

THE LOS ANGELES BJE AT EIGHTY YEARS: CONTINUITY AND STRATEGIC CHANGE

The year 2017 marks eighty years since the founding of BJE-Los Angeles. In the Mishnah Avot (5.24), Yehuda ben Tema notes that eighty years reflect the gift of special strength (*gevurah*). As the strength of the individual octogenarian requires good health, the vitality of a legacy institution demands continuing relevance and demonstrated value.

The winter 1988 issue of *Jewish Education* (now the *Journal of Jewish Education*) was wholly dedicated to “Celebrating the 50th Anniversary of the Bureau of Jewish Education of Greater Los Angeles” (Schiff, 1988), now known as Builders of Jewish Education. Its articles included historical overviews of various aspects of the Los Angeles BJE and its work with schools as well as discussion of topics ranging from early childhood education to the provision of post-bar/bat mitzvah informal educational experiences on a community-wide basis. Reflecting on what had been accomplished over the span of fifty years, BJE’s long retired, first full-time Executive Director, Samuel Dinin commented: “The L.A. Bureau has made commonplace and universal what seemed impossible to accomplish fifty years ago” (Dinin, 1988. p. 25).¹

This essay looks at BJE Los Angeles at eighty years with an eye to the broader significance of lessons learned. As Jonathan Mirvis notes in a recent work on educational change: “Innovation is not limited to the startup sector” (Mirvis, 2016, p. 249); understanding the course of continuity and strategic change charted by a longstanding institution can be instructive. After sketching the history of BJE, this essay will reflect on those elements—each replicable—that have contributed to this organization’s “special strength.” These characteristics reflect BJE’s enduring culture and promise of continuing vitality and value.

Beginnings

In 1937, the Los Angeles Jewish Community Council—constituted, initially, as the United Jewish Community, in 1933—founded the Bureau of Jewish Education employing a local rabbi as “technical advisor.” Both the establishment of a Community Council, comprised of scores of Jewish organizations, and creation of a

¹ Dr. Samuel Dinin (1902-2005), a major personality in Jewish education in the United States at mid-twentieth century, served as Executive Director of the Los Angeles BJE, 1945-1956. Among the founders of the University of Judaism (now American Jewish University), Dinin left BJE to serve as Professor of Jewish education and Vice-President of the fledgling university.

BJE, were consistent with national trends of the era.² By 1940, there were Bureaus of Jewish Education in twenty communities across the United States (Gannes, 1954, p. 192).

During its earliest years, BJE functioned primarily as a financial allocations agent for the Jewish Community Council. Its 1938 budget was \$23,290, of which \$22,000 was for school subventions (Dushkin, 1944, p. 9). Recognizing the need to more effectively address Jewish educational needs in a growing community—estimated at over 140,000 by 1944—the Jewish Community Council engaged Alexander Dushkin, Executive Director of the Jewish Education Committee in New York City, to assess the Jewish educational situation in Los Angeles and offer recommendations.

Dushkin's work was undertaken in 1944. Surveying enrollment at Los Angeles Jewish schools at the time, Dushkin made the following, important observation, framing the challenge at hand:

Seventy-five to eighty percent of our children receive some Jewish instruction during their childhood: only thirty percent of them are found in Jewish schools at any one time; probably only ten percent receive the kind of Jewish education which could be considered satisfactory in the achievement of Jewish knowledge and in the formation of Jewish attitudes. Our problem is, therefore, not only to get the twenty percent of the disinterested parents to send their children to school, but also—and especially—to increase the percentage of children that achieve Jewish knowledge and personality. Our main concern should be the many thousands of Jewish parents who are interested and who do send their children for Jewish education, only to be disappointed and discouraged because of lack of interest and achievement on the part of their children (Dushkin, 1944, p. 5)

Dushkin proposed strengthening the BJE, starting with engagement of a highly qualified Executive Director, "the best available Jewish educator; an energetic cultured leader, one with adequate professional training and successful experience..." (Dushkin, 1944, p. 43). "Supervisors," including specialists in the arts, were to be enlisted to assist the Executive Director by visiting schools and working with teachers. The Jewish Community Council approved Dushkin's report and authorized a budget of \$75,000 to implement its recommendations. Dr. Samuel Dinin, registrar of the Teachers Institute of the Jewish Theological Seminary, in New York, was hired as Executive Director.

