

Prepared for: **Jim Joseph Foundation**

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# GELS

## Detecting Early Signals with a Longitudinal Lens

January 2026

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# 1. Introduction: Purpose and Focus of the Report

The Jim Joseph Foundation has made the cultivation of Exceptional Jewish Leaders and Educators (EJLE) one of its strategic priorities. As part of this focus, the Foundation turned to Rosov Consulting to partner in accomplishing two objectives:

1. To systematize and consolidate what can be learned over time about the profiles of participants enrolled in professional development programs offered by the 15 EJLE grantee organizations (see Appendix for a list of those organizations)
2. To capture the outcomes realized by those organizations alongside the participants' professional trajectories over the years following their participation in programs offered by the grantee organizations

These goals have seen expression in two ongoing research efforts:

1. **An annual audit** of participants in EJLE-supported professional development experiences, designed to provide a broad, cross-sectional picture of who is engaging in these opportunities
2. The Growing Educators and Leaders Study (GELS), a **longitudinal panel study** designed to examine the professional lives, growth trajectories, and career sustainability of Jewish educators and leaders, and to deepen understanding of how professional development, workplace conditions, and institutional contexts shape educators' experiences over time

This report presents findings from the second of these efforts and addresses questions that are central to the Foundation's ongoing learning agenda: How stable are educators' commitments to Jewish educational work? Where do we see change over time, and where do we not? How are professional development, supervision, and workplace conditions associated with educators' satisfaction, sense of efficacy, and intentions to remain in the field?

The findings presented here draw on survey data from the first two years of panel data collection and in-depth interviews with 50 panel participants. The report first describes who is participating in the panel, followed by emergent patterns of stability and change in educators' professional orientations, workplace experiences, and career trajectories. We also include which aspects of educators' professional lives warrant closer attention as the study continues.

## 2. Study Design and Analytic Foundation

### 2.1. The Longitudinal Panel

To date, the longitudinal panel includes more than 550 Jewish educators and leaders. Almost all participants in the longitudinal panel were recruited to the study as alumni of professional development programs offered by one of 15 organizations supported through the Foundation’s Exceptional Jewish Leaders and Educators priority. (See Appendix for how many of their alumni are participating in the study.) A handful of additional individuals asked to participate after having seen publicity about the study, and only invited to participate if they had engaged in at least eight hours of professional development from one EJLE-supported program in the year prior.

Two cohorts have been recruited:

- **Cohort 1**, participated in PD during 2023 and joined the panel in early 2024. The 262 panelists have completed two annual cycles of survey data collection.
- **Cohort 2**, participated in PD during 2024 and joined the panel in early 2025. These 305 panelists have completed one annual survey cycle.

Each year, participants completed a **survey** covering a range of topics, including professional orientation and motivation, workplace experience, leadership capacities, professional contribution, and well-being. To reduce respondent burden and improve recall, the survey has been administered in two shorter installments spaced approximately six months apart.

The qualitative component of the panel includes 50 in-depth **interviews** conducted with participants selected to reflect variation by:

- role (front-line, supervisory, or both)
- career stage (early career and seasoned)
- extent of prior professional experience in another field
- sector of the Jewish education field where they currently work
- intensity of engagement in professional development

The interviews were designed to illuminate how participants interpret their survey responses and to explore what participants perceive as having changed—or remained stable—in their professional lives over the previous year.

## 2.2. What Can Be Learned at This Stage

With two waves of survey data for one cohort and one wave for a second cohort, the panel already supports several forms of analysis. These include:

- identifying which professional orientations and experiences show little movement over a one-year period and which are more variable
- examining how changes in role, job, or supervisory arrangements correspond with changes in job satisfaction or commitment
- providing nuance to the quantitative patterns with participants' own accounts of their work

At the same time, the current data do not yet support conclusions about long-term career trajectories, the cumulative effects of professional development, or patterns of retention and exit. The findings presented in this report should therefore be seen as early observations that help focus attention on where subsequent waves of data collection are likely to be most informative.

### 3. Who is Participating in the Panel

The panel largely reflects the diversity of roles, institutional contexts, and career stages that characterize Jewish educational and communal work.

#### 3.1. Roles, Career Stages, and Sectors

Panel participants occupy a range of professional roles:

- Roughly one-third (35%) work primarily in front-line educational or engagement roles
- Just under one-fifth (16%) hold primarily supervisory or leadership positions
- The remaining participants (49%) report hybrid roles, combining direct work with learners or community members and responsibility for supervising others

In terms of career stage:

- Approximately one in six (14%) of panel participants can be characterized as early career (having worked for five years or fewer in Jewish educational work)
- the great majority have more than five years of experience in the field

Participants work across multiple sectors of Jewish communal life. The largest groups come from:

- Jewish day schools (20%)
- campus-based Jewish organizations (19%)
- camps, youth movements, and Israel-related organizations (12%)
- Federations, foundations, and community organizations (11%)
- supplementary schools (10%)

A smaller but meaningful proportion of participants (7%) work as independent educators or consultants, reflecting the growing presence of noninstitutional career paths in the field.

#### 3.2. Pathways into Jewish Educational Work

Survey data indicate the diversity of pathways into Jewish educational and communal work, a phenomenon underscored by interview data. In interviews, some participants described early and sustained Jewish engagement—often beginning in childhood or adolescence—as formative for their later professional choices. Others recount less linear trajectories, including periods of work outside the Jewish sector before entering or returning to Jewish educational roles. These midlife switchers often describe specific life events or moments of reassessment that prompted their transition into Jewish education, adding further complexity to simple early career / late career distinctions.

Amid these diverse stories, survey data make evident that high proportions of those who work as Jewish educators today first experienced paid work in this field within a couple of sectors: 31% started out as summer camp staff and 18% as supplementary school faculty. These are truly seed sectors for the field as a whole.

