative in 1995 and/or 1998.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CONGREGATION</th>
<th>LOCATION</th>
<th>DENOMINATIONAL AFFILIATION</th>
<th>MEMBERSHIP (# OF FAMILIES)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Temple Aliyah</td>
<td>Needham</td>
<td>Conservative</td>
<td>430</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Temple Beth Avodah</td>
<td>Newton</td>
<td>Reform</td>
<td>520</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Congregation Beth El</td>
<td>Sudbury</td>
<td>Reform</td>
<td>450</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Temple Beth Shalom</td>
<td>Needham</td>
<td>Reform</td>
<td>500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Temple Emanuel</td>
<td>Newton</td>
<td>Conservative</td>
<td>1310</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Temple Emunah</td>
<td>Lexington</td>
<td>Conservative</td>
<td>520</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Temple Isaiah</td>
<td>Lexington</td>
<td>Reform</td>
<td>780</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Temple Israel</td>
<td>Boston</td>
<td>Reform</td>
<td>1580</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Temple Israel</td>
<td>Natick</td>
<td>Conservative</td>
<td>490</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Temple Shalom</td>
<td>Newton</td>
<td>Reform</td>
<td>1050</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Temple Shir Tikva</td>
<td>Wayland</td>
<td>Reform</td>
<td>500</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Information comes from the following sources:

Congregation Inventories: Each congregation prepared a detailed view of its activities, membership and governance structure when it entered Sh'arim.

* Not part of the Sh'arim study in 1995; included in 1998 data only
Mid-Year and End-of-Year Site Reports: Since 1994–95, family education teams at each of the congregations have filed bi-annual reports with the Commission and the Bureau of Jewish Education. These provide information about programs, participation, budget, allocation of the professional's time, and governance structures related to family education, as well as emergent issues and insights. Information from these reports has been shared with the community and the sites on a regular basis.

Parent Survey: In fall 1995, a questionnaire was given to every congregant family with a child in 2nd or 5th grade. Three years later, a follow-up questionnaire was given to every family with a child in 2nd, 5th or 8th grade. These questionnaires asked about parent-child activities at the synagogue, in the home and in the community. Questionnaires were quantitative but also had space for respondents to write comments. They were designed to allow for comparisons by denomination, child’s grade and parent’s Jewish educational background. After each survey, participating congregations received a report detailing overall findings, as well as results from their particular site.

Focus Groups with Congregation Professionals: In spring 1999, two focus groups were conducted with congregation professionals—one with the family educators and one with rabbis and education directors. These roundtable discussions focused on the goals of family education, its impact on the congregations and their families, its evolution over the past few years and its likely future direction.

Parent Focus Groups: In spring 1999, two exploratory focus groups were held with 5th grade parents. Twenty-one parents from the 11 Sh'arim congregations came together to discuss their families' Jewish lives and their reactions to family education.

Partners in Research
The Sh'arim research enlisted assistance from around the community. Many professionals and lay leaders helped frame the study, gather information, reflect on the meaning of results and put findings to work.

The Research Advisory Committee helped create the overall design of the Sh'arim study. This committee was comprised of experts in evaluation research from area colleges and universities, the Synagogue Council of Massachusetts, denominational movements, the Bureau of Jewish Education and the Commission.

Family Educators in each of the participating congregations provided ongoing information about their work; participated in discussions, focus groups and feedback meetings; suggested items for the Parent Survey; fielded the Parent Survey; and helped to interpret results.

Lay Research Coordinators within congregations assisted with the administration of the Parent Survey.

Family Education Teams contributed to the congregations’ mid-year and end-of-year reports and helped administer the Sh'arim Parent Survey.

Parents filled out surveys, attended focus groups and offered insights into the struggles and joys they encounter in creating Jewish family life.
CHAPTER 3

SH'ARIM’S EDUCATORS

This chapter describes the family educator’s job and changes in the family educator position since the first years of Sh’arim. Information comes from the bi-annual site reports prepared by the congregations’ Jewish family education teams.

Family Educators’ Time

On average, Sh’arim’s Jewish family educators spend almost half of their time developing, implementing and evaluating programs (Figure 1). Another significant portion of their time is given to governance—institutional planning, supervising, working with staff and meeting with the synagogue board. They devote 9% of their time to professional development (which includes professional training, class work at Hebrew College in the Family Education Certificate Program and Network meetings) and 7% to one-on-one meetings (intake interviews and individual contacts with families).

These average time allotments mask great variation among the family educators. In one congregation the family educator spends about 20% of her time on program development and implementation, 25% on institutional planning and 33% working with and supervising staff. Another family educator reports spending 60% of the time on programming and virtually none on institutional planning, supervision or working with staff. Since congregations vary with regard to their vision, structure, and goals for family education, it is not surprising that the professional’s role has also developed differently within each congregation.

Figure 1

FAMILY EDUCATOR TIME ALLOCATION (average of all years, 1994-1999)

- Programming 46%
- Governance 30%
- Professional Development 9%
- One-on-one meetings with families 7%
- Other 8%

These categories of responsibilities also fail to describe the full extent of the job. For example, the family educators provide synagogue members with access to resources, information about the Jewish Web, and communication about Jewish activities taking place in their congregations and in the Greater Boston area. They help integrate the various community educational initiatives in their congregation—YEI (Youth Educator
Initiative), Me‘ah\textsuperscript{9}, special needs and so on. And they collaborate with other arms of their synagogues to develop an overall educational vision.

**Expanding Educational Activities**

Since much of the Jewish family educators’ time is devoted to programming, it is not surprising to find that family education has, indeed, provided an increased number of educational opportunities within congregations. 

*Sh‘arim* congregations currently offer an average of 25 family education programs a year. These are of various types—text study, hands-on community service, “spiritual journeying” and a host of other entrées into Jewish life.

Community building is a stated goal of almost half of all of the programs offered. The next largest percentage of programs concern topics generally associated with the synagogue (i.e., rituals, Torah and prayer). The remainder are a smorgasbord of learning opportunities—holidays, bar/t mitzvah training, Hebrew language and literature courses, parent-child communication and sessions on Jewish life or Israel (*Table 1*). Congregation monitoring forms indicate that program content and formats change from year to year. For example, in the past year, one family educator added in-depth discussion sessions on Torah and theology to a schedule filled with holiday “how-to” programs; another moved to small study groups to meet the demand for beginning-level holiday learning.

**Table 1**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Learning Goal</th>
<th>Percentage of Programs Held During Year\textsuperscript{*}</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Community Building</td>
<td>45%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ritual</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Torah and Prayer</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Holidays</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shabbat</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Study</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Tzedakah</em> and <em>Mitzvot</em></td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent-Child Communication</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bar/t Mitzvah</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Israel</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hebrew</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\textsuperscript{*}Based on a total of 254 programs offered by *Sh‘arim* congregations in 1998–99. Numbers do not total 100%, as a single program may serve multiple learning goals.

\textsuperscript{9} *Me‘ah* is an adult Jewish learning program of Hebrew College and the Commission on Jewish Continuity, made possible with funding from Combined Jewish Philanthropies.
Overall, 61% of all family education programs are one-time events, 9% are two-session programs and the remaining 30% are programs extending over three or more sessions (Figure 2). Sh’arim expects congregations to develop their own strategies for addressing their goals, and the data confirm that sites take full advantage of this flexibility. At one congregation, for example, programs are mostly in series; at another, fully 75% of family education programs are one-time events. The former congregation is decreasing the number of programs offered each year in order to increase the number of sessions and deepen participants’ engagement with the subject matter. The latter is reaching out to more participants by offering more beginner-level programs and a greater variety of topics.

Figure 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Single-Session Programs</th>
<th>Two-Session Programs</th>
<th>Programs of Three or More Sessions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>61%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Examples of Jewish Family Education Programs at Sh’arim Congregations*

“Family Connection” (soon to be in place in four of the 11 congregations) is a series of family activity sessions and adult text study sessions running parallel to the children’s religious school classes. The stated goals of this program are to provide parents with the opportunity to learn about Judaism, engage in Jewish study with their children and become acquainted with other parents.