Service Provision in an Era of Rapid Growth

In the two decades post-World War II, Los Angeles Jewry grew to an estimated population of 496,000, comprising seven percent of the total population of Los

² In 1959, the Jewish Community Council merged with the earlier established (1912) Federation of Jewish Welfare Organizations, creating the Jewish Federation Council, now known as The Jewish Federation of Greater Los Angeles.

Angeles County (Vorspan and Gartner, 1970, p. 276). While, in 1944, there had been 4,415 students enrolled in Jewish schools in Los Angeles, pupil enrollment exceeded 28,000 by 1961 (BJE Newsletter, 1961, p. 1). Though the first day school in Los Angeles, the Los Angeles Jewish Academy, dated to the 1940s, day school education in Los Angeles remained in its nascent stages, two decades later (Ury, 1988, p. 45). In 1960-61, the community's five day schools enrolled 761 students (Soref, 1988, p. 16). BJE's work was primarily directed at strengthening existing synagogue-sponsored supplementary school programs and working with educators at newly established such schools. Reflecting on BJE's impact during this period, Irwin Soref, one of Dr. Dinin's early hires and, later, Executive Director of the Los Angeles BJE recalled: "Through its consultative services and ongoing supervision the Bureau helped the new schools to raise curricular standards and to improve instruction" (Soref, 1988, pp. 15-16).

In addition to school consultation, BJE worked with school boards and educators to develop a personnel certification system, organize placement services and fashion a Code of Practice. It also offered extensive professional development opportunities for educators in all school types: supplementary schools, early childhood education programs and the slowly emerging day schools. A quarterly publication, *Educational Notes*, provided guidance on such topics as planning a field trip, the use of slides in teaching Bible stories, the use of Hebrew conversation in the classroom, the teaching of Israel, the place of the assembly in the school program and how to effectively teach a confirmation class. BJE's services were consistent with Walter Ackerman's contemporaneous description of the role of Bureaus of Jewish Education in the 1960s:

The Bureau's function is to give disinterested technical assistance and guidance to the schools of the various ideological groupings in the locality it serves. Affiliated schools may avail themselves of the bureau's supervisory personnel, in-service seminars, central audio-visual and pedagogic libraries, testing programs, placement services, publications and a wide variety of educational activities" (Ackerman, 1969, p. 14).

The Los Angeles BJE rapidly operationalized the recommendations of the Dushkin report, implementing the menu of services described by Ackerman.

Program Initiatives for Teens

Establishment of a supplementary Hebrew High School was among the recommendations of the Dushkin Report (Dushkin, p. 21). In the 1950s BJE joined with the United Synagogue Pacific Southwest Region in supporting development of the Los Angeles Hebrew High School as a post-bar/bat mitzvah framework for teens seeking an opportunity for more intensive (8 weekly hours), Hebrew-rich Jewish study at the secondary school level. Over time, the Hebrew High School established multiple branches and annually served more than five hundred students. In the 1960s and 1970s, BJE significantly expanded its work with teens. One initiative, launched in 1964, was the BJE Summer Ulpan in Israel, affording participants the opportunity—over a 10 week summer experience—to interact with the people, land and culture of Israel combined with a program of study aimed at developing Hebrew language

competence. Well before the “Israel experience” became nationally popular, hundreds of Los Angeles teens were, each summer, experiencing BJE’s “L.A. Ulpan.”

Another BJE teen initiative of the late 1960s/70s, was Havurat Noar. This program combined synagogue-based weekly classes with a series of six weekend retreats. Each retreat culminated a unit of study; teachers—accessible, young adult role models—served as retreat counselors. The program was operated by BJE in close collaboration with a score of Reform and Conservative congregations, and enrolled 450 participants on multiple “tracks” of weekend retreats, each year, into the 1990s.

By the beginning of the twenty-first century, scores of “Israel experience” programs, of varying lengths and with assorted foci, were meeting the needs and interests of teens. After a 37-year “run,” BJE sunset its summer Ulpan, after summer 2000. Starting in the early 1990s, BJE had begun recruiting, orienting and leading groups of L.A. teens on “March of the Living,” an international study/travel experience surrounding Yom HaShoah in Poland and Yom HaAtzma’ut in Israel. By 2016, the L.A. program had grown to 222 participants—the largest number of teens from any city in the United States—drawn from high schools across the city.

