

EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP IN JEWISH DAY SCHOOLS: RESEARCH BRIEF #3

Teacher Satisfaction and the Promise of Jewish Leadership



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About this Brief

The Consortium for Applied Studies in Jewish Education (CASJE) is a community of researchers, practitioners, and policymakers dedicated to improving the quality of knowledge that can be used to guide Jewish education and learning. CASJE is committed to developing high quality research that is responsive to critical questions across diverse sectors in Jewish education. CASJE's programmatic and fiduciary home is located at the George Washington University's Graduate School of Education and Human Development (GSEHD).

Third in a series, this brief reports on findings from a secondary analysis of data collected for CASJE's Jewish Educational Leadership in Day Schools study. Together these briefs offer insight into the day-to-day experiences of Jewish day school leaders, teachers, and students with implications for practice, policy, and purpose.

Led by Dr. Michael J. Feuer, Dean of GSEHD, this work was funded by The AVI CHAI Foundation and The Mandell and Madeleine Berman Foundation. The analysis and reporting was conducted by Rosov Consulting.

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SUMMARY

How satisfied are Jewish day school faculty?

In what ways are they satisfied or dissatisfied?
What do school leaders—specifically Division Heads—contribute to the degree of satisfaction among teachers?

When teachers are satisfied with their jobs, their students and their schools benefit. Satisfied teachers are more likely to take guidance from their principals, adopt new initiatives, and contribute to a positive school culture.

Jewish day school teachers are highly satisfied with their jobs. Those at the beginning or end of their careers are slightly more satisfied than those in the middle of their careers.

The levels of satisfaction expressed by participants in this study are very similar to those among American public school teachers and somewhat lower than other independent school teachers.

Respondents highlight five primary factors that contribute the most to their satisfaction:

- **love of students;**
- **the contribution of their colleagues;**
- **administrative support;**
- **love of teaching; and**
- **school culture and climate.**

These factors are consistent with the broader literature on teacher satisfaction. General studies teachers attribute their satisfaction more frequently than do Jewish studies teachers to the broader aspects of school life, such as support and trust from administration and the profile and partnership of colleagues.

Division Heads make a difference in how satisfied teachers are. Teachers are more satisfied when they perceive their Division Head as more actively modeling Jewish vision and providing greater support in engaging students around Jewish values. This relationship holds for both Jewish studies and general studies teachers.

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Sources of Teacher Job Satisfaction

Teaching can be both deeply challenging and highly satisfying work. As William Ayers memorably put it: “There are many reasons not to teach. ... There is no other profession that demands so much and receives so little in financial compensation. ... But the rewards can be deeper, more lasting and less illusory than the cut of your clothes and the size of your home. ... There is a particularly powerful satisfaction in ... knowing that your life makes a difference.”¹

Job satisfaction in all fields of employment has been associated with positive outcomes: higher employee retention, superior job performance and efficacy, and improved employee physical and mental health.² Teaching as a field of employment is no different. Numerous studies have found that teacher satisfaction is positively related to, for example, responsiveness to guidance from one’s principal and willingness to adopt new initiatives and to contribute to a positive school climate. Teachers who are less satisfied are less likely to be effective as educators.³

The sources of job satisfaction are various. They include on the one hand pay, benefits, workload, employee empowerment, government regulations,

and the physical environment,⁴ and on the other collegiality, collaboration, a sense of community, and the “psychic rewards” of the work itself.⁵ A compelling hypothesis argues that, generally, intrinsic factors draw people to choose a particular form of work, and extrinsic factors are what lead them to leave that work.⁶ When it comes to teaching, this dichotomy breaks down. As a series of powerful (even depressing) biographical studies of teachers have shown, the intrinsic dimensions of the teaching experience—the core interaction between teacher and students—are sometimes so disheartening they drive teachers away from the classroom.⁷ At the same time, the satisfactions associated with these same interactions, when positive, can lead teachers to endure the most challenging conditions.