“Community Shabbatot” is a series program in which members of the synagogue open their homes on Shabbat afternoons to neighboring members of their community. The first open houses welcomed over 300 visitors in two dozen host homes.

“Family Roots” is a program for families of 4th graders. Parents and children work together to make wimples (Torah binders) as part of an exploration of their family histories and Jewish identity. Their wimples become part of their celebration of the 4th grade milestone, Siyum HaSefer.

“Time for Rededication” is part of a year-long program of Tzedek v’Hesed. Over 100 families gather donations and books as Hanukkah gifts for the needy.

* “Family Connection” was originated by Temple Isaiah, Lexington  
“Community Shabbatot” by Temple Emunah, Lexington  
“Family Roots” by Temple Beth Avodah, Newton  
“Time for Rededication” by Congregation Beth El, Sudbury.
Changes in the Jewish Family Educator’s Job

In recent years, four major changes have occurred in the family educator position:

Changes in Personnel: All but four of the congregations in the Sh’arim study have had turnover in their family educator positions since 1993. Most of the current family educators have been on the job three years or less.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Family Educator Years in Current Position</th>
<th>Congregations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1st or 2nd</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3rd</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4th–6th</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Reporting Relationships: The original designers assumed that Jewish family education would be an arm of the religious school. In the first years of Sh’arim, all of the family educators reported to the education director in their congregations, and they worked primarily with school families. Today each congregation has its own definition of who should be served by family education. One site aims 85% of its programs at school families. Another aims only 37% of its programs at the school and divides the rest almost evenly between all members and specific types of non-school families. As responsibilities shift and expand so do reporting relationships and accountability. Today four of the family educators report to rabbis or vice presidents of education in addition to or instead of education directors or school principals.

Salaries: In 1994–95 the average Sh’arim family educator salary (including benefits) was $34,000. In 1998–99 the average salary was $42,000—an increase of 24% in a four-year period (Figure 3). The Commission’s contribution to the family educators’ salaries has decreased as the initiative has grown, and the congregations have commensurately assumed the difference and added sizeable increases. Some synagogues have added benefits as well as increased spending on professional development for their family educators.

Figure 3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Family Educator Average Salary, Plus Benefits (1994-99)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>$34,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Responsibilities: Although the position differs from synagogue to synagogue (with regard to reporting structures, targets, goals, job descriptions and remuneration), almost all the family educators agree that their roles have changed in some ways since the inception of the initiative. They are expected to design and implement more programs, work with more staff members and involve themselves more frequently with other arms of their congregations.

“Our congregation is beginning to demand increasingly more sophisticated and in-depth programming around family education and they’re really starting to feel that they want more and different sorts of things than they have been getting...”

Sh’arim director of education
This chapter describes the Jewish life of the families in Sh'arim congregations. Data come from the 1998 survey completed by parents with children in 2nd, 5th and 8th grades.

The Typical 5th Grade Sh'arim Family

This description of the "typical" 5th grade family in the Sh'arim congregations is based on modal responses to survey questions about Jewish family life and parents' Jewish values. Full analyses of each of these items appear in the sections which follow.

In the typical 5th grade family, both parents are Jewish. They joined the congregation when their child was in preschool. They attend High Holiday services, participate in a Passover seder, light Hanukkah candles, and attend a Purim celebration. They also give money to Jewish causes or charities.

Although their 5th grader is receiving formal Jewish education in the congregational school, this child probably does not participate actively in a youth group, did not go to Jewish summer camp last summer and does not participate in sports or cultural arts in a Jewish setting during the school year.

There is no question that their child is going to have a bar/bat mitzvah celebration, but it is only somewhat likely that the child will travel to Israel on a teen Israel experience or even continue his/her Jewish education through high school. The parents say it is only somewhat likely that, when the time comes to make college choices, this child will want a college with a substantial Jewish population and active Jewish life.

The parents attend family education programs and also attend some adult education programs at the congregation. They do volunteer work with their child and also engage in a variety of other Jewish-related activities with this child at least a few times a year. They attend Jewish cultural events, read Jewish books or stories, work on a project with their child for his/her Jewish class. The parents themselves read Jewish literature, but they rarely seek information from the Jewish press or from Jewish web sites.

Being Jewish is very important to parents in the typical 5th grade Sh'arim family. They feel their preeminent obligations as Jews are to transmit a love of Judaism to their children and to observe the Jewish holidays. It is highly important to them that their children socialize with other Jewish children and that they themselves take a public stand against anti-Semitism. These values far outweigh the importance the parents attach to tzedakah, Shabbat, Jewish study, spirituality, Israel, and tikkun olam, or to their own social connections to other Jews or to their taking on leadership roles in the congregation and the community.

Not surprisingly, the typical parents' primary doorway into the congregation is through their child's education, the celebration of life cycle events and, to a lesser extent, the celebration of holidays. These parents are not necessarily drawn in through religious services, adult or family education, voluntarism, social or cultural activities. They feel fairly comfortable and at home in the congregation, but they do not necessarily feel part of a community.

Significantly, the typical 5th grade Sh'arim parents say they want more Judaism in their lives and more time to devote to Jewish study.
Jewish Practices

The vast majority of parents in the *Sh'arim* study (89%) say that it is very important to them to observe the Jewish holidays. Indeed, virtually all of them attend High Holiday services, participate in Passover sedarim and light Hanukkah candles (*Figure 4*).

*Figure 4*

**JEWISH PRACTICES**

- Light Hanukkah candles: 100%
- Participate in Passover seder: 100%
- Attend High Holiday services: 98%
- Give money to Jewish causes: 97%
- Attend Purim celebrations: 78%
- Build sukkah at home: 20%

Parents of younger and older children are equally likely to engage in these Jewish practices. The only exception is Purim, which is significantly less likely to be celebrated when the child is in 8th grade.\(^{11}\)

---

\(^{11}\) Only 63% of the 8th grade families attended a Purim celebration compared to over 80% of 2nd and 5th grade families (p<.001).
Parent-Child Activities

Jewish rituals and holiday observances are not the only way that families can engage in Jewish life. Various other activities, from attending a play at the Jewish theater to helping out in the food pantry, can give parents and children a shared Jewish experience. An essential aspect of these activities is that they take place in the home and in the community—not in the synagogue. In focus groups, 5th grade parents observed that their children often perceive activities in the synagogue as “obligations,” not as quality family time.

Survey results show that parents and children frequently read Jewish books together. Many parents are also engaged by projects assigned by their child’s religious or day school (Figure 5).

### Figure 5

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Read books or stories with Jewish themes or content</td>
<td>88%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work on projects for child’s Jewish school/class</td>
<td>65%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attend Jewish cultural events</td>
<td>58%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do volunteer work in the general community</td>
<td>57%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Volunteer for Jewish organizations or causes</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As children grow up, Jewish family activities change. The older the children, the more likely the family is to do volunteer work in the Jewish community: 48% of the 2nd grade families do so, compared with 61% of the 5th grade families and 64% of the 8th grade families. There is no such increase in volunteering in the general community as the child gets older. At the same time, the number of parents reading with their children or working on school projects with them declines with grade, as does the amount of time they spend on these activities.

About 87% of the 2nd and 5th grade parents work with their children on assignments for their Jewish school or class. Once children reach 8th grade, the percentage of parents so involved drops to 75%. Since this question referred to the previous year, it is striking to note that one out of four parents in the bar mitzvah year are not engaged through projects from the religious school or bar mitzvah class.

