

MAPPING HEBREW EDUCATION IN PUBLIC SCHOOLS: A Resource for Hebrew Educators

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SUMMARY AND BACKGROUND

In the past decade, there has been a resurgence in the study of Hebrew in traditional and charter public schools.¹ However, the types of schools teaching Hebrew and the demographics of students studying Hebrew do not resemble those of earlier iterations of public school Hebrew programs that trace back to the early 20th century. Although the majority of Hebrew programs still disproportionately serve Jewish students, many schools in urban and suburban districts across the country are teaching Hebrew to students from diverse racial, religious, linguistic, and ethnic backgrounds. This project set out to take measure of these programs and provide some baseline information about Hebrew teaching in public schools in 2018 by investigating their demographics, instructional approaches, and language learning objectives.

About This Research

Two questions guided this project:

1. What is the current picture of Hebrew instruction in US public schools regarding enrollment, materials, program structures, and teacher demographics?
2. What are the learning goals of Hebrew language programs? What challenges do schools face in reaching these goals?

To answer these questions, Dr. Sharon Avni of CUNY-BMCC and Dr. Avital Karpman of the University of Maryland, under the sponsorship of the Consortium for Applied Studies in Jewish Education (CASJE), gathered qualitative data during the spring of 2018. The data included semi-structured interviews with 32 Hebrew teachers and/or program administrators.² In total, we identified 35 schools with Hebrew programs. This group included 17 programs serving grades K-8 or 6-8, and 18 programs serving grades 9-12.³ To round out the study, researchers visited six schools to observe Hebrew language classrooms first hand and to conduct follow-up interviews. There was a big discrepancy in levels of access between the two big Hebrew charter networks and the traditional public schools. We had direct access to teachers at the two charter schools unaffiliated with the two large networks. This report synthesizes the findings around four major areas of findings. It is important to note that we did not evaluate the quality of the programs or teachers. Rather, in mapping the field, this report provides information regarding the status, makeup, and vitality of Hebrew programs across the United States.

¹ In this report, the term “public schools” subsumes traditional and charter schools.

² At some schools, interviews were conducted with multiple people (for instance, a teacher, principal and/or head of World Languages). Although a few schools did not respond to full interview requests, we were able to obtain demographic data to include those programs. In addition, several new programs were introduced in 2018. We did not conduct interviews with these new schools, but did include these new programs in the appendix. The principal of one Ben Gamla charter school spoke on behalf of all schools in the network.

³ Although the grade levels served by elementary and middle schools were usually K-8 or 6-8, there was some variation. For example, Sela Charter School in Washington, DC includes several years of preschool, and some charters began with K-2 or K-3 and have added a grade each year. Most high school programs were grades 9-12, but there was some variation. For instance, Ben Gamla Preparatory School serves 7-12.

Key Findings

- The number of students learning Hebrew in American public schools is growing. Most of the growth is in Hebrew charter schools; however, traditional public high school programs also report steady and increasing enrollments. One of the largest impediments to increasing high school enrollments is the lack of Hebrew class options in middle schools.
- Proficiency in Hebrew varies tremendously among students at the high school level. The same class may have students who have little to no ability to decode as well as native speakers who speak and read fluently. This diversity requires teacher to engage in extreme versions of differential teaching.
- High school teachers report that the Hebrew class represents a different type of space than other foreign/world language classrooms. It is a place where Jewish students can be together, and it is perceived as a less stressful and more comfortable subject than other academic courses.
- Finding qualified and (in the case of traditional and some charter schools) state-certified teachers is a major problem. Additionally, in charter schools, finding teachers who are committed to staying in a school long-term is an issue. Veteran teachers, who made up the largest group interviewed in this study, are concerned about being able to retire and/or leaving their programs without a teacher because it would essentially end the program.
- The Hebrew class does more than cover the Hebrew language. Hebrew teachers also teach (mostly in English) about the Holocaust and Israel. While there is no common Israel curriculum, almost all of the teachers reported not covering the geopolitical realities of the Middle East and refraining from discussing politics. Topics usually focus on food, geography, types of communities, cities, and “start-up nation” information.
- Most high school teachers develop their own curriculum. Materials include a combination of teacher-created worksheets and books used in day schools and in *ulpan* programs designed for immigrants in Israel. There is no published material specifically designed for Hebrew teaching in public schools.
- Charter schools report teaching Hebrew for one period and integrating Hebrew throughout other classes, but this integration is not structured or assessed. Middle and high school students at traditional public schools are exposed to Hebrew learning only during the Hebrew period. There are no fully immersive programs in which children are taught in Hebrew in all content areas, nor are there any dual language (two-way immersion) programs in which half the students are Hebrew-only speakers and the other half are English-speaking.