While school leaders may not be able to control the larger environment in which their schools function, they can hold sway over many aspects of teachers’ working conditions, including facets of a school’s general climate, and they can—through their actions—positively contribute to teacher satisfaction. By helping make teachers’ work more meaningful, and by supporting teachers through instructional coaching and constructive feedback, principals have been shown to heighten teachers’ satisfaction and, in turn, deepen their work commitment and sense of self-efficacy.⁸

1. Ayers, 1994, p. 24.

2. Platis et al., 2015; Tarigan & Ariani, 2015.

3. Yildirim, 2015; Eller & Eller, 2013.

4. Rosov Consulting, 2019.

5. Fernandez & Moldogaziev, 2015; Lortie, 1975; McLaughlin & Talbert, 2001; Raziq & Maulabakhsh, 2015.

6. Herzberg, 1968.

7. Bullough & Baughman, 1997; Ingall, 2006.

8. Chaudhry, 2011; Sparks & Malkus, 2016.

DATA AND METHODS

The findings reported in this brief come from secondary analysis of data generated by a supplemental survey sent to teachers whose Division Head or Head of School was participating in CASJE's study of Jewish educational leadership.

The survey was fielded during the 2015–2016 school year. Responses were received from 546 teachers at 28 schools.

The survey gathered basic demographic information about teachers (gender, role in school, length of employment in current school, and career longevity). Respondents were asked “This school year, how satisfied do you feel with your job as a teacher at [school]?” Then, in an open-ended follow-up question, they were invited to explain “the number one reason you attribute to satisfaction/dissatisfaction.” Additionally, the survey included questions asking respondents to assess the extent to which a named Division Head or their Head of School engaged in specific behaviors associated with (a) **actively modeling Jewish vision** (such as “[articulating] how her/his actions are guided by Jewish knowledge and values”), (b) **supporting teachers’ classroom practices** (such as enabling you to “adjust your lessons to the proper level for individual students”), and (c) **supporting teachers to help students enact Jewish values** (such as assessing “students’ growth relative to personal conduct [*Derech Eretz*]”).

Our analysis has explored the extent to which teachers’ perception of the contribution and behaviors of their supervisors—specifically the Division Head—in their school, predict their level of job satisfaction.

More information about the sample and methods can be found in Appendices A and B, respectively, at the end of the brief.

CASJE’s study of Jewish educational leadership provides a chance to explore teacher satisfaction in a Jewish day school context, identifying how satisfied teachers are, how they compare in this respect with teachers in other school sectors, what contributes to their

satisfaction and dissatisfaction, and the extent to which school leaders (Division Heads and Heads of School) contribute to their satisfaction.

FINDINGS: HOW SATISFIED ARE JEWISH DAY SCHOOL TEACHERS?

Highly and consistently satisfied

The teachers who responded to CASJE's survey are highly satisfied (see Exhibit 1); 86% express satisfaction with their job as a teacher at their school.

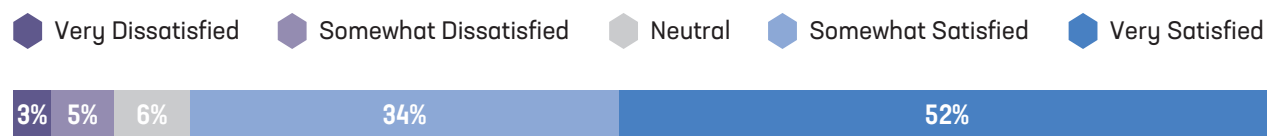
Moreover, there are no significant differences between teachers' responses with respect to gender or the contexts in which they work (school denomination, geographic region, and gender of their Division Head).

However, teacher satisfaction varies in relation to the length of time they have been teaching.

As seen in Exhibit 2, in both the earlier stages of their careers (when they have been working for fewer than 5 years) and in the later stages (when they have been working for more than 20 years) respondents tend to be more satisfied. Those who have been working for between 6 and 20 years are slightly less satisfied. There is also less variability at the beginning and end of people's careers. In other words, at these career bookends, there are few individuals who differ from their peers in how satisfied they are with their work. It may be that the most unhappy teachers tend to leave the field by year 10. By that point, a decade after the start of their careers, people realize that if they don't switch out of teaching it will be increasingly difficult to change their careers.⁹ This doesn't mean that all those who chose to stay are uniformly satisfied, but those who do stay and commit to a long-term career in education grow to increasingly appreciate its satisfactions.