### 3.3. Professional Development Pathways and Cross-Organizational Participation

While panel participants were eligible for the study (and largely recruited) after having participated in PD offered by one EJLE-supported program, survey data indicate that many panel participants' professional development experiences extend, in fact, well beyond a single organization. When asked about participation in professional development over the past five years, a substantial proportion of respondents reported engagement with multiple EJLE-funded providers. More than half of panel participants reported participation in programs offered by two or more organizations during this period, and a meaningful subset reported engagement with three or more.

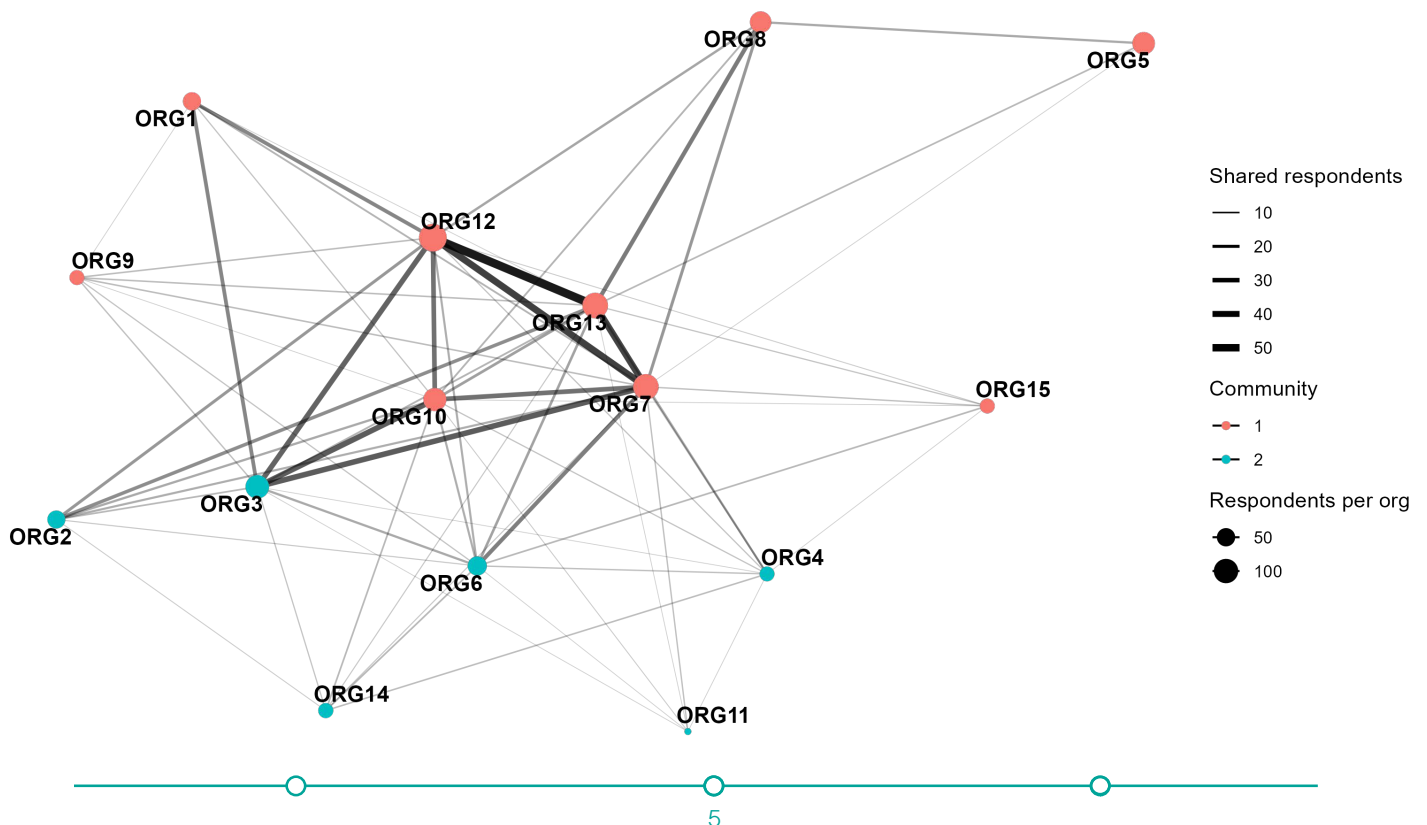
*Exhibit 1* illustrates these patterns through a network map that depicts overlap in participation across EJLE-funded organizations. The visualization highlights (by means of the thickness of connecting lines) several clusters where cross-organizational participation is common, alongside other areas where overlap is less frequent. While panel participants entered the study through a single organizational "on-ramp," many have previously navigated a broader professional development landscape that spans multiple providers, formats, and focal areas.

These overlaps are not evenly distributed. The network map suggests that cross-participation is especially common among organizations with complementary emphases—for example, leadership development, experiential education, and role- or sector-specific professional preparation—while other offerings appear to function more independently within educators' professional pathways. The pattern that emerges is not one of random accumulation, but of intersecting experiences over time.

#### Exhibit 1. Professional Development Network Analysis

##### Professional Development Co-Participation Network

Connections shown for pairs with  $\geq 5$  shared respondents



For the purposes of this report, the significance of these patterns lies primarily in what they reveal about the panel itself. Panel participants should not be understood as alumni of discrete, standalone programs, but as educators whose professional learning often unfolds across an interconnected ecosystem of providers. Many participants bring to the study experiences, relationships, and frames of reference shaped by engagement with more than one EJLE-funded organization within a relatively short time frame.

At the same time, these patterns raise broader questions for future inquiry. The extent of cross-organizational participation suggests the possibility that educators experience EJLE-supported professional development not as isolated interventions, but as a set of overlapping opportunities that may interact in meaningful ways over the course of their careers. As the longitudinal panel continues, the study will be well positioned to explore how different combinations and sequences of professional development experiences relate to educators' growth, roles, and trajectories.

## 4. Initial Findings from the Longitudinal Panel

This section presents six findings drawn from analysis of survey data and interviews with 50 panel participants. Together, these findings describe emergent patterns of stability and change in educators' professional orientations, workplace experiences, and career trajectories.