- Some middle and high schools offer Israel and/or Hebrew clubs. These clubs are not always taught by the Hebrew teacher, and the content of these clubs is detached from the Hebrew class curriculum. Jewish students attend after-school programs run by local Jewish Community Centers (JCCs), Chabad, and other Jewish organizations, both on campus and in other locations.
- High school programs use various formative and summative assessment methods. Programs may use the ACTFL (American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages) guidelines, offer classes or tracks in International Baccalaureate (IB) Hebrew, or employ state-run or private proficiency testing programs (for example, Avant STAMP).⁴
- Schools have divergent and overlapping goals for teaching Hebrew. Some goals are ideological and symbolic, such as strengthening a connection to Israel and cultivating students who can become adults who positively represent Israel. Other goals are pragmatic, such as offering students a credential on their high school transcripts, or cultural, such as increasing intercultural competence. Some high school teachers position their programs as a form of Jewish education within the public school setting so that Jewish children can have opportunities to study together. In Hebrew charter schools, teachers recognize that families have chosen to enroll their children to have access to academically rigorous and safer schools. This divergence means that teachers, administrators, and students do not always share the same goals. It also makes it difficult to assess and evaluate the learning outcomes of Hebrew programs.

Background on Hebrew Education

Hebrew instruction in American public schools is not a new phenomenon, but can be traced back to 1917 (Ehrlich, 1997; Oppenheim, 1918). By the first decades of the 20th century, Hebrew education had made inroads in New York City public schools and in a handful of other cities with strong Jewish populations. In 1928, when the movement to encourage Hebrew instruction in US public high schools gained ground, the American Student Zionist Federation was inspired by efforts to introduce Italian into NYC public schools in order to promote ethnic identity and cultural literacy (Weiner, 2010). Around that time, Samuel Benderly, president of the Bureau of Jewish Education (BJE) and a visionary Jewish educational leader, saw Hebrew instruction as the key to socializing Jewish youth into a new American Jewishness (Jacobs, 2009; Krasner, 2012). These initial efforts had some degree of success. Hebrew programs in NYC grew, and by 1941, more than 3,173 students were studying Hebrew in 17 junior and senior high schools throughout NYC (Lapson, 1941).

However, even at its peak in the 1950s, Hebrew study failed to gain widespread popularity because first- and second-generation American Jews did not see the perpetuation of Hebrew as a “necessary or significant building block of ethnic identity” (Krasner, 2009). By mid-

⁴ STAMP stands for STAndards-based Measurement of Proficiency.

century, Hebrew study in American public schools became less of a priority, replaced by growing congregational-based Hebrew school programs and the emerging day school movement, both of which tended to focus on the acquisition of textual Hebrew so that Jewish youth could participate in Jewish liturgy and religious rituals (Pomson & Wertheimer, 2017).⁵ For much of the latter part of the 20th century, the Jewish community largely ignored Hebrew study in public schooling, despite the fact that it never disappeared entirely. However, in the past decades there has been a noticeable re-emergence of Hebrew study in public schools across the United States, a phenomenon whose growth can arguably be attributed to a confluence of sociological and educational conditions.

The first of these conditions was the establishment of charter schools in the United States beginning in 1992. The increasing number of states adopting charter school laws enabled the creation of Hebrew charter schools in the early 2000s. Underwritten with public funds but run independently, charter schools are granted significant autonomy in curriculum (e.g., what they teach) and governance (e.g., how they teach and where they spend their money) with the expectation that they will improve students' academic performance. The first Hebrew charter school, Ben Gamla, was established in 2007 by former congressman Peter Deutsch in Florida. The Ben Gamla network has since expanded to five schools.⁶ In 2009, Jewish philanthropist Michael Steinhardt, along with his daughter Sara Berman, created the Hebrew Charter School Center (now called Hebrew Public) in 2009 with the goal of launching Hebrew language charter schools across the country. Its first elementary school opened in Brooklyn New York in 2009. At the time of publication, the Hebrew Public network was the charter management organization for six schools and affiliated with several others. Several more Hebrew Public-affiliated charter school programs are in development and will open in the near future. In addition to these two Hebrew charter networks, there are two independent Hebrew charter schools.