Children’s Jewish Lives

The vast majority of children included in our study are enrolled in the congregational school (94%); the others are enrolled in day schools. Only half of the children are involved in any informal Jewish education activities (52%). Informal Jewish education varies significantly by grade. This reflects the different opportunities available at different ages. First graders rarely participate in youth groups, summer camps or sports. Comparatively few 7th graders participate in Jewish cultural arts (Figure 6).
Virtually all of the parents say that it is highly likely that their child will celebrate his/her bar/bat mitzvah. However, only half this number believe it quite likely that this same child will continue his or her Jewish education through high school. This pattern is similar for all grades: There are no statistically significant differences by grade with regard to the likelihood of continuing Jewish education through high school, traveling to Israel on a teen experience or preferring a college with strong Jewish life. In other words, as early as 2nd grade we can see a foreshadowing of the post-bar/bat mitzvah dropout phenomenon (Figure 7).

Of the eleven Sh’arim congregations, only one has a youth group for 1st grade; eight have youth groups for 4th graders.
Parents' Participation in Jewish Education

The survey asked parents about their participation in formal Jewish education programs as well as their use of other, informal ways to gain Jewish knowledge or seek information about the Jewish world. The great majority of parents (80%) have been reached by family education in their congregation and many (52%) have attended adult education programs. Formal programs, however, tell only a piece of the story. Parents also delve into the world of Jewish knowledge through books (83%), Jewish cultural events (60%), Jewish newspapers and magazines (52%), and the Internet (31%).

Parents’ participation in Jewish educational activities changes with the age of their child:

* Fifth grade families are most likely to attend family education programs: 88% of the 5th grade families attend versus 77% of the 2nd grade families and only 71% of the 8th grade families.

* As children get older, there is a significant increase in the frequency with which parents attend Jewish cultural events, read the Jewish press, and surf the Jewish Web. This increase may reflect parents’ growing interest or greater desire to be Jewish role models. Or perhaps these activities are simply easier to pursue when the children are older.

Whatever their level of participation in Jewish education, two-thirds of the parents want to be more involved. Indeed, only about one-third are engaged at the level they would like to be (Figure 8).

Figure 8

**HOW DO YOU FEEL ABOUT THE AMOUNT OF TIME AND EFFORT YOU ARE CURRENTLY PUTTING INTO STUDYING AND LEARNING ABOUT JUDAISM?**

- Less than would like: 67%
- As much as would like: 32%
- More than would like: 1%
Parents' Jewish Values

The survey asked parents how much they value each of 15 different aspects of Judaism and Jewish life. Their responses reveal the preeminent importance placed on transmitting a love of Judaism to their children and observing the Jewish holidays (Figure 9).

Figure 9

PARENTS' JEWISH VALUES
% Very or Extremely Important

- Transmitting a love of Judaism to children: 94%
- Observing the Jewish holidays: 89%
- Having children socialize with other Jewish children: 80%
- Taking a public stand against anti-Semitism: 79%
- Keeping informed about Jewish or Israel-related current events: 64%
- Making social connections with other Jews in the community: 59%
- Donating money to Jewish causes: 55%
- Observing Shabbat in a special way: 45%
- Taking part in Jewish study and learning more about Judaism: 44%
- Exploring the spiritual side of life: 36%
- Having a connection to Israel: 34%
- Doing volunteer work as a member of the Jewish community: 21%
- Being conversant or literate in Hebrew: 14%
- Being a leader in the congregation or in the Jewish community: 20%

"I feel I am a committed Jew, observant in my own way. I feel strongly that my children feel the Jewishness that my husband and I feel, be continually connected to the Jewish community, feel the link to their history and choose Jewish life partners."

Sh'arim Parent Survey respondent

Where comparisons are possible, results from the Sh'arim parent survey are similar to those of the CJP 1995 Demographic Study. The Demographic Study's overall results showed that 45% of Boston's Jews feel very emotionally attached to Israel; 35% say the spiritual side of life is very important to them.
Children's connection to Judaism is so central to parents that the children's education supercedes the importance of their own Jewish education and their own spiritual exploration. The core values are clear: children, the holidays (which can be home-based and child-centered) and fighting anti-Semitism (an enduring concern for Jewish adults).

Most of these values are the same for all of the parents, regardless of whether they have younger or older children. There are just two exceptions:

* Parents of 2nd graders are significantly less concerned about Jewish current events than are parents of 5th and 8th graders. This finding corresponds with the 2nd grade parents' lower exposure to Jewish information through Jewish cultural events, the Jewish press and the Jewish web.

* The importance of observing Shabbat declines by grade: The older the child, the less important it is to the parents to observe Shabbat (Table A1).

### Parents' Attraction to the Synagogue

What are the pathways that bring parents into the congregation and engage them in synagogue life? The survey asked parents about 11 possible points of entry, including education, prayer and social activities. Results mirror the values described above. Most important to parents is Jewish education for their children (89%), the celebration of life cycle events (most notably the bar/bat mitzvah of their child) (82%) and holidays (59%). The aspects of Jewish life that parents most value are also the factors that involve them in the congregation (Table A2).

As children get older the following factors become significantly less important to parents:

* Jewish education for children
* holiday celebrations
* social activities
* voluntarism or social action projects for the general community
* family education.

For example, 69% of the 2nd grade parents say that holiday celebrations are highly important in engaging them in the congregation, versus 62% of the 5th grade parents and only 45% of the 8th grade parents (Table A3).

In contrast, parents are increasingly drawn into prayer and religious services as their children get older. Only 25% of the 2nd grade parents say that services are an important motivator to their involvement, versus 39% of the 5th grade parents and 44% of the 8th grade parents. Commensurately, the parents of 2nd graders attend services less frequently than do parents of older children. About 37% of the 2nd grade parents attend services at least monthly, compared with 49% of 5th grade parents and 46% of 8th grade parents.

Other factors—Sisterhood or Men’s Club, Torah study and adult education, cultural events, celebration of life cycle events or volunteer work in the synagogue—are equally likely to bring parents into the congregation, regardless of whether their children are in 2nd, 5th or 8th grades.
Parents' Relationship to Judaism and to the Congregation

Practically all of the parents in the study say that being Jewish is very important in their lives (91%) and the great majority wish their engagement in Jewish life were higher (67%).

Figure 10

**Feelings' about Current Practice of Judaism**

Less than would like: 67%
As much as would like: 32%
More than would like: 1%

Parents were also asked about their relationship to the congregation—the extent to which they feel at home in the congregation and the extent to which they feel part of a community. Their responses show that the sense of comfort is much greater than the sense of community. Indeed, one in four parents (24%) appear untouched by the efforts to build a sense of community within the synagogue (Figure 11).

Figure 11

**Parents' Integration into the Congregation**

To what extent...

- 12% do not feel comfortable and at home in the congregation
- 40% feel somewhat comfortable
- 52% feel very much comfortable

- 24% feel part of the community formed by this congregation
- 40% feel somewhat part of the community
- 36% feel very much part of the community

"It's hard to become a part of our community if you work full-time. It's hard to come to services if you don't feel part of the community."

*Sh'arim Parent Survey respondent*
Parents' comfort levels and community feelings do not vary by their child's grade in the school nor by the number of years they have been members. What is relevant to these feelings, however, is how many hours they spent in the synagogue this year. Compared with the other parents, those who feel like an integral part of the congregation:

1. spend more hours in the building;
2. are drawn to the synagogue for worship services, Torah study, adult education and family education;
3. are more involved in voluntarism in the community and in the synagogue;
4. place a higher value on being a leader in the congregation or the Jewish community;
5. place a higher value on observing Shabbat.

*Items are listed in descending order based on Pearson correlations. All coefficient values are greater than .31 (p<.001).*
CHAPTER 5
PARENTS' VIEWS OF JEWISH FAMILY EDUCATION

The first part of this chapter presents data from the Sh'arim Parent Survey on participation in Jewish family education. The second part, based on focus groups with 5th grade parents, presents the parents' assessment of the congregations' family education program.

Parents' Participation

The great majority of survey respondents (80%) participate in the congregations' family education programs. For over a third of these parents, these programs were their only source of formal Jewish education that year. An equal number rated family education as "very important" in bringing them into the congregation and involving them in its activities. In a list of 11 synagogue functions that might serve as entry points for parents, family education received the fourth highest rating— as important as religious services in engaging parents in the life of the congregation.