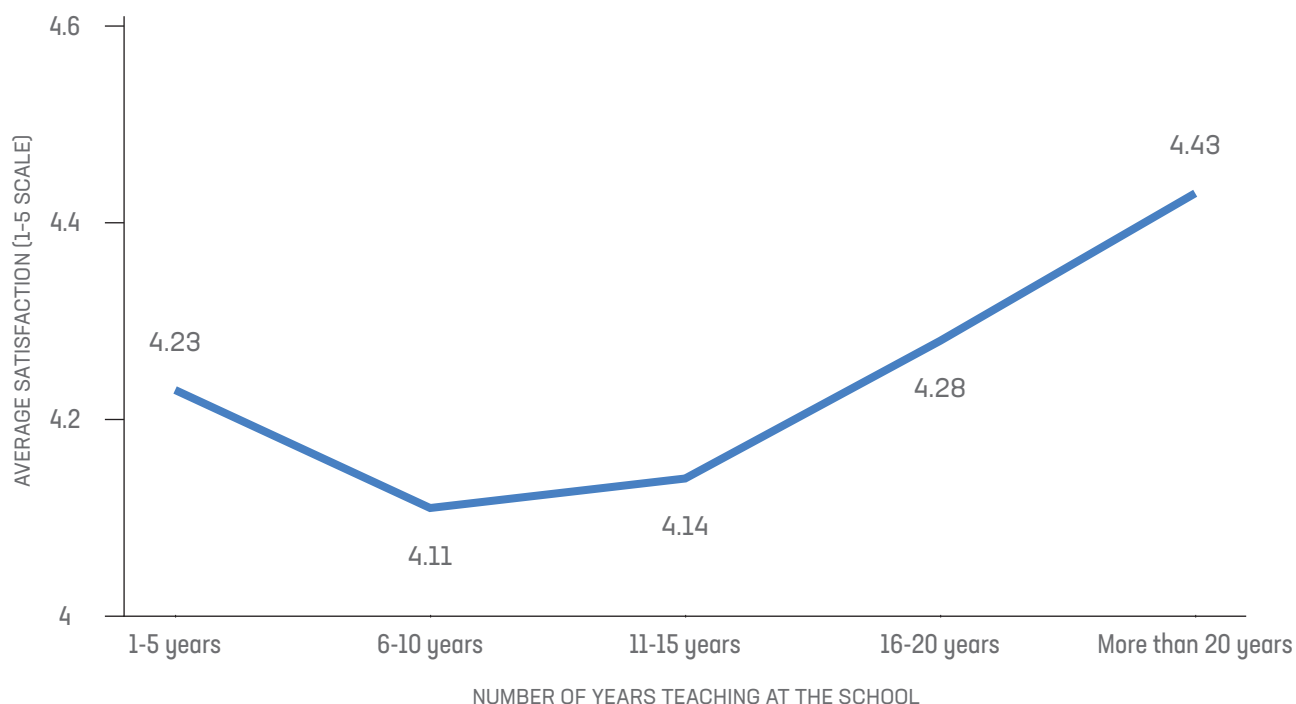
Exhibit 1: Teachers are Highly Satisfied (n=456)

How satisfied do you feel with your job as a teacher at [name of school]?



9. Huberman, 1993.

Exhibit 2: Teacher Satisfaction Relates to Length of Career (n=456)



The levels of satisfaction in this sample are very similar to those among American public school teachers and somewhat lower than other private school teachers.

In findings published by The National Center for Educational Statistics from the 2011–2012 School and Staffing Survey (SASS), 95% of private school

teachers and 90% of public school teachers reported they were satisfied in their jobs.¹⁰ These percentages are well aligned with the 88% of satisfied teachers in the Jewish day school sample.¹¹

10. Sparks & Malkus, 2016. “Satisfied” teachers are those who responded *Strongly agree* or *Somewhat agree*, and “dissatisfied” teachers are those who responded *Somewhat disagree* or *Strongly disagree* to the statement “I am generally satisfied with being a teacher at this school.”