The second condition that has contributed to the growth of Hebrew programs in traditional American public schools is the increasing demand for ethnic language education and the recent momentum to extend foreign language programs beyond the two most common offerings of Spanish and French to include other ethnic and minority languages. The expansion into other languages can be attributed to several overlapping factors. First, schools recognize that foreign language study is increasingly needed for our highly globalized world and that multilingualism can offer economic and political benefits. Second, there is an increased interest among first- and second-generation Americans in maintaining and developing their heritage languages, which has led to the creation of language programs that teach less commonly offered languages, including Arabic, Korean, Urdu, and Japanese (Leeman, 2015). Third, scholarship showing the cognitive benefits of

⁵ Research shows that Hebrew education remains a ubiquitous and defining component of day school education. See Pomson & Wertheimer, 2017.

⁶ Although there are technically five separate MSIN or school locator numbers, Ben Gamla Charter School and Ben Gamla North Broward are housed in the same building and access the same curriculum, teachers, and programs. For the purposes of this study, we count these as two schools.

multilingualism has percolated into the popular discourse, and as a result, more families are seeking out language-learning enriching experiences (King & Mackey, 2007; Burton, 2018). Together, these trends have contributed to an expansion of language offerings in public schools, along with enrollment gains over the past few decades in less-commonly taught languages overall (Modern Language Association, 2019). These conditions paved the way for the growth of Hebrew study in public schooling.

FINDING 1: MAPPING THE FIELD

This section provides descriptive data based on reported information in our interviews. The tables below show the number of students (Table 1) and teachers (Table 2) participating in public school Hebrew education, as well as selected characteristics of schools (Table 3) and teachers (Table 4).

Table 1. Numbers of Students Learning Hebrew

Student Population	Number of Students
<i>By type of school</i>	
Traditional public	1,384
Charter schools	5,244
<i>By grade</i>	
Grades K-8	4,947
Grades 9-12	1,681
Total students, traditional and charter	6,628

Table 2. Number of Public Schools Teaching Hebrew^a

Type of Public School	Number of Schools
Traditional middle schools	2 ^b
Traditional high schools	15
Charter schools pre-K-8	15
Charter high schools	1 ^c
Magnet schools	2 ^d
Total number of schools^e	35

^a The information in this table is current as of the spring of 2018 and does not include changes, new programs, or programs that have been canceled since that time.

^b This figure includes Beachwood Middle School in OH and Great Neck Middle School in NY. It does not include two middle schools that opened in fall 2019: Caruso Middle School and Shepard Junior High in Deerfield, IL.

^c Ben Gamla Preparatory School serves grades 7-12; it is included in the high school category.

^d The two magnet schools are David Boody Intermediate School and Bellaire High School.

^e This data does not include programs that opened in fall 2019 at Caruso and Shepard in Deerfield, IL.

Table 3. Characteristics of Public Schools Teaching Hebrew

Selected Characteristic	Data
Instruction	
Average class size	18-20 students ^a
Hours of Hebrew instruction per week	4-5 hours
External assessment used^b	
International Baccalaureate	2 schools
State Assessment (i.e. Regents in New York)	3 schools
Avant STAMP (Standards Based Measure of Proficiency)	9 schools
Number of Hebrew teachers in school	
One teacher	17 schools
Two to three teachers	3 schools
Four+ teachers	13 schools
Total number of Hebrew teachers in all reporting schools	127 teachers

^a There was a range of class sizes. The largest class size was in Forest Hills, NY with 35 students in a class. The smallest classes were in Beechwood HS in Ohio (2), Bel Air HS in Texas (6), and St. Louis Park in MN (6).

^b Standardized tests were offered as part of an optional learning track in some high school Hebrew programs

Table 4. Characteristics of Teachers Interviewed^a

Teacher characteristic	Number of teachers
Years of experience teaching Hebrew^b	
0-5 years	6
6-10 years	4
11+ years ^c	16
Academic backgrounds^d	
Bachelor's degree	13 ^f
Master's degree	15 ^g
Other degree	4
Age range^e	
25-30	3
30-50	10
50+	13

Table notes:

^a Data reflects interviews with 32 teachers and administrators. Not all teachers responded to every question.

^b We had limited access to speaking with individual teachers at the two charter networks. The representatives we spoke to described their instructional faculty as comprised of primarily novice Hebrew teachers.

^c These are primarily teachers from high school programs.

^d We had limited access to interviewing teachers at the two charter networks. The numbers in this table more accurately capture high school teachers.

^e These figures primarily represent high school teachers.