Increases in participation in family education programs between 1995 and 1998 suggest that family education has expanded its reach and/or its appeal. In 1995, 73% of the 5th grade families attended family education programs; in 1998, the participation of 5th grade families in these same congregations had risen to 87%. Similar increases are seen in the comparison of 2nd grade families.

Although more parents were involved, the number of hours they devoted to family education remained essentially unchanged from 1995 to 1998—an average of six to ten hours over the course of the year. Family education appears to be serving more people, but not necessarily in more extensive ways. This is commensurate with the fact that the majority of family education programs are one-time events.

Fifth grade parents are the greatest consumers of family education. Compared with 2nd and 8th grade parents, they have significantly higher rates of participation, and they spend significantly more hours in family education programs. This is not surprising given the menu of family education offerings. On average, 15% of the family education programs are geared toward children in kindergarten through grade 2; 28% are for children in grades 3 through 6; and 10% are designated for the bar/bat mitzvah class. These numbers parallel participation rates reported by families.

Those Who Take Advantage of Family Education vs. Those Who Do Not

It has been posited that Jewish family education is primarily for parents with limited Jewish backgrounds or for those in interfaith marriages. The survey data, however, do not support this view. People in inmarried families (both partners Jewish) and those in interfaith families (one partner not Jewish) are equally likely to take advantage of the classes and activities offered by family education. Parents who had a bar/bat mitzvah or Jewish confirmation growing up and those who did not are also equally likely to take advantage of these offerings.

"I come from an observant family, and my husband does not. Family education has helped draw him in. Now he is involved in more Jewish education than I am—both organized and self-directed."

Sh'arim Parent Survey respondent
Aside from demographics, virtually every item on the Sh'arim Parent Survey shows significant differences between those who take part in family education and those who do not. Moreover, most of these items distinguish among those who put more hours into family education ("high participants"), those who put in relatively fewer hours ("low participants") and those who give no time to family education ("non-participants"). The following are some of the key findings (Tables A4 and A5):

* Participation in family education is positively associated with reported increases in the parents' attachment to Judaism and commitment to living a Jewish life.

* Participation in family education is significantly correlated with the parents' views of and involvement in Jewish education. Compared with non- or low participants, high participants place greater importance on Jewish study, and they are more likely to say that Torah study, adult education and family education motivate their involvement in the congregation. Their behavior matches their attitudes. The high participants are also more likely to attend other adult education programs at the synagogue and to devote more hours to these programs. Indeed, high participants in family education are three times as likely as non-participants to value Jewish study and to partake of opportunities for Jewish learning.

* Compared with non- and low participants, high participants in family education attend services more regularly and spend more hours per week in the synagogue. Their presence in the synagogue may contribute to their integration into the congregation: High participants are more likely to feel comfortable, at home and part of a community in their congregation.

* Compared with non-participants, participants in family education place greater importance on every Jewish value and practice asked about in the survey. Moreover, the more often one attends family education programs, the greater the importance s/he places on these items—having Jewish social networks for oneself and one's children, having a connection to Israel, observing the mitzvot of tzedakah, tikun olam, Shabbat, and the hagim, as well as being conversant or literate in Hebrew, keeping informed about current events that affect world Jewry and transmitting a love of Judaism to one's children. All in all, Jewish life appears to be more important to those who take part in Jewish family education and less so to those who do not.

Non-, low and high participants do not differ significantly in their feelings about the extent to which they are practicing Judaism in their lives and the amount of time and energy they are putting into Jewish study. Regardless of their involvement in family education, two-thirds of the parents in the survey would like to have more Judaism in their lives. Although these findings show strong associations between participation in family education and Jewish life, they do not indicate causation. That is, family education may, indeed, stimulate participants to higher commitment and involvement. And/or those who take their Judaism seriously may be the ones who choose to participate in family education activities.
Parents' Assessment of Family Education

In focus groups parents spoke highly of the general purpose and accomplishments of family education, but they both praised and criticized specific programs.

On the one hand....

The focus groups suggest that family education serves parents in a variety of ways—providing basic, remedial and more advanced education. A mother who describes herself as Jewishly "clueless" says that, before family education, she never felt comfortable attending synagogue classes or activities. "I never felt that I had had the proper background to really participate, to know what people were talking about. I was just going to sit there kind of stupid, like I didn't know what to say...." Family education for this woman was a "godsend." A second parent finds the parallel education offered in her congregation an effective reminder of Jewish knowledge she possessed in high school but subsequently forgot. And a third, a Jewishly-educated parent comfortable with her home practices, talks about the "wonderful ideas" that she gets from other participants in family programs and the support she feels for her family's home observance.

Jewish family education not only provides formal instruction but also creates experiences. A father in an interfaith marriage speaks appreciatively of the family education programs that helped him put Jewish values into practice with his child, while a mother describes the Sunday family education program as a reflective time for herself, without specific educational goals.

In addition to the formal learning and informal experiences that occur in the family education programs, parents cite the following benefits:

* Jewish family education helps parents understand what their children are doing in religious school. "The fact that all of a sudden I could find out what my kid was doing every Sunday...has been one of my attractions to the program."

* It involves the parents in their children's education. "My kid loves to have me with her at any time, so that's great. I'm going on Sundays with her, or I'm reading some of her Sunday school readings with her before she goes. Now I'm involved in her Sunday school homework in addition to her regular homework."

* It offers a hands-on Judaism through value-based activities. "It's lovely to go to temple, and it's great to study Torah, but for me Judaism is really about giving of yourself and doing for others. The fact that the temple incorporates this into a family activity that we all do together, I think puts some real meaning into it."

"Family education allows me to learn more about Judaism at a time in my life when I cannot participate in adult education because of small children at home. It also allows me to share with my children the experience of learning about our religion and to feel part of a community of Jews who have similar interests in learning. I cannot emphasize enough how important this program is to me and my family."

Sh'arim Parent Survey respondent

"I've enjoyed Sunday morning. There are often speakers or discussion going on while the kids are in Hebrew school...it's wonderful. I drop my youngest off and I sort of wander over and get my coffee. And my feeling is—whatever they're doing, that's great. It's like a free space in my life where I can sit and think about something."

Participant in 5th grade parent focus group
* It supports practices in the home not only by teaching Jewish skills but also by encouraging creativity and helping families discover what will work for them.

"It was very liberating to have our cantor say, ‘Don’t sing [at the Friday night dinner table]. If you don’t want to sing, don’t sing. Talk about something else in your life.’"

* For some, family education helps create connections to other families and to the congregation.

"Through [family education activities] you really get to know a lot of people, and then when you go on other days, you always have somebody. You really feel like you belong there."

On the other hand....

Parents' comments suggest that the quality of family education programs is uneven. Some programs are found to lack creativity or impact. Others are described as emotionally "intense" and educationally effective. For example, one father, an educated Jew, attended a program on Passover that changed his Jewish practices. "What I realized this year—for the first time—is that there is a story of our people that’s being told here, and you can really get into it. Not just in one year, but you can develop it over the course of many years.” Inspired by this insight, he threw out the Maxwell House haggadah and re-created his family’s seder.

Parents pick and choose their way through the programs, avoiding those they are not comfortable with or those they think are too expensive, not at their level or inappropriate to their child’s age. A few also mentioned that they avoid mega-programs that involve large numbers of people. These are experienced by some as "distracting," "madhouses." Clearly what suits one person may not suit another, and the challenge for educators is to meet the disparate preferences of their families. Level of instruction, style of presentation, cost, relevance and size—all of these are factors that draw people in or turn them away from family education.
This chapter describes the institutionalization of Sh'arim within the synagogues and changes in families’ engagement in Jewish life and in their relationship to the synagogue. The description of congregational change is based on data from the bi-annual reports filed by each of the Sh'arim sites. The discussion of family change is based on longitudinal data from the 1995 Parent Survey of 2nd and 5th grade parents and the 1998 Parent Survey of 2nd, 5th and 8th grade families.