11. The SASS survey used a disagree/agree 4-point scale, without a neutral point (*Strongly disagree*, *Disagree*, *Agree*, *Strongly agree*). The day school survey used a 5-point satisfaction scale (*Very dissatisfied*, *Somewhat dissatisfied*, *Neutral*, *Somewhat satisfied*, *Very satisfied*). The question prompt was also worded differently in the two surveys. If those who selected the neutral point are added to the satisfied end of the scale, Jewish day school responses are still closer to their peers in public schools than private schools.

What contributes to teacher satisfaction?

Both content and context

Consistent with the broader literature, day school teachers' satisfaction with their work is as much shaped by extrinsic as by intrinsic factors; extrinsic factors being those associated with the context in which teaching takes place, and intrinsic factors being associated with the act of teaching itself.

The extrinsic factors teachers referenced in their open-ended responses to the survey included support and trust from administration, the profile and partnership of colleagues, school culture and climate, class size, professional growth opportunities, and structures that provide freedom and autonomy or encourage creativity. Teachers noted fewer intrinsic factors. These intrinsic factors included love of teaching, love of students, and a sense of fulfillment and of being appreciated.

Teachers in this study were prompted to offer the number one reason for their satisfaction or dissatisfaction. Their responses reflected five broad themes,

with love of students the most frequently cited reason, and school culture and climate the least frequently cited reason for satisfaction or dissatisfaction (see Exhibit 3).

Extrinsic satisfactions: icing on the cake

Overall, there only two differences between teachers who highlighted intrinsic sources of satisfaction and those who highlighted extrinsic ones.

General studies teachers are more likely to be satisfied because of administrative support, professional comradery, and school culture.

It seems that these factors are more salient in their decision to work in a Jewish day school rather than in another school—a consideration that most Jewish studies teachers don't have the luxury of weighing because there are so few other professional contexts where they can employ their skills and learning.

Teachers who report being “very satisfied” tend to more frequently cite the contexts in which they work and less frequently the satisfactions in teaching itself compared to those teachers who report being “somewhat satisfied.”

Exhibit 3: Teachers' Primary Causes for Satisfaction: Love of Students First

In order of frequency

LOVE OF STUDENTS

"Students in the building make the job special."

"I love to work with these young people and get a chance to shape the way they approach this world."

"I love working with kids. I enjoy watching them learn new things every day and I enjoy learning from them."

PROFESSIONAL COMRADERY AND COLLEGIALITY

"The top reason for my satisfaction with my job is the collaborative, supportive atmosphere fostered by my [colleagues] and the Upper School administration."

"I love the feeling of comradery within the school. Everyone is willing and happy to work with each other."

ADMINISTRATIVE SUPPORT

"The care and development of the staff. I feel that at [my school] the administration is really invested in their staff."

"I feel that my supervisor has my back."

"I am given the support and space to try new things in the classroom while receiving the appropriate amount of guidance."

LOVE OF TEACHING

"[I get satisfaction from] my own ability to get things done and to create meaningful lessons and activities for my students to partake in."

"I get to teach my passion of sports medicine to the students, in addition to the general Health and Exercise Science classes to all."

"I love what I do."

SCHOOL CULTURE AND CLIMATE

"[My school] is a wonderful, welcoming, and supportive environment to work. It is one of the best work environments I have ever had the privilege to be a part of."

"Positive vibe and a family feel in school community, I love that most people around me have passion for what they do and that they care for each other."

FINDINGS: HOW SATISFIED ARE JEWISH DAY SCHOOL TEACHERS?

This difference might suggest that the satisfactions associated with the work itself (such as relationships with students and love of the subject matters) are already “built in” (or taken for granted) for both groups of satisfied teachers; these are the things that draw them to the work of teaching in the first place and provide basic levels of satisfaction. The satisfactions associated with the quality of their workplaces can’t be assumed. They are the “icing on the cake” that makes the difference between being somewhat and very satisfied with one’s situation.

What explains teacher satisfaction?

Satisfaction related to Division Head practices

Division Heads make a difference in teacher satisfaction.