^f This figure includes teachers who received teaching certifications in Israel but not bachelor's degrees.

^g Teachers held advanced and master's degrees in a range of subjects, including education, archeology, and rabbinics. In total, from reported data, we identified 2 teachers who had master's degrees in language education/pedagogy. One teacher and curricular director held a PhD. One teacher was currently enrolled in a PhD program.

Briefly, the data in these tables point to some additional observations:

- The most experienced “veteran” teachers are in the high school programs because these programs have been around longer.
- Traditional high schools typically had only one Hebrew teacher at the school.
- The teachers at traditional high schools tended to be older.
- The assessment practices vary widely; teachers at high school programs with students at high levels tended to use external assessment instruments.

Schools taught Hebrew for at least one period every day, or up to 5 hours a week. Some of the charter schools reported conducting additional curricular lessons using some Hebrew and doing cultural programs in English. No schools taught academic content (i.e., math, social studies) solely in Hebrew. There were also no dual language bilingual programs, which we define here as two-way programs that purposefully mix students from two language backgrounds and teach content material in two languages (i.e., Hebrew and English), with the goals of developing bilingualism, biliteracy, and sociocultural competence for both sets of students.⁷

FINDING 2: SUSTAINABILITY AND GROWTH

The number of schools that teach Hebrew has grown over the past decade; however, there are questions regarding the long-term vitality of some of these programs. Future sustainability depends on several factors: 1) student enrollment and retention and 2) teacher recruitment and retention.

Enrollment Factors

The enrollment numbers at schools teaching Hebrew widely vary.⁸ As shown Table 1 in the previous section, there are 6,628 students learning Hebrew in American public schools. However, this absolute number does not reflect enrollment shifts over the past 5 to 10 years. To compare these numbers with previous years, Table 5 indicates the number of schools reporting that enrollment in their Hebrew programs was decreasing, increasing, or staying the same. Most programs reported steady or growing enrollments, but some teachers, especially in the public high school, expressed concerns about the long-term health of their programs.

⁷ The Sela Language Academy in Washington DC has a preschool which was identified as an immersive context.

⁸ See appendix for specific reported enrollments at each school.

Table 5. Schools Reporting Enrollment Trends Over 5-10 Years*

Enrollment Trend	Number of Schools Reporting Trend
Decreasing enrollments	1
Steady enrollments	11
Growing enrollments	19

* Although this report covers 35 school programs, some demographic responses were missing from surveys, so numbers may not always add up to 35.

Given that most students in public school Hebrew programs attend charter elementary schools (see Table 1), it stands to reason that K-8 programs are experiencing the most robust growth in enrollment. There are no traditional public elementary schools teaching Hebrew. Charter school teachers in Los Angeles and New York, which have large Israeli populations, cited the attraction of a free Hebrew education for less observant and/or secular Israeli families who did not want to send their children to a religious day school. Financial considerations were also a factor in parents' decisions to enroll their children in these programs. A teacher at a charter school with two private Jewish day schools in the immediate vicinity acknowledged that when the Jewish parents realized that the charter school taught modern Hebrew and also offered advanced academics and extracurricular programs such as art and music, it was a "no-brainer decision" to enroll their children. Charter teachers referred to the "exorbitant tuition" at day schools as a salient factor in recruiting students to their Hebrew programs. For non-Jewish families, teachers indicated that their choice often reflected a belief that learning modern Hebrew would assist them in reading and praying from the New Testament. Factors that may explain the slower growth of Hebrew programs in traditional public schools compared with charters relate to the local dynamics; public school programs require support from parents and school administrations, as well as certified teachers, a point we discuss further below.

Other teachers attributed the enrollment success in charters to factors unrelated to Hebrew education. These include parents who choose the charter school as a better option than their underfunded or overcrowded local public school. A teacher at a Hebrew Public charter school spoke about the school's attraction to working parents who were looking for aftercare programs. At her school, the option of picking up children at 6:00 pm rather than 4:00 pm was a critical factor for many parents. Teachers also mentioned that their schools had garnered the support of local non-Jewish communal and political leaders, who were actively promoting the schools.

While most of the charter programs have robust enrollments, there were also emerging signs of potential issues regarding student recruitment and retention. Teachers spoke about significant administrative and teacher turnover, which had caused students to leave the

charter schools. One teacher at a traditional public school spoke about receiving many transfer students from one of the charter schools because parents were unhappy with the faculty turnover, behavioral issues, and lack of proven rigorous programs. She also said that some parents' expectations and priorities changed once their children completed elementary school and moved to middle school. Whereas parents of elementary children were interested in the focus on Hebrew learning, middle school parents became more invested in strong math, science, and language arts programs.