As teens’ readiness to commit to multiple weekend retreats waned, BJE, in consultation with synagogue partners, sunset Havurat Noar and companion weekend retreat programs it had conducted. Instead, it initiated a robust service learning program, meeting teens “where they were.” Known as BJE Impact, the service learning approach connects community service with reflection linked to Jewish wisdom.

Meeting the Needs of Jewish Day Schools

While, in 1960-61, five Los Angeles day schools—all Orthodox—served 761 students, by 1990-91, 7398 students were enrolled at thirty-two L.A. area day schools. This growth over those decades reflected national trends (Graff, pp. 82-87; 102-105). In school year 2016-17, 9692 students attended thirty-seven local day schools. Enrollment at Community, Conservative and Reform day schools accounts for more than forty percent of current participation in this setting of Jewish education in Los Angeles.

Early in the development of Los Angeles day schools, BJE services mirrored those provided supplementary schools: consultation and professional development were provided and organized by a BJE educator with expertise in yeshiva curriculum and instruction.³ As other-than-Orthodox day schools emerged, starting in the late 1960s, a staff person with particular expertise in Hebrew language instruction was dedicated to consultative services for this growing sector. Daily engagement with students represented an opportunity for strengthening Hebrew proficiency; new models and materials were developed toward realizing this aim.

³ Special mention is due Rabbi Zalman Ury (1924-2006) who served as BJE’s consultant to yeshiva day schools from 1959 until his passing—the longest-serving staff person in the organization’s history. Rabbi Ury, who survived World War II in a Soviet labor camp in Siberia, received semikhah from Rabbi Aharon Kotler in Lakewood and earned a doctorate in education at UCLA.

By the 1990s, BJE had partnered with the Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC) and the California Association of Independent Schools (CAIS) to ensure that all its affiliated day schools undertook self-study and accreditation processes; it worked with schools to address recommendations emerging from this internal and external review. Early in the twenty-first century, BJE day school services turned, largely, to operational issues: best practices in governance and finance, accessing government resources and endowment development. Through a leadership commitment from the Lainer family, and partnership with several foundations, schools, the Jewish Federation and individual donors, BJE was able to initiate an ambitious endowment campaign in 2008, with a first phase goal of \$100 million.

Changing Approaches to Educational Service

Dushkin's report had called for employing BJE "supervisors" and, twenty-five years later, Ackerman wrote of the availability (to schools) of BJE "supervisory personnel." Throughout the 1950s and 1960s, BJE's newsletter for educators featured a "supervisor's column" providing guidance on a topic of educational interest. By the last quarter of the twentieth century, however, the term "supervisor" had given way to "consultant," and BJE professionals increasingly took on the role of network weavers.

In the 1990s, BJE, in consultation with complementary schools and early childhood centers, developed a self-study and accreditation protocol for each of these sectors, and supported this process over a span of fifteen years. The aim was to encourage discussion and reflection within each school's stakeholder community—in the case of a synagogue supplementary school, for example, educators, clergy, parents and students—to articulate the mission of the program, align the curriculum with the mission, and identify ways of evaluating the effectiveness of the program with respect to its expressed goals. Over the course of fifteen years, BJE staff worked with forty (self-selected) of the community's fifty supplementary schools—collectively educating upwards of 10,000 students—on "re-imagining" Jewish education in their particular setting. Early in the twenty-first century, new models of complementary Jewish education are the community norm; long-term impact of today's educational experiences remains to be assessed.

As with day schools, BJE provided financial grants in support of implementing recommendations emerging from the self-study/accreditation process. From its inception, BJE had been the Community Council's vehicle for the allocation of Council funds to schools. BJE continued to play this role on behalf of the Jewish Federation Council through 2009-2010, by which time annual allocations to schools exceeded \$1.6 million, annually.⁴

In the early childhood education sector, only a dozen of the community's sixty early childhood centers chose to undertake the self-study/accreditation process. However,

⁴ In 2010, the (reconstituted) Jewish Federation assumed this function, directly, allocating \$1.5 million to Jewish day schools and inviting grant proposals from complementary schools. To be eligible to receive Federation funds, day schools must be BJE-accredited.

many more of these centers participated in learning networks around such topics/approaches as moral development, intergenerational art, High Scope and Reggio Emilia methodology. Most recently, BJE has benefited from partnership with the Simms/Mann Institute in engaging “parent and me” instructors around the science of brain development and its implications for parents and teachers on how best to relate to/educate very young children to nurture their healthy growth.