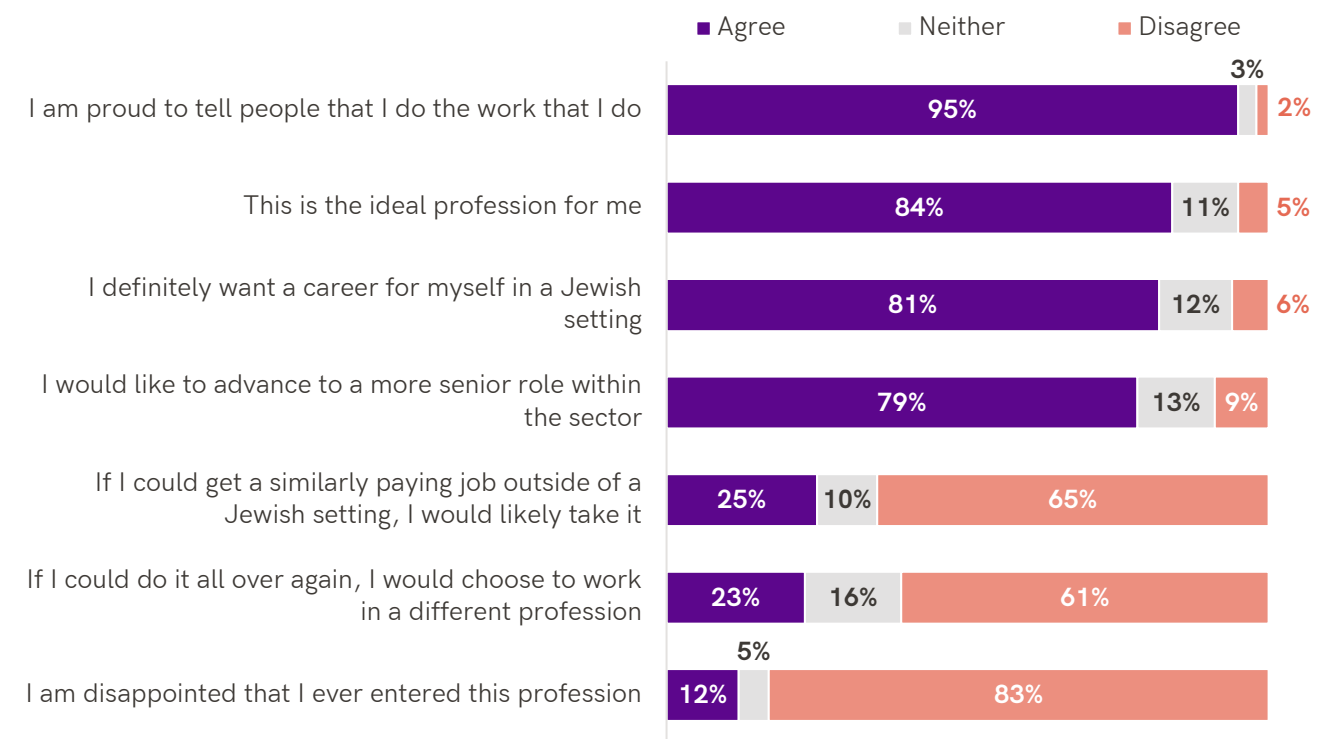
### 4.1. Commitment to Jewish educational work remains strong, even as many educators experience significant workplace strain.

Survey data from the longitudinal panel indicate that participants' commitment to Jewish educational and communal work is both high and stable over time. Among Cohort 1 participants, mean scores on measures of career motivation and career commitment show no meaningful decline from Year 1 to Year 2, with the large majority of respondents reporting strong agreement with statements reflecting long-term engagement in Jewish educational work. This stability is evident across roles, sectors, and career stages. Similarly, the items included in a measure of career commitment are consistently high, as seen in *Exhibit 2*.

Interview data help illuminate what this stability represents—and what it does not. Participants rarely describe their commitment as contingent on ease, comfort, or favorable working conditions. Instead, they speak of their work in identity-laden terms, often framing it as an expression of purpose or calling—a phenomenon very much aligned with findings from CASJE's "preparing for entry" study. As one seasoned supplementary school educator put it, *"Judaism and Jewish community were where I succeeded and where I had friends and community. I was really drawn to stay in that."* Another, a seasoned camp educator, described leaving a higher-paying for-profit role because *"it wasn't fulfilling to my soul on a day-to-day basis.... This work feels more meaningful and impactful for me."*

#### Exhibit 2. Indicators of Career Commitment

Thinking about the work you do, to what extent do you disagree or agree with the following:



These expressions of commitment coexist with widespread accounts of strain. Survey measures related to workplace stress and workload indicate that a substantial proportion of participants report having experienced multiple stressors in the past year, including overextension, emotional exhaustion, and pressure from competing demands. Interview narratives reinforce this picture. Even highly committed educators describe feeling stretched thin and feeling concerned about the long-term viability of their roles.

As one early-career educator, working at a campus organization, reflected, *“I love my work, but I can’t do it forever at this pace. I’m being told to keep refilling the cups of others, but when your cup runs dry, that’s your problem.”* A seasoned JCC professional echoed this tension from a different career stage: *“I don’t see myself leaving Jewish education, but I don’t know that I can do exactly what I’m doing all the way to retirement. It’s an absolute ton of work, and at some point, I need to make more money.”*

What is striking in these accounts is not ambivalence about Jewish educational work itself, but rather concern about the conditions under which that work is carried out. Commitment, in this sense, appears to function as a relatively durable orientation—one that persists even as participants describe exhaustion, frustration, or doubt about longevity. As one participant, based in a supplementary school, expressed it succinctly, *“Even on the hard days, [the work] feels important.”*

Taken together, the survey and interview data, even while emergent, reflect participants’ ongoing commitment and deeply held sense of purpose alongside the significant professional strain they experience. Understanding how long such commitment can be sustained under these conditions will be a central question for subsequent waves of the study.