High schools faced additional enrollment challenges due to several distinct factors. The first has very little to do with Hebrew and more to do with high school graduation requirements. High school teachers indicated that many of their feeder middle schools do not offer Hebrew instruction. The lack of middle school programs has two significant ramifications. Students who begin taking a foreign language (i.e., Spanish, Mandarin, French) in 7th or 8th grade accrue foreign language credits and continue taking that language at an advanced level in high school. In some states, this advantage means that students will be eligible for an enhanced high school diploma if they continue in that same language in high school. In New York State, for example, students who take a language other than English for one year by 8th grade can complete two additional classes (for a total of three units of study) and be eligible for a Regents diploma with an advanced designation—which many students see as an advantage on their college transcripts. At Beverly Hills High School, taking a foreign language in middle school means that students only need to take one additional year in high school in order to meet the foreign-language graduation requirement. The issue of middle schools “locking in” students who might otherwise be interested in Hebrew was raised at several schools. In some districts, the lock-in occurs even earlier. For example, at one Chicago district that has a high school Hebrew program, the teacher told us that students start taking Spanish in elementary school so that by the time they are in 8th grade they can place into third year Spanish. This sequence lets them take an Advanced Placement (AP) exam in Spanish—another significant credential on a high school transcript.⁹ As a result, changing to Hebrew upon entering high school level is not an attractive option.

A second factor affecting recruitment and retention at the high school level has to do with the varying levels of Hebrew proficiency among the students. Students come to the Hebrew classes in 9th grade with a wide range of Hebrew knowledge based on their previous Hebrew learning experiences, and whether they come from day schools, yeshivas, congregational Hebrew schools, and/or Hebrew-speaking homes or homes in which they have no exposure. For instance, yeshiva, day school, and congregational school students may be able to read sacred texts written in biblical Hebrew with some degree of comprehension but are not able to participate in a conversation in modern Hebrew. Children of Israelis, on the other hand, may be conversationally fluent but have limited reading and writing proficiency. Some

⁹ AP (Advanced Placement) is a program in the United States created by the College Board which offers college-level curricula and examinations to high school students. Students who score high on the AP examination can receive course credit and advanced placement at American colleges and universities, which can allow students to save on college tuition, study abroad, or secure a second major.

students may start with no knowledge of written or spoken Hebrew whatsoever. Teachers talked about the difficulty of accepting new students with no Hebrew background into the Hebrew sequence in high school. As one teacher said “If someone comes in with no previous knowledge then they really cannot partake in this class. There is no way.” The difference in proficiency levels was also mentioned by teachers in elementary charter schools. Students joining a charter school in the later years of elementary school or mid-year and those with learning or other disabilities also need to be placed and integrated into the Hebrew program, and this can pose significant challenges.

While there are always some differences in proficiency levels in foreign/second language classrooms and a need for differential instruction, almost all of the Hebrew high school teachers and some of the charter school teachers mentioned cases in which they were teaching widely varying levels in the same class. Teachers responded to this challenge in creative ways, depending on the scheduling constraints at each school. Programs with larger enrollments divided grades into three to seven language levels (for example, by putting Level I 9th through 12th graders together in the same class). Others taught different levels and mixed ages within the same class. Differentiation was a defining feature of many Hebrew programs. Connected to this issue were other scheduling considerations, including overriding placement results in order for students to learn with their friends and recognizing the gender differential in level placement because former male yeshiva students have received more Hebrew instruction than female students of the same age.

The vast differences in levels also had implications for teachers’ teaching loads and schedules. Because public school teachers are covered by contracts specifically delineating the number of hours and classes they teach, some Hebrew high school teachers had to make difficult decisions about opening up new classes. In the case of a school in the New York metropolitan area, the world language department chair explained that he and the teacher had to choose between allowing more beginners to register for a first-level class and combining beginners with advanced students, or providing a higher-enrollment upper-level class. As the teacher acutely understood, not opening up more classes for beginner students would ultimately shrink the program. To resolve this problem, this teacher had the assistant principal at the school register the advanced level 4 students as level 3 students so that these two levels could be taught together, despite the fact that level 4 had to prep for the graduating exit exam in Hebrew.¹⁰ According to the teacher, accommodating all of these levels was starting to take a toll on her, even leading her to speak to the upper-level students about the option of dropping Hebrew. “I can’t teach like this; It’s just too much for me,” she admitted.

