

## A Whole-School Approach to Professional Development Aimed at Educating Diverse Learners

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### Background

Across the diverse field of Jewish day schools, one goal unites all: seeking to ensure that each and every student is provided a quality education, and is imbued with the passion for learning that has sustained the Jewish people through the centuries. Yet, in too many places, this lofty educational mission fails to extend to “non-traditional” learners. For students who might have difficulty accessing information, or developing full comprehension, or demonstrating skills and knowledge through more conventional educational methods, the gates of Jewish education can be shut. The inability of day schools to reach all learners is not for lack of desire to do so, but often results from a lack of know-how among educators in how to structure classrooms or design instruction or provide needed supports in ways that will enable all students to succeed. But this state of affairs need not stand. Day schools can be places where all learners can thrive.

### What is B'Yadenu?

To help day schools in their quest to better serve all students, [Gateways: Access to Jewish Education](#) and Boston's [Combined Jewish Philanthropies](#), with funding from the [Jim Joseph Foundation](#) and the [Ruderman Family Foundation](#), have partnered to pioneer the B'Yadenu project. B'Yadenu—Hebrew for “in our hands”—is a whole-school approach to planning and implementing professional development that seeks to create an effective, sustainable, and adaptable model for opening up Jewish day school education to more students with special learning needs. Focusing on whole-school improvement, B'Yadenu strives to set a new cultural norm in Jewish day schools where all administrators and educators share responsibility to expand access to and engagement with a quality education for a wide range of learners.

Piloted in five Boston-area day schools\*, B'Yadenu has honed a state-of-the-art process to:

- a. Pinpoint areas for improvement and set goals for how an entire school faculty can address them together and, then,
- b. Implement a series of professional development activities that aim to embed research-based strategies across the school, followed by a cycle of measuring impact and refining those strategies.

### Project Implementation

Schools participating in the B'Yadenu project undertake a four-phase process designed to encourage educators to focus on first crafting and then achieving educational goals for reaching all learners. Built upon the principles of the well-tested Logic Model approach to managing organizational change, the project revolves around careful planning to optimize professional development and methodical monitoring to ensure each school meets its identified goals. The B'Yadenu approach also emphasizes collaboration and cultivating teacher leadership.

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To support schools through the process, the B'yadenu partnership has developed a series of tools and resources, alongside a proven expertise in working with educators, that enable school partners to effectively: (a) form a leadership team to drive the change process; (b) assess current strengths and areas for growth in serving non-traditional learners; (c) plan for how to build upon current capacity, and (d) implement whole-school professional development in ways that generate a robust feedback loop to generate sustained improvement in educating learners with diverse needs.

Adhering to this model of whole-school improvement, participants can expect to:

- **Develop a cohesive school-wide approach** to address the learning needs of all students and, in so doing, coordinate and integrate the many initiatives the school may already have in place;
- **Embed new pedagogical strategies** in teachers' daily practice, together with a routine of consistent reflection by teachers on the impact these strategies are having on meeting the diverse learning needs of all students and, in particular, of the least confident learners; and
- **Increase retention of students** with special learning needs and generate higher satisfaction among parents of students with special learning needs.

## The Value of External Support

Though the responsibility for change in practice ultimately rests with the teachers and leaders in each school—this is the meaning of B'Yadenu, after all—throughout the process, Gateways and CJP professionals act as indispensable “guides on the side,” who can provide the objective and seasoned perspective so necessary when endeavoring to generate whole-school improvement.

For one, the B'Yadenu experts offer realistic assessments of each school's current policies, structures and pedagogy—often difficult for practitioners to discern on their own— and honest advice on how schools can undertake to improve. Further, because B'Yadenu advisors have collectively worked in and with dozens of schools, they draw upon a wealth of knowledge about what constitutes best practice, suggesting where and how each school's teaching and learning can improve to align with these proven methods.

In practical terms, B'Yadenu advisors intervene at key points in the process, including:

- At the outset, with the formation of the leadership team and the development of overall project goals;
- In the assessment phase, they offer objective feedback on the strengths and areas for improvement in serving all learners that educators have identified;
- During planning, they advise how to generate the professional development activities that will yield the intended shifts in instruction; and
- As schools implement the cycle of professional development, they assist in setting up the data collection methods needed to gauge the effectiveness of professional development.

## Contact Information

For additional information and to find out how your school or community might participate, contact:

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\* The five pilot schools are: (a) [The Jewish Community Day School](#); (b) [Maimonides School](#); (c) [Striar Hebrew Academy of Sharon](#) (SHAS); (d) [Solomon Schechter Day School of Greater Boston](#); and (e) [Gann Academy](#).