The survey asked teachers about their perceptions of their Division Heads regarding three areas of Division Head responsibility: the extent to which the Division Head (a) actively models the school’s Jewish vision, (b) provides support for teachers’ instructional practices, and (c) supports teachers in engaging students with Jewish values. (See Appendix B for the particular activities probed.)

Teachers who report that their Division Head actively models Jewish vision and provides greater support in engaging students with Jewish values have higher job satisfaction.

Exhibit 4: Leadership Practices Contribute to Teacher Job Satisfaction



Division Head Practices

- ▶ Modeling Jewish vision
- ▶ Support in engaging students with Jewish values

This is the case for both Jewish studies and general studies teachers. By way of contrast, teachers’ perceptions of their Division Head providing greater support for teaching practices is not related to higher job satisfaction for teachers. (See Appendix B for a more detailed explanation of the method used to establish the relationship between teacher satisfaction and Division Head practices and these other variables.)

FINDINGS: HOW SATISFIED ARE JEWISH DAY SCHOOL TEACHERS?

Satisfaction related to the personal characteristics of the teacher

As noted above, the length of a respondent's career, both in the school where they are currently employed and in education more generally, also predicts their job satisfaction. After a dip in their first years, the longer they are at the school, or in the field, the more satisfied they are. However, the respondent's gender, whether they work part-time or full-time, and whether they teach in Jewish studies or general studies does not predict how satisfied they are in their work.

What matters most in day schools?

The findings from this study are highly consistent with the broader research on teacher satisfaction. Those who work as teachers over extended periods of time experience great satisfaction in their work. This may be because those who are not satisfied tend to leave—perhaps quite quickly. Again, consistent with general education research findings, satisfaction is as likely to derive from both the content of teachers' work as well as from the context in which they work, although those satisfactions that derive from the teaching act itself—from relationships with students and from the artistry associated with educating children—are generally more powerful than other satisfactions.

The study confirms that even while satisfaction might most commonly be associated with the act of teaching, school leaders do make a difference to teacher satisfaction as well.

Leaders' greatest impacts come from modeling Jewish values and supporting their teachers' capacity to engage students with those values. This is not trivial. The leadership that enhances teacher satisfaction is not primarily about

improving the conditions in which teachers work; it is about inspiring teachers with compelling ideas and a clear sense of purpose.

This finding is strongly aligned with the well-established principle that compass-setting leadership—leadership that is guided by and that enacts a clear school vision—has a positive impact on school outcomes.

Day school teachers appreciate leadership guided by Jewish values.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION OR FURTHER EXPLORATION

For Practitioners

For Division Heads:

- What elements of teacher satisfaction do you as a school leader have the most capacity to affect? In what ways is your leadership “compass setting” for your faculty?
- To what extent are your teachers more intrinsically or extrinsically motivated? What kinds of extrinsic supports are in place to help increase teacher satisfaction? How can teachers’ intrinsic motivations be supported?

For Teachers:

- What are the intrinsic and extrinsic factors that lead to your own job satisfaction?

For Researchers

To what extent are the particularly Jewish aspects of Jewish day school contexts salient factors in Jewish day school teacher satisfaction?

For Policy Makers

How can the field as a whole work to support extrinsic factors that improve job satisfaction?

How can Division Heads be supported and trained to develop leadership skills that are important for teacher satisfaction?

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APPENDIX A: SAMPLE CHARACTERISTICS

The teacher survey was fielded during the 2015–2016 school year. Responses were received from 456 teachers at 28 schools. Of the full sample of the teachers, about half (51%) teach in Orthodox schools (representing 15 schools), and about half (49%) teach in Conservative/Community schools (representing 13 schools). The majority of the teachers teach full time (78%), and the rest (22%) teach part time. Exhibit A1 shows the breakdown of teachers by their role in school.