¹⁰ The teacher used the term “Regents” in our interview. However, in June 2011, the NY State Education Department (NYSED) stopped offering Regents Examinations in Hebrew. The Jewish Education Project filled the gap by offering the Hebrew Language Comprehensive Exam (HLCE) in its place. The HLCE satisfied the requirement of competency in a foreign language resulting in credit towards a Regents Diploma with Advanced Standing.

The third reason that high school programs are facing enrollment issues is the “pull factor” and competition from other world languages that students perceive as more important or more beneficial than Hebrew. As language knowledge becomes commoditized as an object of economic value, students are more aware than ever of the instrumental payoff of knowing Mandarin or Spanish or other world languages with a strong global presence. High school students are making decisions not necessarily against taking Hebrew, but more in favor of other languages they perceive will afford them more social and linguistic capital. Nonetheless, high school teachers did speak about the “pull” of Hebrew. According to several interviews, teachers said that students perceived Hebrew classes as attractive because students were seeking to carve out a “Jewish space” in an otherwise non-Jewish high school. Part of that space was the opportunity to be with other Jewish students they knew from camps, synagogues, JCCs, and their neighborhoods. Indeed, one teacher from a high school in the Midwest highlighted parental involvement in these decisions because parents wanted their children to be with other Jews, even if that meant attending an open-enrollment high school in a different area that offered Hebrew.

High school teachers also identified the “low stakes” nature of Hebrew classes as a recruitment factor. Given the increasingly demanding and competitive nature of high school academics, as well as the stress that high school students are under, teachers described the Hebrew class as a “safe space” and a “45-minute respite” for students. Put differently, the Hebrew class was seen as an oasis for overloaded and stressed out students. The following quotes attest to the low-stake, low-stress, and familiar environment that teachers tried to create and capitalize on in order to attract and retain students:

It [the Hebrew class] is a place where they meet their friends and their buddies. The seniors even don't drop it. They stay in because it's a safe and comfortable place. They tell me what's going on in their lives. It's a chatty class. It's not as studious as other classes. There's no AP or no big test, although there is the Seal of Biliteracy.¹¹

I begin telling them, every year, my intention is not to ruin their GPA, but it's to make it as strong as possible. If they do the little work that's required, then they will learn Hebrew and get a good grade . . . I don't mean just the easy A, but by easy, I mean it's not going to be like other languages. There, they have a tremendous amount of work.

When you have one teacher who teaches the whole program . . . there's kind of a reputation for the program being very familial, a family-like environment, comfortable. [At] a high school of 4,100 kids, a lot of parents say, “This is going to

¹¹ California initiated the Seal of Biliteracy in 2011 to recognize students who study and achieve proficiency in two or more languages by graduation. Other states, such as New York, New Jersey, Maryland, and Nevada, have enacted similar legislation. The seal is awarded by the school district, state, or individual school and is based upon course work, assessments, and performance.

be a good thing for you.” I almost want to say, it's not even as much about [Jewish] identity . . . I don't know if the other schools have that same experience, but it's a lot more about the small environment and the comfort level than necessarily anything about their connections to their synagogues, for example.

The other [goal] in general is creating this environment for the kids in a very crazy, busy, intense school—that I'm giving them kind of a place that is more like their family.

These high school teachers recognize that learning Hebrew is measured differently in terms of the classroom context and expectations than learning other world languages that are perceived as high-stakes. Moreover, some teachers recognized their personal roles in creating this perception when they spoke about their own teaching goals. Teachers mentioned that in addition to teaching content (i.e., language and Israel), they were invested in building relationships with the students. Indeed, several teachers admitted taking pride in the fact that they recruited and retained students because of their reputations as nice and fun teachers, and even sought out ways to create an intra-family buzz so that one family member would spread the word to other siblings and cousins at the same school. Teachers were referred to by students, and by themselves, as “local legends” and as people who had “developed a following over the years.” One teacher attributed the strength of the Hebrew program at his school to the trust that families had in him because he had grown up in the area and to the high degree of comfort that families had with him. He also stressed that his personal linguistic and cultural background as the child of Israelis helped him to gain favor with the Israeli families at the school, explaining that he was “American enough for the kids, but Israeli enough for the Israelis because my Hebrew's very good.”