In its first seven years, Sh'arim has had measurable impact on Jewish family education as a professional specialization and on the congregations’ educational mission and offerings. Although it has done much to engage families in Jewish education and increase participation in some aspects of Jewish life, there is little evidence, to date, that the initiative has had widespread impact on the Jewish quality of families’ lives at home or outside the congregation. Sh'arim is fundamentally an institution-based engine for change. It is thus not surprising that most of the change we see is rooted in the synagogue.

Congregational Change

Jewish family education has become an accepted part of Sh'arim congregations. When Sh'arim began, the Commission on Jewish Continuity wanted to insure lay support and involvement. It therefore required each site to create a lay/professional team that would work together to create the congregation’s vision and forge its approaches for family education. Some congregations have developed structures that integrate lay and professional leadership more successfully than others. Some have been more inclusive of members’ diverse interests than others have. Despite notable variation across congregations, most of the teams have evolved into committees and most congregations now include family education chairs on their boards of directors.

Sh'arim, along with other Commission initiatives, has provided an impetus for synagogues to integrate the various dimensions of their educational programming. Three of the 11 congregations now have umbrella education committees that seek a unified vision for Jewish learning.

Changes in Families

Most aspects of Jewish family life measured by the Sh'arim Parent Survey show little or no change from 1995 to 1998. There are no increases in Jewish activities carried out by parents alone or with their children, and there are no increases in family holiday observances. There is, however, significant change in two pillars of Jewish life: study and worship. As well, a substantial number of survey respondents say that their attachment to Judaism and commitment to living a Jewish life grew over the past three years.
Increased Attachment to Judaism

Although half of the survey respondents say that their attachment to Judaism and commitment to living a Jewish life is about the same as it was three years ago, some 46% say that it is more. Only 4% see a decline.

Figure 12

![Diagram showing attachment to Judaism and commitment to living a Jewish life compared with three years ago.]

More than 3 years ago
46%

About the same
50%

Less than 3 years ago
4%

Second grade parents are the most likely to feel increases in their Jewish commitment: 57% of the 2nd grade parents reported growth in their attachment to Judaism, versus 43% of 5th grade parents and 39% of 8th grade parents. Parents appear more likely to experience dramatic growth in their Jewish feelings in the early years of their children’s education. These data imply that the parents’ commitment is more influenced by their child’s entry into religious school than by their child’s bar/bat mitzvah celebration.
Increased Participation in Jewish Study

Comparisons of 2nd and 5th grade families in 1995 and 1998 show significant increases in participation in both family education and adult education programs (Figure 13).

Figure 13

**PARTICIPATION IN EDUCATION PROGRAMS BY YEAR**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>2nd grade</th>
<th>5th grade</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1995</td>
<td>69%</td>
<td>73%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1998</td>
<td>79%</td>
<td>87%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>2nd grade</th>
<th>5th grade</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1995</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>54%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1998</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>54%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The greatest change is in the participation of the 5th grade families. In 1995, 73% of the survey respondents with children in 5th grade said they participated in family education programs. In 1998, that percentage was 87%, a significant increase. Since grade is held constant in this analysis, the increase in participation suggests either that more educational opportunities are available, that attendance has been made mandatory, that programs are more attractive or, for some other reason, parents are taking greater advantage of the Jewish education their congregation offers them. The increase may be due to different combinations of factors in each congregation.

Increased Attendance at Worship Services

A significant increase in the frequency of attendance at synagogue religious services emerges in every comparison (Figure 14). Focusing on 2nd grade families, for example, we see that in 1995 only 14% attended services regularly. Three years later almost half of these same parents, with children now in 5th grade, have become regular participants. The increase in attendance at services between 2nd and 5th grade may be part of the developmental process of families with children in the religious school.
When 2nd grade families in 1995 are compared with 2nd grade families in 1998, we again see large increases in regular synagogue attendance (from 14% to 37%). Since grade is held constant in this analysis, this increase cannot be attributable to family development. Rather, it suggests that worship services have become more appealing or more accessible to parents. Family services introduced by the family educators may have helped in this regard. As well, this finding is consistent with greater participation in educational programs, which would produce higher levels of Jewish knowledge among synagogue members.

**Figure 14**

![Graph showing attendance at worship services at least once a month](image)

In focus groups, 5th grade parents were asked about changes they were aware of in their family’s Jewish life. Respondents took this as an opportunity to comment on attendance at worship services and observance of Shabbat, two salient markers they use to gauge the integration of Judaism into their lives. Their remarks indicate that Jewish observance is a tide that ebbs and flows. Families do more in some years, less in others. Moreover, the tide is often driven by particular family members—one or more children, one or both parents—who, by force of their own preferences, elevate or depress the family’s level of observance.

**Changes in Families’ Relationship to the Synagogue**

In 1995, survey results showed that 49% of the parents “very much” felt comfortable and at home in the congregation, while only 32% “very much” felt part of the community formed by the congregation. The discrepancy between feelings of comfort and community persists from 1995 to 1998. Although most parents do feel part of the congregational community, a sizeable group—about one in four—still do not (Table 2).
Table 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Feel comfortable in the congregation</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>not at all/a little</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>37%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>some</td>
<td>49%</td>
<td>53%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>very much</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feel part of congregation community</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>not at all/a little</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>37%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

One might expect the greatest increases in these feelings to occur between 5th and 8th grades, as families go through the transition of the bar/t mitzvah. These years, however, are not the critical ones. The increase occurs solely between the 2nd and 5th grades. In 1995, 32% of the 2nd grade parents said they “very much” felt part of the community formed by the congregation; three years later, when their children were in 5th grade, 38% said so. Feelings of comfort show a similar increase in this cohort, again suggesting that the early years represent a fertile period in a family’s Jewish life.

The challenge of building community appears particularly acute when we consider that close to half of all of the programs offered by the Sh’arim educators are explicitly intended to build community, and most of the others probably have building community as an implicit goal. Despite these efforts, there has been little change in parents’ sense of community. It may be that people are as involved as they want or that they identify with subcommunities within the synagogue and not with the institution overall. Congregations need to know a great deal more about how their families define community, where they find community in their lives, whether they long for more, and what type of relationship they want to have with the congregation. An effective response awaits a deeper exploration of the issues.

"Spiritually, Judaism is very important to my husband and me; we want our children to experience Judaism as the foundation of their lives. But we don’t center our lives on the synagogue."

Sh’arim Parent Survey respondent

"I would love to have more Judaism in my life but have never felt welcome in my temple."

Sh’arim Parent Survey respondent

"Feeling a part of the community and comfortable in the temple are very different. I feel a part of the community but do not feel that the temple is my 'spiritual' home away from home."

Sh’arim Parent Survey respondent
CHAPTER 7
THE FUTURE OF SH’ARIM

This chapter sets forth the challenges and opportunities faced by Sh’arim as it moves into the future. The chapter is based on the research data presented above but also draws heavily on the insights offered by the congregations’ family educators, rabbis and directors of education during focus groups conducted as part of the Sh’arim study.

A key finding of the research is the significant increase in parents’ participation in Jewish education programs over the past few years. The synagogue professionals see this increase as part of a congregational culture change in which adult participation in Jewish study has become more normative and the general attitude toward Jewish learning more positive. They find evidence of this cultural shift in behaviors large and small—budgetary decisions by the synagogue board to increase support for the family educator and to expand educational programming, capacity registration for Me’ah and parents’ entering the synagogue building on school days rather than simply dropping their children off at the door. One rabbi referred to these behaviors as manifestations of a “true cultural shift into the fast lane of Jewish life.”

Sh’arim is credited with increasing opportunities for Jewish study and contributing to change in the congregations’ climate of learning. Comments written on the Sh’arim Parent Survey and anecdotes provided by rabbis and educators indicate that individual families have grown in important ways in their commitment to Judaism. Yet, despite its support of such change, family education has been evolutionary and not revolutionary.