Governance

As a function, initially, of the Jewish Community Council, BJE policy was shaped by a committee of the Council headed by a Council-appointed Chair. Dushkin noted, in 1944, that the Los Angeles Community Council was composed of one hundred sixty-three Jewish organizations; it was broad-based (considerably more so than the earlier-established Federation). It was consistent with the ethos of the Council that BJE embrace a broad spectrum of school types and that the committee relating to BJE include multiple voices and perspectives.

Dushkin addressed the question of whether it was desirable for BJE to wholly depend on the Council for financial support, or whether it should develop an independent base of support. He observed that “experience has indicated that so long as Jewish education [specifically, BJE] depended solely and entirely on central funds (such as the federation of charities), it tended to become static and communally weak. Jewish education gained in strength in those communities when circumstances made it necessary for the Bureaus to develop additional backing and strength of their own” (Dushkin, 1944, p. 28). He opined, however, that there was so much to do, immediately, in connection with implementing an effective educational program, that BJE should, for the next few years, fully concentrate on meeting the presenting educational challenges.

With the merger of the Council and Federation in 1959, creating the Jewish Federation Council, BJE continued to function as a committee of the larger entity. In 1982, the Jewish Federation Council undertook a review of the Bureau; among the recommendations of that review was that BJE—in a friendly “spin off”—become an independent agency affiliated with the Federation Council (Bank, 1982, pp. 25-28) The recommendations of the review were approved by the Jewish Federation Council board, although it was not until 1990 that the organization became completely autonomous. In the interim, new by-laws transitioned the board of BJE toward independence.

The current by-laws of the now long-autonomous BJE call for an elected board of 40-55 directors and officers, “broadly representative” of the Los Angeles Jewish community, with Presidents serving as life members of the board. The organization has consciously worked to ensure that the diversity inherent in this mandate is achieved. From BJE’s inception, shared commitment to building Jewish education has brought together people of differing backgrounds and perspectives in pursuit of a common cause.

Factors Contributing to the Continuing Vitality of a Legacy Institution

There are, perhaps, four key attributes that have collectively contributed to the enduring vitality of the Los Angeles BJE. Though these factors are examined, here, in the context of a particular organization, they are equally relevant to the good health of any Jewish communal institution. These attributes are: a mission-driven approach—surrounding a compelling mission—to decision-making and strategic action; governance by a board of diverse backgrounds and perspectives; commitment to collaboration and partnership in advancing mission-driven goals; and professionalism (and all that this connotes) in the organization’s activities and interactions with the individuals and entities to which it relates.

Mission/Vision/Values

In its most recent strategic plan (2013), BJE’s mission, vision and values are expressed, as follows:

VISION

Jewish learning is the foundation of vibrant Jewish living. BJE will ensure present and future generations of knowledgeable Jews who are committed to their religious and cultural heritage and an enduring connection with Israel. BJE will play a vital role in fostering meaningful Jewish continuity, strengthening contemporary American Jewish life and promoting lifelong Jewish learning.

MISSION

The mission of BJE is to enhance quality, increase access, and encourage participation in Jewish education throughout the Jewish communities of Greater Los Angeles. BJE, independently and in collaboration with schools and others, is an advocate, planner, catalyst, and creative leader for strengthening and advancing Jewish learning, with special emphasis on children and youth, early childhood through high school, their educators and parents.

VALUES

Jewish education matters; it is essential for the individual Jew.

Jewish education matters; it is essential to the Jewish community.

Jewish education should be available to all who seek it.

Jewish education of children is a collective Jewish responsibility.

Multiple visions of Jewish education are to be respected.

Multiple approaches to Jewish education are to be encouraged.

Jewish educational institutions are enhanced by interaction with each other.

The quality of Jewish education matters.

The institutional health of Jewish schools matters.

Learning is life long.

Though, over the years, the mission has been reviewed and refined, its fundamental foci have remained: *enhancing the quality of Jewish education, promoting access (when there are barriers) to Jewish education and encouraging participation in Jewish education*. Dushkin pointed to this mission in 1944 and it continues to guide the work of BJE.