## 4.2. Core professional dispositions are relatively stable, while workplace experiences are more variable.

Analysis of survey data from Cohort 1 reveals a clear distinction between dimensions of educators’ professional lives that remain relatively stable over time and those that are more sensitive to change even over the course of one year. Measures related to professional identity and orientation—such as career motivation, their sense of curiosity and exploration, and their commitment to Jewish educational work—show stability year-to-year, with most participants reporting very similar scores in Year 1 and Year 2 along a kind of bell curve.

By contrast, measures tied more directly to educators’ day-to-day work environments show substantially greater variation over the same period. These include participants’ reported relationship with their supervisor, overall career satisfaction, and sense of contribution within their organization or professional sector. In each of these domains, a notable minority of respondents report meaningful change—both positive and negative—from one year to the next.

*Exhibit 3* illustrates this contrast by comparing the distribution of Year 1–Year 2 change scores across scales. While most respondents cluster tightly around zero change on measures of motivation and personal disposition, responses on workplace-proximate measures are more widely dispersed, indicating greater instability.

**Exhibit 3. Change in Scale Scores from Year 1 to Year 2** (Change between -1 and 1 scale point is no change)

	No change	Increased	Decreased	N
Grit	100%	0%	0%	224
Leadership Capacities	98%	2%	0%	119
Career Motivation	98%	0%	2%	222
Curiosity and Exploration	96%	1%	3%	230
Meaning in Work	93%	4%	3%	117
Growth Mindset	90%	4%	6%	226
Career Commitment	88%	5%	7%	228
Autonomy/Empowerment	79%	10%	10%	230
Career Satisfaction	66%	16%	18%	228
Relationship with Supervisor	59%	19%	22%	222
Workplace and Professional Contribution	44%	23%	33%	116
Networks and Relationships	30%	28%	42%	107

*Note. The color scheme distinguishes between facets of (1) educators’ dispositions and inner orientations [green], (2) professional experience and meaning [orange], and (3) professional contribution and connectivity [blue]—as discussed in Section 5 below.*

Interview data help explain this pattern. Across sectors, participants describe their motivations and sense of professional purpose as deeply rooted and slow to shift. Many trace these orientations to formative experiences earlier in life and speak of them as part of who they are, rather than as reactions to current circumstances. A seasoned educator in a Jewish supplementary school explained, *“I’ve questioned a lot of things about my job over the years, but not whether this work matters to me. That part feels settled.”*

In contrast, participants consistently describe their experience of work as contingent on current organizational conditions. Interviewees’ accounts of satisfaction, frustration, or efficacy are closely tied to leadership practices, role clarity, workload, and institutional culture. A midcareer professional working in a Federation setting noted, *“What changed this year wasn’t my commitment—it was who I was reporting to and what I was being asked to carry. That made all the difference.”*

This distinction—between relatively stable dispositions and more fluid workplace experience—helps make sense of a pattern that might otherwise appear contradictory. Educators can remain highly committed to Jewish educational work even as their satisfaction rises or falls, and even as their sense of contribution fluctuates. Conversely, improvements in workplace conditions can lead to increased satisfaction without necessarily altering educators’ underlying professional identity.

Importantly, this pattern appears across sectors and career stages. Early-career educators, seasoned professionals, and midlife career switchers alike describe a strong internal orientation toward Jewish purpose, alongside more variable assessments of how well their current roles enable them to live out that purpose. As one campus-based educator put it, *“I still believe deeply in the work. The question each year is whether this is the place where I can do it well.”*

Overall, these findings suggest that short-term change in educators' reported experience is driven less by shifts in identity or motivation and more by changes—or lack of changes—in their professional context. This distinction provides an important lens for interpreting subsequent findings, particularly those related to job transitions, supervision, and professional development.

### 4.3. Observable changes in satisfaction and commitment are concentrated among educators whose professional context changed.

Not all Cohort 1 participants experienced stable levels of career satisfaction and commitment from Year 1 to Year 2. Both interview and survey data suggest that change is disproportionately concentrated among participants whose professional context shifted during the year, especially those who switched to work for a new organization.

Participants who remained in the same organization but experienced role changes or expanded scope also reported greater movement than those whose roles remained static. Interview narratives clarify that these changes often involved increased responsibility, visibility, or influence. As a professional working in a Jewish day school explained, *“Having this new role has made me feel more satisfied—like I can actually see the impact of what I’m doing.”* By contrast, participants whose jobs and roles remained unchanged were most likely to display stability across scales. For many, this stability reflected contentment; for others, it reflected stagnation rather than equilibrium. A front-line educator in a campus-based organization put it succinctly: *“Nothing really shifted this year. That’s partly reassuring—and partly the problem.”*

#### Career Satisfaction

Overall, about two-third (66%) of Cohort 1 participants reported no change in career satisfaction. Among participants who changed jobs, 25% reported an increase in career satisfaction and 22% reported a decrease, compared with 12% among those who did not change jobs or roles. Job changers were also substantially more likely to report change—again in both positive and negative directions—on measures of autonomy and empowerment, 33% showing increase or decrease compared with 20% of nonchangers. Among survey respondents, most strikingly, 41% of those who changed jobs in the past year, and 35% of those who changed roles, also experienced an improvement in their relationships with their supervisor, compared with only 11% of those who did not change job or role. Unfortunately, 21% of those who changed jobs experienced a deterioration in these relationships.

#### Career Commitment

A larger percentage of Cohort 1 participants (88%) reported *no* change in career commitment from Year 1 to Year 2. Modestly greater proportions of those who changed jobs also evidenced changes in career commitment, either positive or negative, compared to those who did not (11% vs. 4% changing positively, and 14% vs. 5% changing negatively).

In interviews, participants who changed jobs frequently described their moves not as expressions of discontent, but as efforts to find conditions that better supported professional growth and work that aligns with their values or their ability to stay committed. A seasoned professional who moved into a leadership role in the Jewish camping sector described the transition as a long-term investment: *“I think it’s a real opportunity for me to grow and set my fingerprint on an institution.... The goal is for this to be a long-term commitment to an*

*organization that I care a lot about.”* Similarly, a professional who transitioned into a Federation-based strategic role framed the change as a shift toward greater coherence between values and work: *“I really wanted to look at how we create thriving Jewish communities more holistically. I’m really happy with the change that I made.”*

By and large, the survey and interview data point to a consistent pattern: Professional context acts as a lever for change. When educators’ contexts shift—through new jobs, new roles, or new supervisory arrangements—their reported experience is more likely to move. Where context remains static, reported experience is more likely to remain stable as well. This finding reinforces the importance of attending not only to individual dispositions, but to the organizational and structural conditions that shape educators’ professional lives.