Overall, teachers were acutely aware of their need and responsibility to promote their classes and attract and keep students enrolled. Interviews revealed how teachers went “over and above” to retain students and provide classes, including working more than the hours required under their contracts, having up to 40-45 students in a class, bringing snacks at the end of the year to get students to come back, and making latkes during the Hanukkah holiday. Some high school teachers were also aware of the benefits of utilizing Jewish community leaders, local synagogue outreach efforts, and Jewish institutional policy makers to publicize the programs. In one case, a local Federation propped up a program and paid the difference for a teacher who did not have enough hours for a full course load. Additionally, Chicago-area teachers noted their deep appreciation for the iCenter¹² and The Jewish United Fund of Metropolitan Chicago for helping them build and expand their Hebrew offerings and to provide professional development.

¹² The iCenter (<https://www.theicenter.org/>) is a nonprofit organization based in Chicago that provides learning opportunities and tools for Jewish education professionals to enhance Israel education.

Teacher Recruitment and Retention

Finding qualified teachers was a major challenge in all programs. In fact, several teachers nearing or at retirement age (the majority of participants of this study) expressed a need to continue working because their school has been unable to find a teacher to replace them and sustain the program. Teachers are aware that once a program loses its Hebrew instructor (such as the schools in Fairfax, CA) it is nearly impossible to rehire staff and restart the program. Teachers spoke about beginning the school year with their program understaffed and taking on an overload of courses. In Closter, NJ, a new Hebrew program at a traditional high school did not open in 2018 because the school could not find a qualified teacher, despite strong demand among the Israeli families in that district.

Geography was a major hindrance to finding eligible Hebrew teachers. Principals in cities such as Minneapolis and San Diego lamented the small populations of Israelis or near-native Hebrew speakers in their towns compared to major hubs like New York and Los Angeles. Prospective teachers living outside of large Jewish centers often consisted of females residing in the area temporarily, completing post-doctoral work and/or accompanying their spouses who were working at companies in the US.

Overall, the greatest challenge in finding teachers had to do with state certification, although not all states require that teachers in charter schools be certified.¹³ This variation has direct implications for recruiting and training Hebrew teachers. Traditional public schools require certified teachers, and certification is a multi-step, time-consuming, and expensive process, different in each state. Even if an individual agrees to undertake this process, finding a program offering certification is difficult, and prospective Hebrew teachers have little help navigating the process. Several teachers reported working around certification requirements in schools by having more than one teacher in a room. In two cases, a certified teacher was the “teacher of record”—meaning that the certified teacher’s name was listed officially—and was present in the classroom to take attendance and deal with other administrative issues, but a different teacher actually taught the class. In addition, in Illinois, for example, schools have taken advantage of another route to certification for those who are qualified in the language, that of bilingual transitional educator, which allows an in-service teacher up to five years to make up deficits for certification. Teachers at traditional public schools noted a high degree of satisfaction with the perks of being a state employee, including health insurance coverage and benefits, tenure, competitive salaries, and state pensions.

There have been some significant steps to address the teacher shortage. Since 2014, Middlebury Language School in Vermont has provided a highly subsidized program for master’s and doctoral students in Hebrew education; however, this program does not provide state certification. To increase the pool of Hebrew teachers, Hebrew Public and the

¹³ Texas state law does not require charter school teachers and principals to be certified, except in the case of teachers assigned to teach in special education or bilingual programs, for whom the appropriate state certification is required. Each state has different certification requirements for charter schools.

World Zionist Organization Department of Education have recently initiated the Arbel Fellowship, a recruitment program that facilitates bringing Hebrew teachers from Israel to teach at Hebrew Public charter schools.¹⁴ However, as several teachers and administrators reported, newly arrived Israeli teachers face the challenges involved in relocating to a new country and acclimating to the norms of American educational systems, compounded by challenges of working with low-income, disadvantaged students or children with special needs. One principal at a Hebrew Public charter school directly addressed the complexity of the challenges faced by Arbel Fellows and other Israel-recruited Hebrew teachers:

People think, you know, I'll be fine. Even if they've been in the States before, I think the trauma of just moving over a summer and beginning to work right away in a very high intensity setting . . . is also part of the issue. When you're brand new and you don't know people and you don't know the place and simple things become a big deal because you don't speak the language perfectly, or getting a social security number, getting a driver's license, getting all those things that you need to set up. Signing a lease and you don't know what the lease says. You know, your kid's starting a new school in a new country or your kid's not adjusting as well as you thought they would...I think all of that comes into play.