Given commitment to the mission, vision and values, the particular services and programs to be provided are a matter of strategic decision-making. This commitment nurtures a readiness to innovate or change course as required to achieve strategic goals. For example, a summer Ulpan in Israel that was a (pre-1967) pioneer program of its sort, for decades, and advanced educational goals, could be created and later sunset, when the unique niche that it filled was, otherwise, effectively addressed. From initiatives in school accreditation to scaffolding schools' endowment development to service learning, BJE has often been "ahead of the curve," as an innovator. Consistent with this mission-driven commitment, when an individual or grant-making entity proposes that BJE consider a particular project, the first question is whether the proposal advances BJE's mission. As a mission-driven organization, openness to strategic change is ever-present, but it must be clear that a particular strategy is mission-aligned and, potentially, of high impact.

Diversity of Board Leadership

BJE board Presidents serve one year terms to a maximum of three years. A look at Presidential leadership of the most recent 12 years is instructive. A President long-active in a Sephardic congregation was succeeded by a Past President of a major Orthodox congregation, who was followed by a leader of the community's largest Reform temple, followed, now, by an active lay leader of a Conservative synagogue. Two of these four Presidents are men, and two are women; two educated their children in day schools; two, in complementary Jewish education programs. The four come from varying professional and business backgrounds, bringing diverse experiences and perspective to their volunteer leadership.

The elected board (with past Presidents, in addition, serving as life members) is typically 40-42 directors. Though there are no quotas, there *is* a mandate that the board be "broadly representative." Age, gender, geography, connection with various types of Jewish education and denominational preference are among the factors considered, each year, by the nominating committee. There are term limits, so the board is constantly "refreshed" by the thinking of directors who have not previously served on the board (though they might have served on one of its committees).

Though of diverse backgrounds and perspectives, BJE directors of the board share deep commitment to the organization's mission. They recognize that the enduring vitality of Judaism is rooted in the Jewish education of successive generations. Directors often point to the "transdenominational" nature of the board as something that they find quite meaningful in terms of their volunteer service.

Commitment to Collaboration

The capacity of twenty professional staff and fifty directors of the board to accomplish BJE's mission depends in great measure on collaboration and partnership. Jewish education benefits from a myriad "players" active in the field. Schools, youth groups, camps, foundations, federations, families, universities, denominational offices of education, national organizations focused on the advancement of particular types of Jewish education—each of these represents a potential partner in achieving specific goals and objectives. In thinking about any strategic initiative, an opening question is: who are the potential partners?

In its work of encouraging day school endowment development, engaging teens in Jewish service learning activity, providing professional development opportunities for educators; indeed, in every facet of its activity, BJE advances its goals by partnering with others. The impact of such "leveraging" represents a win-win proposition for the partnering organizations eager to fulfill their missions, with children and families—and the Jewish communities of which they are a part—the ultimate beneficiaries. Partnership requires trust, a function of the professionalism that must characterize any enduring organization.

Professionalism

Writing in 1944, Dushkin advised that the Jewish Community Council "seek to engage the best professional leadership available in the United States. The Board of Directors, including its Chairman, should deal with questions of policy....But it must leave to the executive director and the staff all implementation of program, all working relations with schools and teaching staffs, the administration of the office and of all projects in the program" (Dushkin, 1944, p. 11). This healthy prescription has characterized the "lay-professional" dynamic within BJE. "Professionalism" begins with a dedicated board, active in shaping the direction of the organization's work and strengthening its capacity to achieve its goals.

As those charged with carrying out "all projects in the program" of BJE, BJE staff must reflect reliability, competence, trustworthiness, knowledge and wisdom, commensurate with the seriousness of the mission they represent. There are, to be sure, instances when BJE staff have fallen short of the mark; there is, however, clear, recognized commitment to accomplishing the highest level of professionalism. A strength of the organization is its commitment to ongoing learning and standards of accountability, understanding the high bar that it must meet and demonstrate to realize its mission. It is manifesting such professionalism that enables the essential possibility of partnership.

What's in a Name?

The first Bureau of Jewish Education was established by the Kehillah of New York City, in 1910. The term "bureau" reflected both its role as a department of the Kehillah and the prevailing connotation of "bureau" among progressives as representing a scientific, orderly framework, dedicated to identifying and addressing problems in a particular field. By the early twenty-first century, "bureau" was more often associated with bureaucracy than with the spirit of progressivism.