#### 4.4. Supervision as a hinge point playing a central role in shaping educators’ professional experience.

Across survey and interview data, the quality of supervision emerges as one of the most consequential features of educators’ professional lives. Changes in participants’ relationships with supervisors are closely associated with changes in career satisfaction, sense of contribution, and perceptions of job sustainability.

As seen previously in *Exhibit 3*, survey data show that the quality of supervisory relationships is among the scales with the greatest year-to-year movement, and that’s among respondents who changed jobs, changed roles, or who reported no such change. Such volatility underscores that supervision can function as both a source of workplace improvement and challenge.

Interview data provide clarity about what participants mean when they talk about supervision—and why it matters. Across sectors, educators rarely frame supervision as a narrow managerial function. Instead, they describe it as a relational and structural condition that shapes role clarity, trust in colleagues, workload, recognition, and professional growth.

Participants consistently link positive supervisory relationships to feeling seen, supported, and protected. A seasoned professional working in a Jewish community organization described the difference explicitly: *“Having a supervisor who actually understands the work and advocates for me changes everything. It doesn’t make the job easy, but it makes it feel possible.”* In these accounts, supervision is not just about feedback or evaluation; it is about creating an environment in which educators feel they can exercise judgment and sustain effort.

Conversely, weak or misaligned supervision frequently appears in interviews as a source of strain. Participants describe supervisors who are absent, overly controlling, or unclear about expectations, often linking these dynamics directly to declining satisfaction. A mid-career educator in a campus-based organization explained, *“It wasn’t the students or the work that wore me down. It was constantly feeling like I was guessing what success looked like—and never quite getting it right.”*

Several participants explicitly tied decisions to change jobs or roles to supervisory relationships. In these cases, leaving was framed less as a rejection of the work itself and more as a response to unsound leadership. One educator who moved from one Jewish engagement organization to another reflected, *“When I left, it wasn’t because I didn’t believe in the mission anymore. It was because the way I was being supervised made it impossible to do the work well.”*

It is evident that supervision shapes educators' sense of contribution and impact. Participants who describe supportive supervisors are more likely to articulate how their work fits into broader organizational or communal goals. Those who describe poor supervision often report feeling disconnected from decision-making and unclear about the significance of their efforts. *"I know I'm working hard,"* said a seasoned educator in a day school, *"but without real guidance or feedback, it's hard to know if I'm actually moving the needle."*

To conclude, these findings suggest that supervision functions as a hinge point between educators' stable commitment to Jewish educational work and their variable experience of that work. While supervision does not determine educators' underlying motivation or sense of purpose, it powerfully shapes how that purpose is experienced day to day—whether as sustainable and supported, or as exhausting and fragile. This pattern, and its implications, merit close attention going forward.

#### 4.5. Professional development supports growth and connection, but does not substitute for healthy workplace conditions.

Survey data indicate that professional development is a regular feature of professional life for many—but not all—panel participants; levels of engagement vary meaningfully by role and career stage. Two-thirds (67%) of panel members reported participating in at least one multisession or intensive PD experience in the prior year, and almost a quarter reported participating in three or more distinct PD offerings of eight hours or more. Educators in supervisory or hybrid roles are more likely than front-line educators to report frequent participation in structured PD experiences.

While early-career educators differ little from more seasoned educators in rates of participation in PD, there are notable differences between rates of participation between different sectors. At the extremes, more than 90% of day school educators participated in at least one intensive experience of professional development, presumably because such experiences are mandated in their workplaces. By contrast, just 30% of those who work in social justice or service-learning organizations reported having done so.

These patterns provide a backdrop to how participants talk about PD in interviews. Across sectors, interviewees describe PD as valuable—but rarely as transformative on its own. Participants most often frame PD as a resource that supports reflection, confidence, and connection to peers, rather than as a lever that directly reshapes their day-to-day work experience. They emphasize its value when it is embedded in supportive organizational environments—settings that allow them to apply new learning, expand responsibility, or gain recognition. A mid-career professional working in a Federation setting explained that PD mattered most when it translated into influence: *"The learning itself was great, but what really changed things was being trusted to use it."*

Participants are particularly attentive to whether PD is recognized and integrated by their workplaces. When PD participation is encouraged, funded, and accompanied by opportunities to apply new learning, it is experienced as energizing and affirming. A seasoned educator in a Jewish day school explained that PD mattered most when it was treated as an institutional investment: *"It's not just that you go and learn something—it's that people expect it to change how you work."*

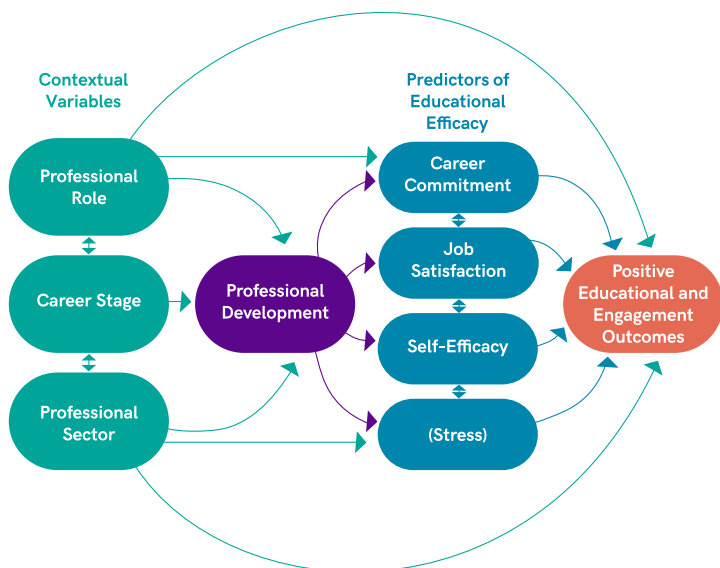
By contrast, participants working in less supportive environments often describe PD as meaningful but limited in its effects. Several interviewees spoke of PD as a temporary source of renewal that did not alter core conditions such as workload, role clarity, or supervisory support. As one educator in a campus-based organization put it, *“PD can refill the tank for a bit, but it doesn’t fix the engine.”*

Repeatedly, interview data also highlight that access to PD is uneven, shaped less by motivation than by organizational capacity and role design. Participants in larger or better-resourced organizations are more likely to report consistent access to funded PD and protected time for participation. Others—particularly front-line educators in smaller settings—describe having to pursue PD on their own time or forego opportunities altogether, despite strong interest.