The synagogue’s professional leaders—rabbis, directors of education and family educators—are now looking for ways to move family education from “programmatic” to “systemic” change. That is, they want to create a form of family education that will transform how families view themselves. Rabbis and educators find that many families today go to family education programs and treat bar/bat mitzvah preparation as simply another obligation on the calendar, another rung in the ladder of their child’s achievement. In contrast, transformed families would see themselves on a Jewish journey marked by lifelong Jewish learning, a growing commitment to Judaism and a deepening connection to the Jewish community.

CHALLENGES

Jewish family education currently faces four challenges as it pursues its potential as a transformative force in synagogue life: producing programs and services of consistently high quality, addressing professional concerns, dealing with organizational issues and nurturing a sense of community within the congregation.
The Programming Challenge

Synagogues now have members who participated in the first years of family education and then went on to take adult education classes, including Me’ah, and become serious Jewish learners. Family education has served to interest many people in Jewish learning and make them “think about their own education and look at themselves as part of a community of learners.” As people achieve higher levels of Jewish learning, however, they will increasingly demand more of the synagogue—and the synagogue must be prepared to respond. In order for family education to maximize its impact on families, it will need to address these four aspects of the programming challenge: the demand for high quality programs, the need for innovation and for multi-level programming and the challenge of the bar/t mitzvah families.

Demand for high quality programs. Experienced Jewish learners who have taken family and adult education courses in the synagogue want more sophisticated programs with higher quality and greater depth and breadth. One director of education noted that five years ago “people were thrilled with family education but today parents say, ‘I know all of this. I’ve been to Hebrew school already. I want to do more things. I want to do different things. I want to do more in-depth types of things than we’ve been doing.’”

Call for innovation. Family education programming must respond to parents with multiple children in the religious school. Because much of family education has been tied in with the religious school curriculum, some parents are required to go through the same program with each of their children. “How do we keep them involved and engaged?” asked a director of education. “How do we keep them feeling that it’s new and fresh for them? That’s a challenge for us as professionals—to continually make the program evolve, at least for the adults.”

Need for multi-level programming. Family education must respond to the needs of parents at different levels in their Jewish education. Some parents have completed various Jewish education programs and are now ready for “graduate-level courses.” Other parents are new to the system and need more basic courses. Family education needs to develop multi-level programs that will engage parents at both ends of this spectrum.

The challenge of the bar/t mitzvah families: Data from the Sh’arim study indicate that certain aspects of the synagogue lose some of their power to draw in parents as their children move from 5th to 8th grade, passing through the bar/t mitzvah year. These include the religious school, holiday celebrations, social activities, voluntarism and family education. While attendance at worship services increases over these years in a family’s life, the importance of observing Shabbat declines. As well, the data suggest that the bar/t mitzvah year does not deeply affect most parents’ connection to the congregation. Indeed, Sh’arim data suggest that parents are less moved by the celebration of the bar/t mitzvah than by enrolling their children in 1st grade in the religious school. Some of the rabbis are concerned that the bar/t mitzvah families are “processed and not transformed spiritually.” They believe, however, that family education has an important role to play in ameliorating this situation.

“I think that family education is a fantastic and important component of the religious school experience for my children. I’ve seen the concept and practice of family education mature and improve in recent years here and expect it to continue. One challenge will be how to maintain a family’s interest during middle school years—beyond bar/t mitzvah issues.”

Sh’arim Parent Survey respondent

“Even though you’ve got, hopefully, a pool of families for whom family education and studying is an ongoing thing, you also need to figure out how to integrate the families who come into that later. At the same time you are offering deeper study opportunities for veterans, every so often you still may need to go back and do the basic, lay the groundwork.”

Sh’arim family educator
The Professional Challenge

*Sh'arim* supports the training, hiring and placement of Jewish family educators in synagogues. As the data show, the addition of this professional has led to increased programming and, therefore, increased parental participation in Jewish education. In the words of one congregational leader, the mere presence of this trained professional has given synagogues “the opportunity to take our good programming to an even higher level.” In some instances, however, the family educator’s success has also led to unchecked expansion of the job.

**Workload:** As described in the preceding chapters, the family educator not only oversees the Jewish family education program but also works with other arms of the synagogue, runs community initiatives such as *Me’ah* and serves as a resource person to members of the congregation.

The title “family educator” suggests that this professional is the direct service provider to families, responsible for all family programming. The title alone might cause unrealistic expectations: “Perhaps,” one of the family educators suggested, “we should look at the title systematically and strive to come up with something, like ‘coordinator of family education,’ that gives the sense that other people, staff and congregants can come in to do programs as well as family educators.”

The family educator’s job often extends seven days a week and many nights. In the focus group, the family educators talked about how the job both nourishes and drains. It takes tremendous time and effort but also pays back in terms of their relationships with the congregants and the knowledge that they are helping people grow as Jews. As currently structured, however, the growth of family education is constrained by the limits of what this single professional can do.

**Defining family education:** Congregational family education lacks clear boundaries. In focus group conversation, rabbis and education directors raised a series of questions about the definition of family education. For example, if parents in a “parallel program” are in a room studying Jewish text, is this family education, adult education or both? Can such a program be opened up to the wider congregation, or is there something about family education that requires this program admit only religious school parents? Isn’t every congregant in a family, and, therefore, wouldn’t the family educator actually be a “program director” managing programming for the entire community? After seven years of *Sh'arim*, congregational leaders are still grappling with these definitional questions.

In order for the synagogue to be able to pick up learners “wherever they’re at,” the definition of family education must not only establish the program’s identity but also integrate it with other forms of education in the synagogue. The operational definition of family education must also deal with the tension between the need to confine the role of family educator to a manageable job and the desire to expand it to be inclusive of everyone in the congregation. Congregations are struggling to define the role in a way which is neither too restrictive nor too “global.”
The Organizational Challenge

_Sh’arim_ synagogues face the critical organizational challenge of fitting family education into the ongoing life of the congregation.

**Relationship to the religious school:** The focus of family education partially depends on where it is placed in the synagogue’s organization chart. Opinions vary: Some rabbis and educators believe family education should primarily be a grade-based program within the religious school. They argue that families with young children are critical to the life energy of the congregation. As one rabbi noted, “I really think that the target population is families with young children. That’s why people come to the synagogue, let’s face it. If you want to transform your community, that’s the group you have to go to.”

Moreover, practical experience shows that when programs are offered to the general congregation, attendance can be low. When programs tie in with the school’s curriculum and specifically target the parents, attendance increases considerably. One synagogue moved family education too quickly from the school into the wider congregation. “We had our family educator doing incredible things for everybody,” says the director of education, “but we were bypassing the school as the core consumer.” Recognizing the need for both a targeted and a global family education program, this congregation has returned to the school families as family education’s core constituency.

Others argue for moving beyond the school and grade-based programming to “find points for our family educator and family education to touch people in different sorts of ways.” Rather than lock step with the children’s education, these rabbis and educators try to view family education from the perspective of each family and determine what would make a difference in their Jewish lives. They say that grade-based programming sends the wrong message to parents. As one rabbi stated: “The danger with any exclusively grade-based programming is that it allows families to live their Jewish lives through the synagogue. They come in and they do a program and they leave and they’re done. To me, that’s not the goal of family education or any Jewish education.” At the current stage of _Sh’arim_’s evolution, the challenge for each synagogue is finding the optimal balance among school-focused, congregation-focused and home-focused family education.

**Integration:** In its initial phases, Jewish family education needed to be separate from other arms of the synagogue in order to establish itself as an accepted program with its own professional educator and lay committee. This separation may have helped family education take hold, but it also contributed to the existing compartmentalization within the synagogue. As one director of education observed: “There’s the school. There’s family education. There’s adult education. There’s Me’ah. We have consultants to family education. We have consultants to youth. No one has sat down and said, ‘Let’s consult to the whole institution, the lay and professionals, and bring them together and help really build a team.’ I think that’s the next step.”