Exhibit A1: Teacher Roles

	n	%
General Studies	207	45.4%
Jewish Studies	175	38.4%
Both General and Jewish Studies	40	8.8%
Other	34	7.5%
Total	456	100.0%

Respondents were asked to provide the exact number of years (a) they have been teaching overall and (b) they have been teaching in the specific school they were in. The number of years teachers have been teaching overall ranged from 1 year to 40 years, with an average of 14.8 years (SD = 10.7) and a median of 12 years. The number of years teachers have been teaching in their respective schools ranged from 1 year to 40 years, with an average of 8.6 years (SD = 8.2) and a median of 5.5 years. Exhibit A2 summarizes these distributions by using five categories for teachers' longevity. As can be seen, about a quarter of the teachers were quite new to their job (24%) and about a quarter have been teaching for over 20 years.

Exhibit A2: Teacher Longevity

	OVERALL		IN THEIR SCHOOL	
	n	%	n	%
1-5 years	108	24.4%	220	50.0%
6-10 years	90	20.3%	94	21.4%
11-15 years	73	16.5%	54	12.3%
16-20 years	57	12.9%	30	6.8%
More than 20 years	115	26.0%	42	9.5%
Total	443	100%	440	100%

In terms of gender breakdown, the majority of the teachers identified as female (73%, $n = 337$), a fifth of the teachers identified as male (21%, $n = 94$), and the rest declined to identify (6%, $n = 25$). As seen in Exhibit A3, female teachers were almost evenly split between Orthodox schools and Conservative/Community schools. Conversely, there were more male teachers in Orthodox schools compared to Conservative/Community schools.

APPENDIX A: SAMPLE CHARACTERISTICS

Exhibit A3: Teacher Gender by Type of School

	CONSERVATIVE/COMMUNITY		ORTHODOX	
	n	%	n	%
Female	174	51.6%	163	48.4%
Male	34	36.2%	60	63.8%
Declined to State	15	60.0%	10	40.0%

Exhibit A4 demonstrates the breakdown of regions in which schools’ teachers are located.

Exhibit A4: School Region

	n	%
Northeast	252	55%
Southeast	29	6%
Southwest	24	5%
Midwest	108	24%
West	43	9%
Total	456	100%

APPENDIX B: MEASURES AND METHODS

The Teacher Survey instrument included three questions asking teachers to assess the extent to which their Division Head or their Head of School engaged in specific behaviors. The first question included items tapping into teachers' perception on their leader actively modeling Jewish vision. Responses were on a 5-point scale with 1 representing *Rarely or Seldom* and 5 representing *Very Frequently*. See Exhibit B1 for the distribution of answers on these items.

Exhibit B1: Leaders Actively Model Jewish Vision

	Rarely or Seldom	Once in a While	Sometimes	Often	Very Frequently	N	M	SD
Demonstrates a personal passion for Judaic knowledge.	4%	3%	11%	34%	47%	455	4.17	1.03
Exhibits a passion for contributing to the Jewish community beyond the principal's job responsibilities.	4%	6%	14%	28%	48%	450	4.11	1.10
Tries to understand what being Jewish means to students.	4%	5%	14%	34%	42%	453	4.05	1.07
Appeals to our faculty to share the school's vision of Jewish life.	6%	4%	16%	34%	40%	455	3.97	1.13
Articulates how her actions are guided by Jewish knowledge and values.	4%	6%	18%	38%	34%	455	3.91	1.07
Talks to teachers about the importance of infusing Jewish values into the classroom culture.	6%	7%	23%	34%	30%	455	3.74	1.14
Total						456	3.99	0.94

The second question included items tapping into teachers' perception on their leader providing greater support in engaging students around Jewish values. Responses were on a 7-point Likert scale, with 1 representing *To an Extremely Small Extent* and 7 representing *To an Extremely Large Extent*. See Exhibit B2 for the distribution of answers on these items.