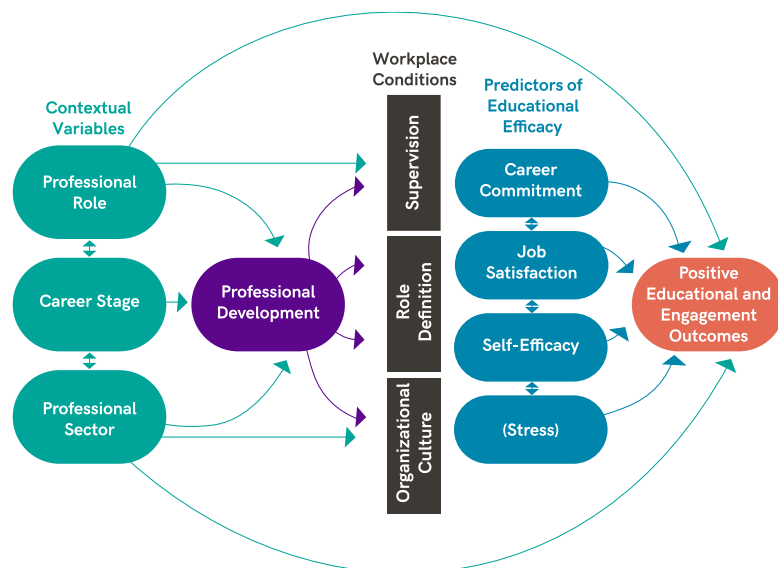
Taken together, these findings suggest that professional development plays an important but context-dependent role in educators’ professional lives. PD supports learning, renewal, and connection, but its influence is mediated by supervision, role definition, and organizational culture. Where workplace conditions enable educators to integrate new learning into their practice, PD contributes to positive professional experience. Where such conditions are absent, PD alone is unlikely to produce sustained positive change.

In addition, these findings suggest that we need to update the conceptual model that shaped the design of this study. In that model we conceived professional development as having an unmediated impact on career commitment, job satisfaction, self-efficacy, and stress reduction (as depicted in *Exhibit 4*). Our interview data suggest that when exploring the outcomes of PD, we need to account for some profound mediating influences, not least of which are supervision and organizational culture (as depicted in *Exhibit 5*).

**Exhibit 4**  
Original Model of PD Origins and Influences



**Exhibit 5**  
Revised Model of PD Origins and Influences



#### 4.6. Early-career educators are navigating the field rather than disengaging from it.

Early-career educators in the longitudinal panel often reported shorter time horizons and openness to change, but these orientations should not be interpreted as indicating a weak commitment to Jewish educational work. Rather, early longitudinal evidence suggests that many early-career participants are actively navigating a period of exploration—testing roles, developing skills, and assessing fit within the field.

Survey data show that early-career educators reported levels of career motivation and commitment that are comparable to those of more seasoned participants, with little aggregate decline from Year 1 to Year 2. At the same time, early-career interviewees were more likely than their more experienced peers to report uncertainty about long-term professional sustainability, particularly with respect to compensation, workload, and opportunities for advancement. This combination—high commitment paired with provisional planning—distinguishes early career exploration from disengagement.

Interview data further clarify how early-career educators make sense of this phase. Many describe their current roles as intentionally temporary, emphasizing learning, exposure, and relationship-building rather than permanence. A front-line educator working in a campus-based organization explained that they viewed their role as *“a place to learn how the field actually works—what I’m good at, what I’m not, and what kind of environment I need to thrive.”* In these accounts, movement is framed as developmental rather than reactive.

To clarify, the early-career category includes not only younger educators but also midlife career switchers—individuals who entered Jewish educational work after substantial experience in other fields. These participants often bring strong professional identities and high commitment, but they are still assessing how well Jewish educational settings align with their expectations around leadership, compensation, and organizational culture. A midlife switcher working in a Jewish community organization described feeling deeply invested in the mission while remaining uncertain about longevity: *“I’m all in right now—but I’m also paying attention to whether this can really work for me over time.”*

Set apart from age or years in the field, early-career educators consistently emphasized fit as a central concern. They spoke less about whether they want to remain in Jewish education and more about *where* and *how* they can do their best work. Many described themselves as deciding what version of the field they can remain in, rather than whether to remain in Jewish education at all.

Survey data are consistent with this framing and help explain a phenomenon noted above: Early-career educators appear more likely than seasoned professionals to experience changes in career satisfaction from one year to the next, largely because they are more likely to undergo changes in role or supervision. These patterns mirror those observed among job and role changers more broadly, suggesting that early career variability reflects sensitivity to context rather than fragility of commitment.