"On the one hand there is a downside to class-based programming in that you’re not getting other members there, and perhaps it’s not carried as well from year to year as it could be. But the positive side is that’s the way we attract people. Parents are very conscientious. If their kid is having a program and they are asked to come, then they will show up.”

_Sh’arim_ director of education
The focus of the institutional consultation effort of the Bureau of Jewish Education has become the formation of education coordinating committees. In three of the Sh'arim congregations, these committees are seeking a united approach that will coordinate and integrate the diverse educational programs and activities taking place under the synagogue's roof. For example, one congregation set Jewish ethics as a broad theme for the year. The rabbi explains: "From the preschool through adult education, Jewish ethics is going to be a focus. It is a way of beginning to integrate not simply content, but people and committees; beginning to skirt the boundaries so that we have a sense of a community of learners. I think when we do that, we have a greater possibility of success."

**Professional teamwork:** Strengthening collaboration among the congregation’s education professionals may help integrate family education into the synagogue’s educational system and deal with issues of workload. In the first years of Sh’arim, all of the family educators reported to the education director in their congregation. This arrangement created a certain dynamic between these two professionals, what one rabbi referred to as “a very interesting dance.” “One of the stress points is the relationship between educator and family educator when both are full-time professionals. Where do they meet? Where do they not? Who supervises whom? Who picks up the ball?” The solution being sought in many of the Sh’arim congregations is a non-hierarchical, team approach to professional leadership. It is thought that as professional staff move to such an approach, this perspective will filter through the board and lay leadership, contributing further to cultural change in the synagogue.

**The Challenge of Community**

Survey results show minimal increase in parents’ sense of being part of the community formed by the congregation. Any increase in this measure appears to come primarily during the early years of the child’s education. Site reports further show that almost half of the programs the family educators deliver are intended to build community. It thus appears that these programs have not managed to break through the barriers that stand between parents and the congregational community. Addressing the issue of community will require deeper understanding of what community means to people, what congregants are looking for and what the synagogue can do to build strong connections among members and between families and the congregation.

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

The Sh’arim study is intended to provide information to the community on the progress of the Jewish Family Educator Initiative and to stimulate discussion of its future development. The following recommendations are offered as starting points for a community dialogue on the future direction of Sh’arim.

**High Quality Programs and Services**

By and large, parents in the Sh’arim congregations want more Judaism in their lives. Two-thirds of the Parent Survey respondents say they practice Judaism less than they would like, and an equal number say they expend less time and effort on learning about Judaism than they would like. The desire for more represents a great opportunity for Jewish family education.
Although it has done much to engage families in Jewish education and increase participation in some aspects of Jewish life, there is little evidence, to date, that Sh'arim has had widespread impact on families' Jewish lives at home and in the community. Research findings suggest that the biggest boost to Jewish family life comes in the early years, when parents first register their children for religious school. The data further suggest that the religious school experience does little to raise the likelihood of children continuing their Jewish education beyond bar/t mitzvah.

* Working together, Sh'arim professionals, lay leaders and consultants should explore new strategies for enhancing the impact of family education on home practices and for strengthening connections between the synagogue, school and home. These strategies should cover the span of children's religious education—a Head Start program to build on the intensity of the early years and set families on a path of Jewish growth, programs and services to strengthen all the grades in the religious school, efforts to increase links among educational opportunities for children (classes, camping, youth group, Israel trips, etc.), innovations to maximize the potential of the bar/t mitzvah year and a new impetus to engage post bar/t mitzvah families.

In order to develop relevant programs and services, the synagogues must understand the educational and developmental needs of their families, the reality of Jewish family life and the dynamics and feelings within the family that support Jewish life or resist it.

* The family educators should explore what congregants know and what they lack in terms of Judaic knowledge. Since intake interviews, originally part of the Sh'arim model, have not been done, they should conduct interviews and focus groups to learn more about the Jewish lives and aspirations of the congregations' families. For example, when people say they do not have as much Judaism in their lives as they would like, what do they mean? And what are the obstacles that keep them from having more? Such needs assessment requires high-level interpersonal and technical skills. The community should support this effort with advanced training, technical assistance or a needs assessment service.

Close to half of all of the programs offered by the family educators are explicitly intended to build community. Despite these efforts, the Sh'arim study found little evidence of change in parents' sense of community in their congregations.

* Congregations should begin a public conversation about the meaning of community and their vision of the kind of community they wish to create. This exploration should include parents' and children's honest assessment of what has facilitated and what has hindered their connection to the congregation. As well, Sh'arim should conduct observational studies of family education programs to see how they are implemented and to recommend adjustments that might help them better serve the goal of community building.
Professional Growth

Over the past seven years, the Sh’arim educator’s job has expanded and become more complex. It is time to reconsider professional growth opportunities, the content of the professional training and a renewed commitment by the family educators to ongoing professional development.

* Family educators should be engaged regularly in study programs to enhance their skills and deepen their Judaic knowledge. The synagogues should support professional development activity with encouragement, release time and incentives. The family educators should have mentors and supervisors within the congregation who can help them clarify areas for professional growth. Based on this input, the Sh’arim network and consultants should target topics of practical benefit to the educators and the congregations.

* Family educators should be freed from some of their administrative and programming tasks in order to devote more time to other important aspects of the job. The Sh’arim educators need more time for collaboration—working with colleagues in the synagogue to help stitch together the education offered by the school, adult education, Me’ah and other arms of the congregation. They need more time to give personal attention to families—reaching out to them, assessing their needs, coaching them, providing them with Jewish resources and perhaps helping them create individualized learning plans.

Organizational Vision

The Sh’arim synagogues face difficult decisions concerning the relationship of family education to the religious school, the delimitation of family education’s target audience and the allocation of educational resources and of the family educators’ time. And they face the difficult task of creating a system of education aimed at lifelong Jewish learning that makes a difference in people’s lives.

* Each synagogue should undertake a process to clarify its vision and goals for Jewish education in general and family education in specific. It should tackle the challenge of maintaining a focus on family education while also creating an integrated educational approach for the whole congregation. This task is not the responsibility of the professionals alone but requires the serious engagement of synagogue lay leaders as well. Synagogues already engaged in visioning and goal setting should serve as models and guides for others.

* The family education perspective needs to permeate the entire synagogue. Some family educators have become teachers of teachers within their congregations, providing training and imparting the family perspective to their colleagues in the synagogue and to lay leaders. The other family educators should follow this lead for, indeed, they will get more support from professional and lay leaders who share their understanding of the approach, rationale, and goals of family education.
Action Research

The community has placed greater demands for research and evaluation on Sh'arim and the family educators than on any other program or professionals in the Greater Boston Jewish educational system. These demands were not always welcomed by the congregations, where research is largely an unsupported activity. They did, however, produce useful data that led to changes in Sh'arim’s operation (specifically in the training, education and support of the family educators). Such action research, which creates a continuous loop between program implementation and evaluation, helps practitioners and lay leaders reflect on their progress and modify their efforts where necessary.

* Family educators should be encouraged to approach their work with a greater spirit of experimentation, to try out new program designs and new ways of delivering Jewish education. These might include family schools, family networks, individual learning plans, retreats, Israel trips and other cutting-edge approaches to educating families. These efforts should be studied carefully and the resulting information used for program development and improvement. As well, the results of these educational experiments should be shared widely so that the whole field of Jewish education can be inspired by and learn from the work of the Sh'arim educators.

* Sh'arim should continue to study the ongoing evolution of Jewish family education in Greater Boston. In its first seven years, Sh’arim institutionalized family education in the synagogues. It now stands poised to achieve breakthroughs in family education and in the creation of transformative experiences for families and congregations. Tracking this next phase of Sh’arim is essential to understanding how family education confronts the challenges it faces and how it assumes its role in the current renaissance of Jewish learning.

