

ECE Family Needs Study

Executive Summary // May 2024

Background

The Jewish ECE sector is experiencing an explosion of activity of late, with a host of community-based and national efforts recently underway. As part of its work supporting and strengthening the 12 Jewish early childhood education (ECE) programs in the Detroit metro area, J Detroit leadership commissioned Rosov Consulting to conduct a small-scale qualitative study to explore the factors that motivate Jewish parents to choose a Jewish ECE program or to choose another setting. To explore these questions, Rosov Consulting conducted 24 interviews in late winter 2024 with parents in the Detroit metro area with at least one child between the ages of two and six.¹ Eight parents had children currently enrolled in a Jewish ECE program, six had children who had left a Jewish ECE program to attend a different ECE program, and 10 had inquired at a Jewish ECE program but never enrolled their children.

¹This sample of parents is too small to make comparisons between different groups, but does represent a diverse array of Jewish families. Of 24 families represented in the sample: six do not identify with a denomination; three are interfaith; four have someone in their household who identifies as a person of color; one identifies as something other than Ashkenazi; two have someone in their household who identifies as LGBTQ+; and four are just meeting basic expenses.

Findings



Draws to Jewish ECE Laying Foundations, Building Community

Interviewees with children in Jewish ECE programs shared that one of the primary motives for their choice was to establish a foundation for Jewish identity and learning for their children. Parents who had taken their child out of a Jewish ECE program, and even some who had never enrolled, were sometimes wistful about what they knew they were missing.

Parents also mentioned the hope that “by participating in Jewish ECE they and their children would make life-long Jewish friends and would be part of a built-in Jewish community moving forward.

Barriers to Jewish ECE Time and Distance

Consistent with other research about preschool parent choice, distance from home or work and hours of care were chief among the disincentives to enroll in Jewish ECE expressed by parents interviewed for this study.

Interviewees generally set their drive time limit at 15 minutes; for families with either jobs or other schools to get to after drop off, the direction of the transit also matters. (On the flip side, a few parent interviewees who did not necessarily prioritize Jewish programs per se did end up at a Jewish ECE because of the convenience of the location.) Many Jewish ECEs do not offer the extended hours of care that full-time working parents need; of those that do, complicated fee structures for determining precisely what extended care would cost were cited as barriers to enrolling.

Cost was the least significant logistical factor cited by most parent interviewees, none of whom self-described as experiencing any form of financial hardship. For those families that self-described as more budget-conscious, and for those that have good options for free or low-cost ECE programs, many of the Jewish ECEs are simply not competitive.

Finally, a few parents interviewed cited safety and security concerns as disincentives to enrollment.

Strategic Opportunities



The Draw of Community

The importance parents place on building Jewish community for themselves and their children is a place of strength. Finding ways to create connections between young couples and families in the years before ECE may encourage parents to continue building those communities through Jewish ECE enrollment (especially if some carpooling can be fostered or encouraged among those who live near one another).

Location Is Everything!

Location is determinatively important: parents near Jewish ECEs are good prospects, but it will likely always be harder to draw those from further away. This is a universal challenge for Jewish ECE, and is a particularly difficult problem to address. Focusing recruitment and marketing efforts on parents in closer proximity to ECEs, for instance, by offering the kinds of pre-preschool classes described by one parent, is one possible approach to increasing market penetration.

Easy Extended Hours

Extended hours of care for working parents may be one of the most important things to contemplate. While a number of parents are charmed by some of the synagogue ECE programs, they are simply not in the realm of consideration for households in which both parents work full-time. More clearly advertising extended hours and streamlining pay scales to make them easier to calculate may attract parents who would otherwise not take a second look.



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