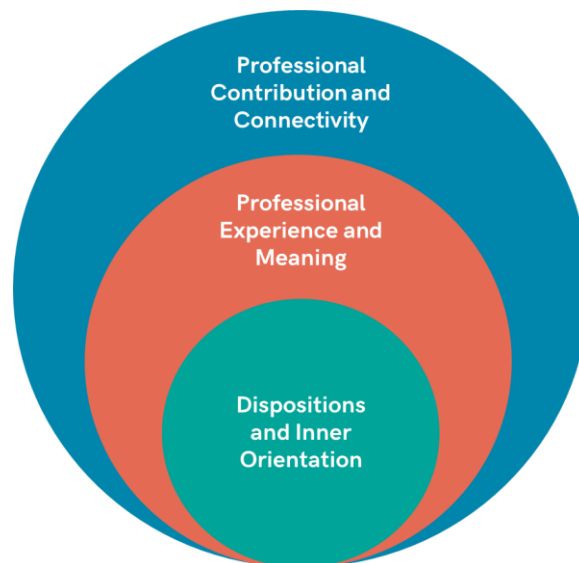
All told, these findings suggest that early career movement should be understood as a normal and potentially productive phase of professional growth, not as an early signal of attrition. For many participants, exploration functions as a way of testing alignment between values, skills, and institutional conditions. Subsequent waves of the longitudinal panel will be critical for distinguishing between exploratory movement that leads to sustained engagement in the field and trajectories that culminate in exit.

## 5. Interpreting the Findings Together: Early Signals With a Longitudinal Lens

Taken together, the six findings presented in this report point to a consistent pattern: Educators' professional identities and commitments—their dispositions and inner orientation—are relatively stable, while their day-to-day experiences—their sense of professional contribution and connectivity—are far more sensitive to context. This distinction helps reconcile several features of the data that might otherwise appear contradictory—high job commitment alongside strain, stability in educators' identities alongside volatility in experiences, and widespread participation in professional development alongside uneven career satisfaction.

We have depicted these patterns in a model that, when we met with them, EJLE partners found highly compelling. The model, designed to reflect the data collected in *Exhibit 3*, distinguishes between those features of educators' identities and experiences that are exceptionally stable (dispositions and inner orientation), those that are highly volatile (professional contribution and connectivity), and those that indicate modest movement (professional experience and meaning).

**Exhibit 6. Stable and Unstable Components in Educators' Identities and Experiences**



Across roles, sectors, and career stages, participants articulate a durable sense of purpose rooted in Jewish educational and communal work. This orientation appears slow to change, even in periods marked by organizational disruption, heightened workload, and broader societal stress. At the same time, educators' reported satisfaction, sense of contribution, and perceptions of sustainability show meaningful variation from one year to the next, particularly when their professional context changes.

One implication of these early findings is that short-term change is more often driven by shifts in environment than by shifts in identity. Job transitions, role changes, and changes in supervision function as inflection points, making improvement or decline in professional experience more likely. Where roles and contexts remain static, reported experience is more likely to remain stable as well.

Supervision emerges as a particularly important feature of this professional ecology. Across the findings, it operates as a hinge between educators' commitment to the work and their experience of doing that work. Supportive supervision appears to buffer strain, clarify expectations, and enable growth, while weak or misaligned supervision amplifies stress and undermines sustainability. Notably, participants rarely frame supervision as a discrete intervention; instead, they describe it as a pervasive condition that shapes how all other aspects of their work are experienced.

Professional development plays a complementary but distinct role. Participants value PD and engage in it frequently, especially when their roles and organizations support ongoing learning. Yet PD's influence is mediated by context: It is most consequential when workplaces create conditions that allow educators to apply new learning, expand responsibility, or gain recognition. In the absence of such conditions, PD tends to support short-term reflection and renewal without substantially altering day-to-day experience.

Finally, the findings invite a more nuanced reading of early career movement. Early-career educators' openness to change reflects responsiveness to context and active exploration, rather than disengagement from Jewish educational work. This pattern mirrors the broader finding that variability is concentrated where context shifts, and it underscores the importance of distinguishing between exploratory movement within the field and exit from it—an analytic distinction the longitudinal design is well positioned to support over time.

Viewed through a longitudinal lens, these findings should be understood as early signals, not endpoints. Their significance lies in how they clarify where stability appears to be the norm, where variability concentrates, and which features of educators' professional environments warrant sustained attention as the study continues.

## 6. Participant Experience of the Study

In addition to generating data about educators' professional lives, the longitudinal panel has created opportunities for participants to reflect on their own experiences and to contribute to a broader understanding of the field. Interviews included questions about why participants elected to join the study and why they have continued to participate.

Across interviews, participants most commonly described a desire to contribute to learning and improvement in the field as a central motivation for participation. Many framed their involvement as an act of responsibility toward other educators and toward the future of Jewish educational work. As one seasoned, self-employed educator explained, *"I really feel that we're not being listened to and heard, and I wanted an opportunity to share my opinion.... If anything I say can be helpful for the next group of educators out there, then it's worth it."*

Others emphasized participation as a way of ensuring that lived experience informs decision-making. An early-career educator working in a campus-based organization noted, *"Change doesn't happen if you don't say anything. By participating in studies and having the opportunity to say something, you're being a part of that change."*

Participants also spoke frequently about the value of structured reflection. Both surveys and interviews were described as rare opportunities to pause and assess professional goals, challenges, and sources of meaning. Several educators described the experience as personally affirming or even restorative. A seasoned educator in a supplementary school reflected, *"Every question you ask helps me become a better educator. You're basically giving me an hour to reflect on why I'm doing this on a day that is a little bit crazy."* Another participant described continued participation as *"good therapy,"* noting that it created space for reflection that was otherwise difficult to find.

Practical considerations also shaped participation. Incentives were frequently mentioned as an important factor in initial enrollment, validating the study's engagement strategy. As one seasoned camp professional put it succinctly, *"I signed up because I've done your studies before and I know you send gift cards."* At the same time, participants were clear that incentives alone did not explain continued participation. Over time, curiosity about the findings and investment in the study's purpose have become more salient.

Finally, several participants expressed appreciation for the longitudinal nature of the study itself. One educator who had recently moved into a role outside the Jewish sector reflected on the importance of continued participation from a research perspective: *"Even if you decide not to include me, at least you have the data and you can make that choice as scientists."* Such comments reflect participants' understanding of the study's aims and their commitment to its integrity.

Participants' reflections suggest a high level of engagement with the study and confidence in its purpose. Their willingness to continue participating—often over multiple years—strengthens the panel's capacity to generate meaningful insight over time and reinforces the value of sustained longitudinal inquiry.