Consequently, many Bureaus of Jewish Education adopted new names, becoming a “project,” a “venture” or a “partnership.”

In Los Angeles, not only was the general connotation of “bureau” an issue, the institution had, over time—consistent with Dushkin’s long-term proposal and as an outgrowth of the Jewish Federation Council’s review in the 1980s—become an independent entity; it was no longer a “bureau of” a larger, sponsoring organization. After considerable internal discussion and consultation with stakeholder focus groups, the BJE board determined that there was name equity attached to its “historic” BJE moniker. It “repurposed” the “B,” adopting the name BJE: Builders of Jewish Education, in 2009.

The *value* of an organization—its activities and their impact—not its name, represents its worth. Yet, there is symbolic significance in an institution’s choice of name. The election of BJE-Los Angeles to carry forward its longstanding identity as BJE represents an affirmation of continuity and strategic change.

A Changing Landscape

The current time is one of significant change in Jewish education. Technology has made knowledge—including Jewish knowledge—immediately available to anyone who seeks it. Synagogue membership has declined, and educational options outside the synagogue have proliferated. Models of complementary Jewish education continue to be re-imagined.

Day school enrollment in Los Angeles has remained fairly stable over the past decade; it has not grown.⁵ Alongside efforts to expand financial resources to seat those who desire to participate but require tuition assistance are experiments in blending online instruction with a reduced number of on-site teachers to substantially reduce costs. Early childhood education providers recognize, today, even more than in previous generations, that not only the child but the parents are part of the learning community of the early childhood education center.

While Federations continue to be important partners in communities’ educational initiatives, foundations committed to “moving the needle” when it comes to particular aspects of Jewish educational engagement play an ever-increasing role as change agents. Both federations and foundations recognize the importance of partners “on the ground” equipped to deliver value in shaping and implementing visions of possibility. BJE has demonstrated its capacity to serve in this role; it is a trusted partner in initiatives ranging from early education, to teen engagement, to (day school) endowment development.

BJE at Eighty Years: Continuing Creativity and Building for the Future

⁵ There has not been a demographic study of L.A. Jewry since 1996. It is possible that stable enrollment means that a greater percentage of Jewish children of school age are in day schools today than a decade ago, if—as some project—there are fewer children of school age today than was the case ten years ago.

Dushkin, in 1944, pointed to the need to work with schools, but also to think about parents considering the Jewish education of their children (Dushkin, 1944, p. 5). Within the most recent decade, BJE launched www.JKidLA.com, a website—professionally supported by a “Concierge for Jewish Education” at BJE—that provides current, comprehensive information about Jewish educational opportunities, broadly defined, available for children and families. At this writing, the website is visited by more than 10,000 unique visitors annually, with nearly 5,000 subscribers requesting bi-weekly e-blasts. That one address is familiar with virtually all available opportunities and looks to meet the needs of individual families rather than “push” a particular school or program has done much to “link the silos” of Jewish education for Los Angeles families (see Wertheimer, 2005). It is an approach that has, since its launch in Los Angeles, been replicated in other communities.

Dating to implementation of the Dushkin Report more than sixty years ago, professional development of educators has been a significant focus of BJE attention. Recognizing the essential role of teachers, professional development opportunities have been provided system-wide, in all educational sectors. Most recently, through grant investment by the Jewish Federation and the Jim Joseph Foundation, BJE has been able to strengthen and enrich the professional development of educators engaged in providing experiential education opportunities for teens as part of a Los Angeles Jewish Teen Initiative.

Over the course of decades, BJE has worked with schools to help meet students’ diverse learning needs. Initiatives have included special education resource rooms at day schools, grants in support of “magnet” (open to all) complementary education programs for learners with special needs and early intervention testing. At this writing, BJE looks forward—with recently-announced grant support from the Jewish Community Foundation of Los Angeles—to initiating access to expanded services at day schools to enable learners with special learning needs to more readily obtain the services they require on campus at reasonable cost.