APPENDIX B: MEASURES AND METHODS

Exhibit B2: Leaders Support Teachers in Engaging Students Around Jewish Values

	To an Extremely Small Extent	To a Very Small Extent	To a Small Extent	To a Moderate Extent	To a Large Extent	To a Very Large Extent	To an Extremely Large Extent	N	M	SD
Model core values that are central to the mission of the school.	3%	3%	5%	12%	18%	24%	36%	433	5.55	1.54
Design student activities that offer valuable opportunities for students to practice core values.	3%	3%	7%	15%	20%	23%	28%	430	5.27	1.60
Encourage students to put their Jewish commitment into action when they are outside school.	4%	4%	7%	13%	19%	22%	30%	430	5.23	1.69
Assess students' growth relative to personal conduct (<i>Derech Eretz</i>).	6%	4%	8%	16%	17%	21%	27%	423	5.07	1.77
Assess students' growth relative to personal and social responsibility (<i>Acharayut</i>).	6%	5%	7%	16%	17%	24%	26%	424	5.07	1.77
Facilitate classroom conversations about Israel.	10%	8%	12%	17%	18%	17%	19%	415	4.49	1.90
Total								435	5.12	1.53

The third question included items tapping into teachers' perception on their leader providing support for teachers' classroom practices. Responses were on a 7-point Likert scale, with 1 representing *To an Extremely Small Extent* and 7 representing *To an Extremely Large Extent*. See Exhibit B3 for the distribution of answers on these items.

APPENDIX B: MEASURES AND METHODS

Exhibit B3: Leaders Provide Support for Teachers' Practices

	To an Extremely Small Extent	To a Very Small Extent	To a Small Extent	To a Moderate Extent	To a Large Extent	To a Very Large Extent	To an Extremely Large Extent	N	M	SD
Respond to difficult questions from your students	7%	4%	7%	15%	20%	22%	25%	447	5.02	1.78
Implement alternative instructional techniques to address different learning styles of students.	6%	7%	6%	18%	18%	22%	24%	445	4.92	1.79
Provide appropriate challenges for very capable students.	7%	8%	8%	16%	16%	23%	22%	441	4.83	1.85
Use a variety of assessment strategies to measure student learning.	8%	7%	8%	18%	18%	21%	21%	442	4.79	1.82
Provide an alternative explanation or example when students are confused.	8%	7%	9%	15%	16%	24%	20%	444	4.75	1.87
Craft good questions for your students.	10%	7%	8%	17%	17%	24%	18%	442	4.67	1.87
Gauge student comprehension of what you have taught.	9%	6%	9%	19%	19%	21%	18%	444	4.67	1.82
Adjust your lessons to the proper level for individual students.	11%	6%	7%	19%	16%	21%	19%	443	4.65	1.90
Total								450	4.79	1.71

The mean score on each of these three questions was used as a predictor in a regression analysis¹⁵ on teacher satisfaction. Teacher role in the school, teacher gender, teacher longevity (both overall and in the specific school), and school denomination were also added to the regression model as predictors. We used a linear multiple regression model to predict teacher satisfaction. The model was significant at $p < .001$ with 25% of the variance in satisfaction explained by these predictors (i.e., $R^2 = .25$). The two highest predictors¹⁶ were the frequency by which leaders actively model Jewish vision ($\beta = .26$, $p = .004$) and the frequency by which leaders actively engage students ($\beta = .21$, $p = .005$). Longevity overall and in the school were also significant predictors ($\beta = .18$, $p = .011$, and $\beta = .17$, $p = .015$, respectively). The other predictors in the model (teacher role, teacher gender, school denomination, and leader's support for teaching practices) were not statistically significant ($\beta s < .07$, $ps > .18$).

15. Regression is a statistical modeling technique used to explain the relationship between one dependent variable (the criterion) and one or more independent variables (the predictors). Regression examines two things: (1) Does a set of predictor variables do a good job in predicting an outcome (dependent) variable? (2) Which variables in particular are predictors of the outcome variable, and in what way do they relate to the outcome

variable (in terms of magnitude and direction)?

16. In statistical terms "predict" means a directed association between variables derived from a regression analysis—as one variable changes, the other one changes as well. It does not imply a cause and effect relationship, as other factors can be contributors to this relationship.



The Consortium for Applied Studies in Jewish Education (CASJE) is an evolving community of researchers, practitioners, and philanthropic leaders dedicated to improving the quality of knowledge that can be used to guide the work of Jewish education. CASJE supports research shaped by the wisdom of practice, practice guided by research, and philanthropy informed by a sound base of evidence.



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