## 7. Looking Ahead: What Future Waves of the Study Will Make Possible

The findings presented in this report reflect an early moment in the life of the Growing Educators and Leaders Study. With two cohorts recruited, one cohort observed over two years, and qualitative interviews completed with a subset of participants, the longitudinal panel is now positioned to move beyond early signals toward deeper insight.

Future waves of data collection will allow the study to examine trajectories rather than snapshots. As additional years of survey data accumulate, it will become possible to distinguish between short-term fluctuation and sustained change, and to trace how educators' experiences evolve across different career stages and institutional contexts. Patterns that are only suggestive at this stage—such as the relationship between supervision and sustainability, or between early career exploration and long-term engagement—can be examined with greater precision.

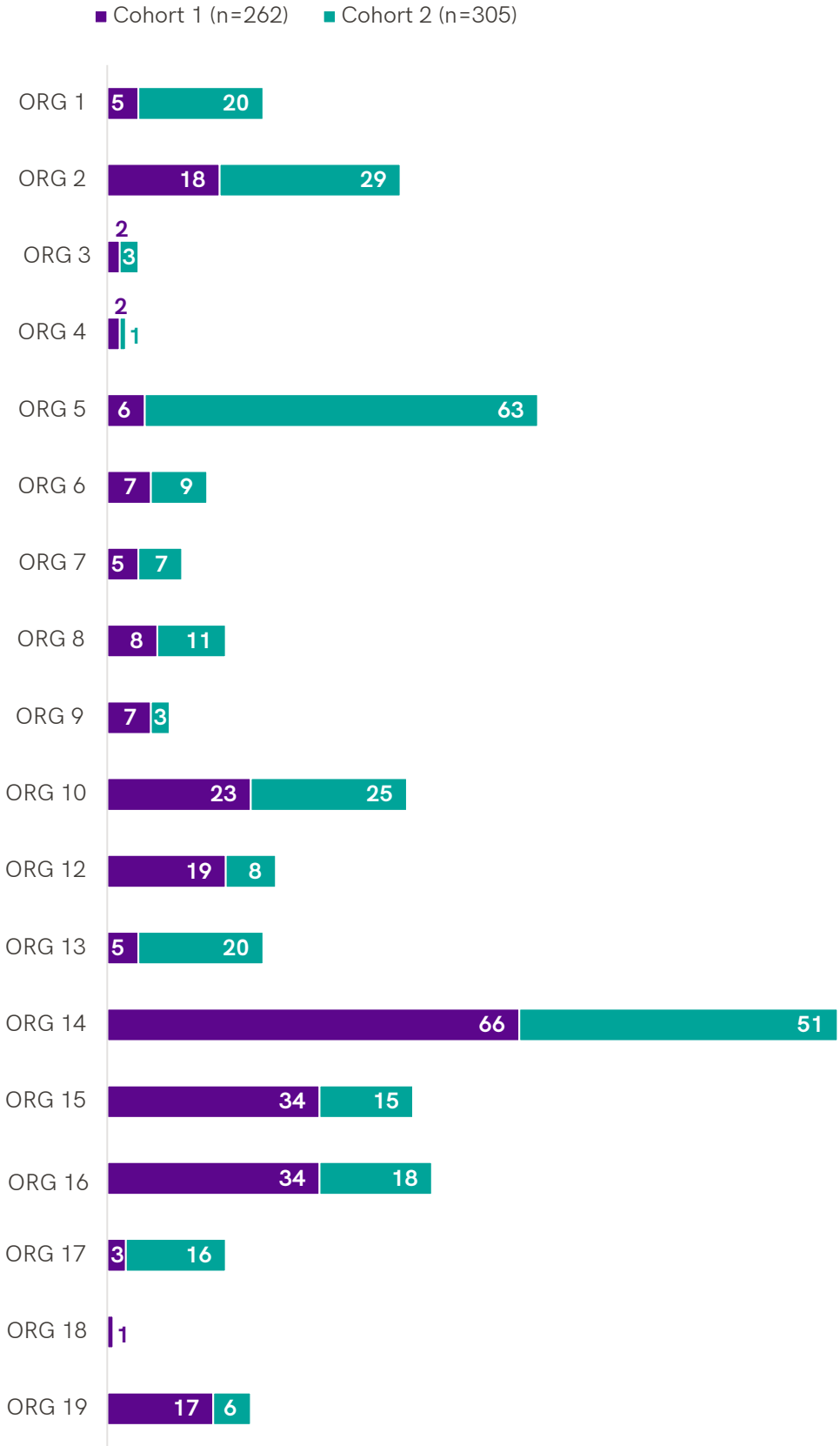
The longitudinal design will also support more refined subgroup analysis. With additional observations, the study can more closely examine how professional experience differs by role, sector, and career stage, and how transitions—such as job changes, promotions, or shifts in supervision—shape longer-term outcomes. In particular, future waves will help clarify which forms of early career movement are associated with continued engagement in Jewish educational work and which are more likely to precede exit.

Over time, the study will also be better positioned to explore the role of different kinds of professional development in educators' trajectories. As participants are followed across multiple years, the panel will make it possible to examine how sustained engagement in particular PD formats—such as cohort-based programs, leadership development, coaching, credentialing, or episodic learning experiences—interacts with workplace conditions, supervision, and role progression. This will allow for a more nuanced understanding of when and how professional development contributes to educators' growth, contribution, and career sustainability.

Finally, continued engagement with participants will strengthen the study's capacity to inform field-wide learning. High levels of participant investment to date suggest that the panel can continue to serve as a window into educators' lived experience, capturing how broader social, organizational, and professional dynamics shape work in real time.

We hope that future waves of the Growing Educators and Leaders Study will allow the Foundation and its partners to move from identifying early patterns to understanding how and why those patterns unfold over time. The findings in this report provide a platform for that ongoing inquiry—one that emphasizes sustained attention and learning grounded in educators' experience.

# Appendix 1. Numbers of Panel Participants, by EJLE Organization and Cohort





**Questions?**

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