Every aspect of BJE’s work requires professional leadership and involves cost. Apart from ongoing partnership with funders—including the Jewish Federation which currently (2016-2017) provides \$620,000 in (aggregate) grant support—toward a budget of \$5 million+, foundations and individuals, BJE has, since its Jubilee, developed an endowment and has utilized a spend rate of five percent toward its annual budget. With the endowment at \$8.5 million today, the spend rate, together with annual fundraising and grants, helps maintain and support the organization’s services. Commenting on the early BJE budgets that he reviewed, Dushkin observed that the Council had, apparently, taken the view that “everything except school subvention is ‘overhead’ which should be kept down.” “This,” he commented, “is an erroneous disastrous view in Jewish education” (Dushkin, 1944, p. 9). The Council was convinced of Dushkin’s suggestions and immediately altered its approach. Since that time, and particularly in recent decades, annual investors as well as legacy benefactors who recognize a continuous history of BJE accomplishment and

understand that achieving its mission requires ongoing financial support have made it possible for BJE to take bold, current action and plan for tomorrow.

In his editorial comments prefacing the BJE Jubilee issue, thirty years ago, *Jewish Education* editor Alvin I. Schiff expressed the hope that the Los Angeles BJE would proceed “from outstanding accomplishment to even greater achievement” (Schiff, 1988, p. 2). The mission-driven essence of BJE, its embrace of diverse leadership, commitment to collaboration and professionalism collectively represent the organization’s *gevurah* (special strength). They are the underpinnings of its history of continuity and strategic change. These are the characteristics that define the Los Angeles BJE at eighty years; they ensure that its vitality and value will long endure.

Looking Ahead:

In looking to the next 3-5 years, there are 5 key areas on which BJE is focused in carrying forward its mission.

- (a) engaging more families with young children in Jewish learning experiences;
- (b) engaging more teens in Jewish learning experiences;
- (c) strengthening special education services available to students at Jewish day schools, enabling greater participation of students with diverse learning needs;
- (d) building endowment resources for Jewish education
- (e) nurturing, broadening and deepening the range of meaningful educational options in part time Jewish education

(a) Engaging families with young children

BJE has, for decades, worked with early childhood centers to promote parent and family education. More recently, it initiated an online website, www.jkidla.com and established the portfolio of “Concierge for Jewish education” to help guide parents to Jewish educational opportunities meeting the needs of families and children. In partnership with the Simms/Mann Institute and the Jewish Federation, BJE has worked with Parent & Me educators at synagogues and schools to help them more effectively educate parents, with sensitivity to brain-based research on child development and Jewish wisdom.

Yet—though demographic data are not available—it seems clear that there are many Jewish families with young children who are not engaged in Jewish learning experiences. As BJE marks its 80th year, BJE’s Committee on Jewish Educational Engagement has identified this entry point as a primary focus, with the aim of developing a 3-5 year plan of action for engaging more such families in Jewish educational experiences.

(b) Engaging more teens in Jewish learning experiences

BJE has worked with schools to strengthen Jewish educational experiences for teens, promoted a diversity of learning opportunities for teens through its JKidLA.com website *and*, over the years, conducted a variety of direct service programs for teens. In addition to strengthening its intensive “March of the Living” study/travel

experience, BJE is embarked on expansion of service learning as a vehicle of teen engagement in Jewish education. At a time when teens are eager to engage in meaningful community service, service learning can serve as a springboard to reflection on service activities through a Jewish lens, connecting teens' organic activity with a rich body of Jewish teaching. Through expanding the number and themes of Jewish week-long service learning "camps" that it operates and consulting with camps, youth groups and schools on ways that they can engage teens in service learning activities, BJE looks to expand the number of Jewish teens it annually reaches by 50% in the coming 3-5 years.

(c) Strengthening special education services

While a number of part time Religious School programs have—often with the support of BJE—created and maintained opportunities for including learners with special learning needs, educational therapy services available at most Jewish day schools have been limited. Through a "cutting edge" grant from the Jewish Community Foundation and in partnership with Jewish day (elementary) schools, BJE has initiated expanded services at schools with the aim of enabling a broader range of student participation within Jewish day school settings. This initiative, which aims to extend to 12 Jewish day schools in the coming 3-5 years, will serve as a platform for expanded services in years to come.