There is much to be learned from the Sh’arim study: It teaches us to be more reasonable in our expectations of what a single professional can accomplish. It shows us that an institutional initiative is more likely to affect what people do inside that institution than what they do at home or elsewhere. And it helps us understand that strong outcomes may occur only with powerful interventions. Family education may not, as yet, have been implemented in strong enough doses to have a significant impact on Jewish family life. Ultimately, no one initiative can be the panacea that “transforms” the Jewish community, its institutions and its families. Transformation is likely to occur only when many initiatives work in concert. The true value of Jewish family education will be found in the synergy it creates with the many other efforts underway within the synagogues and throughout the Greater Boston community.
## APPENDIX A

### Table A1

**PARENTS' JEWISH VALUES BY GRADE**

(Significant values only)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>% Very or Extremely Important</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2nd</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Keeping informed about Jewish or Israel-related current events</td>
<td>55%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observing Shabbat</td>
<td>58%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p<.05  **p<.005

### Table A2

**PARENTS' ATTRACTION TO THE SYNAGOGUE**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Not At All Important</th>
<th>A Little/ Somewhat Important</th>
<th>Very Important</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jewish education for children</td>
<td>3.84</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>89%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Celebration of life cycle events</td>
<td>3.77</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>82%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Holiday celebrations</td>
<td>3.45</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>59%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family education</td>
<td>3.03</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>59%</td>
<td>36%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prayer, minyan or religious services</td>
<td>2.96</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>55%</td>
<td>36%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Torah study and adult education</td>
<td>2.59</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Voluntarism or social action projects</td>
<td>2.64</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>72%</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social activities</td>
<td>2.56</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>69%</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural events</td>
<td>2.46</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>76%</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Volunteer work within the synagogue</td>
<td>2.06</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>54%</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sisterhood or Men's Club</td>
<td>1.80</td>
<td>51%</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Mean is based on a four-point scale from 1 "not at all important" to 4 "very important."*

### Table A3

**PARENTS' ATTRACTION TO THE SYNAGOGUE BY GRADE**

(Significant values only)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>% Very Important</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2nd</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jewish education for children</td>
<td>93%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Holiday celebrations</td>
<td>69%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family education</td>
<td>42%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prayer, minyan and/or religious services</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Voluntarism or community social action projects</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social activities</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p<.05  ***p<.001*
### Table A4

**PARENTS' SURVEY RESPONSES BY LEVEL OF PARTICIPATION IN FAMILY EDUCATION**

(Significant values only)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level of Participation in Family Education</th>
<th>0 hours during the year</th>
<th>1-5 hours during the year</th>
<th>6-10 hours during the year</th>
<th>11 or more hours during the year</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Attachment to Judaism and commitment to living a Jewish life more than it was three years ago</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>51%</td>
<td>54%**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jewish study highly important in respondent’s life</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>60%***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Torah study and adult education very important in involving respondent in the congregation</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>31%***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family education very important in involving respondent in the congregation</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>56%***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attend adult education programs in the congregation</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>62%</td>
<td>69%***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feel very comfortable in the congregation and very much part of the community</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>55%</td>
<td>66%***</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**p<.005  ***p<.001**
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Importance in Life&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</th>
<th>0 hours</th>
<th>1-5 hrs during the year</th>
<th>6-10 hrs during the year</th>
<th>11 or more hrs during the year</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Transmitting a love of Judaism to children</td>
<td>88%</td>
<td>92%</td>
<td>94%</td>
<td>97%***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observing the Jewish holidays</td>
<td>75%</td>
<td>90%</td>
<td>90%</td>
<td>94%***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Having children socialize with other Jewish children</td>
<td>69%</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>85%</td>
<td>81%*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taking a public stand against anti-Semitism</td>
<td>70%</td>
<td>79%</td>
<td>79%</td>
<td>82%*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Keeping informed about Jewish or Israel-related current events</td>
<td>52%</td>
<td>64%</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>69%**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Making social connections with other Jews in the community</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>54%</td>
<td>65%</td>
<td>67%***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Donating money to Jewish causes</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>55%</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>59%***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observing Shabbat in a special way</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>51%</td>
<td>56%</td>
<td>58%***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taking part in Jewish study and learning more about Judaism</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exploring the spiritual side of your life</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>49%</td>
<td>53%***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Having a connection to Israel</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>40%**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doing volunteer work as a member of the Jewish community</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>38%***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being conversant or literate in Hebrew</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>26%***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being a leader in your congregation or in the Jewish community</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>19%***</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Significance based on analysis of variance. *** p<.001 ** p<.005 * p<.05

(a) Percentages reported are those checking "Very" or "Extremely" important.
APPENDIX B

Sh’arim Parent Survey

Method

The 1995 survey was given to all parents with a child in 2nd or 5th grade. We chose these grades believing they would yield important time-series information as we tracked families from their early years of Jewish education through the bar/t mitzvah year. Three years later, when their children were in 5th and 8th grades respectively, we surveyed these parents again. Also included in the 1998 survey were parents with children in 2nd grade that year.

The family educators, along with their lay research coordinators, were responsible for assembling a list of all families with children in the target grades and getting questionnaires into the parents’ hands. Where possible, they administered the survey on-site, using registration, back-to-school nights or other parent meetings as an opportunity to field the survey. Where on-site administration was not possible, they mailed surveys to families along with a return envelope. The family educators were encouraged to follow up with families—with notices, letters and telephone calls—to assure the highest response rate possible.

Response Rate

In 1995 eight congregations took part in the Sh’arim study. The overall response rate was just over two-thirds (68%). There were, however, noticeable differences across congregations from a low of 49% to a high of 98%. This range in response rates signals differences in how the survey was administered, the amount of follow-up done to increase the response rate and the attitude of congregations toward the study.

Three years later, eleven congregations took part in the study. The response rate in 1998 was 60%, and again there was a substantial range among congregations. Part of the decline in the response rate is caused by the 8th grade parents. Only half of those who were contacted filled out a survey. Congregations appear to have greater difficulty locating and engaging parents once their children are post-bar/t mitzvah.

Because of the response rate and some changes in the congregational population, it cannot be assumed that families represented in the 1998 survey are necessarily the same as those in the 1995 survey.

Table B1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SH’ARIM PARENT SURVEY RESPONSE RATE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Population:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No. of Families</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1995 (2nd, 5th gr.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1998 (2nd, 5th, 8th gr.)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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Commission on Jewish Continuity Executive Committee: Martin Abramowitz, Laura Dickerman, Andrew Eisenberg, Rabbi Gershon Gewirtz, Aaron Kischel, George Krupp, Rabbi Barbara Penzner, June Rokoff, Steven Rosenthal, Judith Shankman, Barry Shrage, Cynthia Shulman, Deanne Stone, Jeffrey Swartz, Alan Teperow, David Trietsch, Audrey Wilson, Rabbi David Wolfman.


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Sh’arim Research Advisory Group: Dr. Susan Benjamin, Dr. Bonnie Hausman, Dr. Daniel Margolis, Bonnie Millender, Dr. Barbara Neufeld, Dr. Amy Sales, Dr. Harvey Shapiro, Dr. Susan Shevitz.

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Hornstein Program Interns: Debbie Karpel, Valerie Marshal, Wendy Rapport.

Participating Sh’arim Communities: Temple Israel, Boston; Congregation Eitz Chayim, Cambridge; Congregation Mishkan Tefila, Chestnut Hill; Rashi School, Dedham; Temple Emunah, Lexington; Temple Isaiah, Lexington; Temple Israel, Natick; Temple Aliyah, Needham; Temple Beth Shalom, Needham; Temple Beth Avodah, Newton; Leventhal-Sidman Jewish Community Center, Newton; Temple Emanuel, Newton; Temple Shalom, Newton; Congregation Beth El of the Sudbury Valley, Sudbury; Striar Jewish Community Center, Stoughton; Temple Shir Tikva, Wayland.


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Cynthia B. Shulman,
Chair, Board of Directors
Barry Shrage,
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