(d) Building endowment resources for Jewish education

Over nearly a decade, BJE has worked with Los Angeles-area Jewish day schools, foundations and local donors to raise more than \$50 million in endowment resources for the long-term support of day school education. This represents an important stride toward a "phase one" goal of \$100 million for this purpose. The capacity of day schools to make educational opportunities available to students and families who cannot afford the high cost of tuition will depend, in great measure, on revenue from endowments. Looking ahead, the capacity of BJE to continue to vigorously advance its mission will, likewise, depend in part on endowment revenue. BJE's most recently established endowment, for example, the Janet and Jake Farber March of the Living Pre-Trip Orientation Fund, ensures BJE's capacity to provide a series of educational programs for the 200+ teens per year who register in the fall for the spring March of the Living travel/study experience. Institutional funding partnerships and individual contributions are important sources of annual support; the enduring strength of the organization requires endowment resources as well. The 80th year of BJE is an opportune occasion for asking historic donors to consider legacy provisions to endow BJE capacity.

(e) Innovation in part-time Jewish education

Approximately 50% of students, K-12, who participate in any given year in Jewish educational programs of schools or synagogues in Greater Los Angeles are enrolled in day school; 50% are enrolled in part-time programs. BJE has, independently, and with partners, worked with schools and synagogues to imagine a variety of models, outside the day school setting, for the meaningful educational engagement of students. BJE is part of the Shinui (Change) network, a collaborative effort of 10 community educational entities to disseminate promising models of part-time Jewish education.

The only constant in the work of BJE is change, and—in partnership with area schools and synagogues—BJE aims to further nurture innovative models and to share lessons learned to the benefit of the continuing growth and development of part-time Jewish education.

In its work in each of the above areas of focus as in ongoing programs and services, *educators* are essential. For that reason, Professional Development of educators—one of the earliest activities of BJE—remains a priority. In all settings, whether classrooms, youth programs or early childhood centers, the professional skills of the educator play a vital role in the experience of the learner. From approaches to differentiated instruction to the use of technology—in the school and beyond—strengthening the capacity of educators is an enduring dimension of BJE’s work. Through the generosity of the Milken Family Foundation and its Jewish Educator Awards program and the Simha and Sara Lainer Fund for Jewish Education @ BJE, BJE has been able to publicly recognize teaching excellence in day school, early childhood and “complementary” (part-time) religious school settings.

By BJE’s 85th year, we look forward to expanded numbers of families with young children engaged in Jewish learning experiences; significant growth in the number of Jewish teens engaged in service learning; a broadening of the number and range of students whose learning needs are effectively accommodated within the Jewish day school setting; substantial growth in endowment development for long-term support of Jewish education; and further expansion of models of meaningful part-time Jewish educational engagement.

As with all living organisms, the Jewish people continues to evolve. In like fashion, the ways that Jews educate successive generations metamorphoses over time. “You shall teach your children diligently” does not suppose a fixed formula. In twenty-first century Los Angeles, BJE: Builders of Jewish Education is committed—building on its accomplishments of 80 years—to advancing its Jewish educational mission from generation to generation.

CHAIRS/PRESIDENTS OF BJE*

Jacob Lieberman	1937	Herbert Glaser	1975
Herman Bachrack	1938	Max Candiotty	1978
Peter M. Kahn	1945	Mark Lainer	1981
Dr. Nathan Saltzman	1948	Herb Abrams	1984
Theodore Strimling	1949	Sidney Eisenshtat	1988
Herman Bachrack	1950	Linda Goldenberg Mayman	1991
Jacob Alkow	1951	Phalen Hurewitz	1994
David Bassan	1953	Rhea Coskey	1997
Dr. Nathan Saltzman	1955	Janet Farber	1999
Cyrus Levinthal	1956	Earl Greinetz	2002
Max Ponder	1963	Elaine Lindheim	2005
Matthew Berman	1967	Marc Rohatiner	2008
Moshe Cohen	1968	Donna Nadel	2011
Albert Spiegel	1968	Alan Spiwak	2014
Bernard Levin	1971		

EXECUTIVE DIRECTORS

Rabbi Bernard Cohen**	1937
Dr. Samuel Dinin	1945
Professor Morris Liebman	1957
Irwin I. Soref	1964
Dr. Benjamin L. Yapko	1974
Dr. Emil Jacoby	1983
Dr. Gil Graff	1993

*Until 1990, BJE was a committee of the Jewish Federation; its lay leader was a committee chair.

**Rabbi Cohen served as "technical adviser."

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