Because of the temporary nature of their employment and the fact that they will be returning to Israel within a few years, recruited Israeli teachers are not motivated to pursue certification or interested in working at traditional public schools. In addition, teachers related that the temporary element of the Arbel program meant that schools relying on these teachers were in a perpetual state of flux. Teachers described difficulty engaging in longer-term professional development, cultivating professional relationships with the other content teachers, building program assessments, and developing and revising curricula because of high turnover and last-minute hiring.

In general, Hebrew teachers fell into two general categories: “veteran” teachers who had lived in the U.S. for at least a decade, and “novice” teachers who recently moved from Israel (five years ago, or less). One California principal summarized the difficult hiring challenges and differences in teaching and pedagogical practices between American-trained and Israeli-trained educators:

I'm leaving aside the language component, or the cultural differences, and doing this big move, and leaving your family behind. I'm more talking about . . . the field of teaching in Israel, comparing to the US; it's very, very different. Things like classroom management, differentiation, lesson planning, observation—I found out

¹⁴ In addition to offering employment at one of the Hebrew Public network schools, the Arbel Fellowship (<https://hebrewpublic.org/arbel-fellowship/>) helps teachers and their partners get a visa, find an apartment, and become acclimated to the United States. It covers the cost of the teacher's initial flight to the US and his/her return trip to Israel upon conclusion of the fellowship. It also covers professional development opportunities at Middlebury College and guarantees a teaching job in Israel upon return.

they did not exist in Israel. So, either way, you bring a qualified Hebrew teacher from Israel or a native speaker from the States, it's very challenging.

One potentially untapped resource that some veteran teachers mentioned was to cultivate as future teachers the children of Israelis who have grown up in the US. School administrators at two schools (a traditional public high school and a charter school) noted that their most successful hires came from this group because their bilingualism and biculturalism allowed them to transition more smoothly into the role and their ties to the local communities improved retention rates.

FINDING 3: CURRICULAR GOALS AND SCHOOL ACTIVITIES

Several elements comprise the content of students' Hebrew language learning experiences. Program affiliations or lack thereof show whether the school is siloed or part of a network. The context in which the school operates affects what goes on inside and outside the classroom and the school's learning goals, including its language policy, approach to Jewish and Israel education, classroom curriculum and assessment tracks, and presence of extracurricular programs.

Siloed vs. Networked

Most of the Hebrew programs, except those in the two Hebrew charter networks, operate in a siloed fashion, meaning they have little to no interaction with other Hebrew programs and/or other Hebrew teachers at other schools. They do not feel part of a broader professional Hebrew teaching community and do not attend professional development with other Hebrew teachers outside of their school. At the same time, some teachers saw themselves as separated not only from other schools, but even within their own schools; they reported existing "under the radar," meaning they did not receive a lot of attention in their schools compared to other language programs. Unlike other teachers of commonly taught world languages, which have national networks for teachers to join and copious amounts of online lesson plans and resources, Hebrew high school teachers emphasized that they were often the only Hebrew teacher in the school or district and that they mostly worked on their own, with little direct oversight in constructing their curriculum or building assessment tools. Of the high school teachers we spoke to, almost all said they had designed their curriculum alone and with little collaboration with others. This independence included looking for Hebrew language books that were appropriate for American public schools (and not religious in nature), as well as creating lesson plans and building assessments. The "under the radar" element gave teachers a tremendous amount of independence and flexibility regarding curricular content, but also led to feelings of isolation and, in some cases, concerns about the future of the program if they decided to leave or retire. All of the teachers appeared interested in opportunities to interact and collaborate with other teachers at other schools and would welcome the opportunity to meet face-to-face or virtually and have access to resources for K-12 teaching.

Language Policy: Use of English and Hebrew in the Class

Most schools had a stated language allocation policy about how much Hebrew or English should be used in classrooms. Many teachers referred to the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) goal of 90% immersion in the target language (i.e., Hebrew) or said that they attempted to use as much Hebrew as possible. In spite of goals of immersion, realities in the classroom necessitated the use of English. For example, preschool and lower-level elementary educators noted that they used English in cases of physical safety or emotional comforting. In addition, English was used more in lower proficiency level classes. In charter schools that sought to integrate some Hebrew into content areas, teachers reported that the primary language was English and that there was no specific Hebrew language curriculum in content areas. Although teachers would not describe their classrooms as immersive learning contexts, many nevertheless said that they strove to use as much Hebrew as possible when they were confident that the subject matter was comprehensible enough to allow them to do so. Discussions of the Holocaust or Jewish history were conducted in English.

One high school teacher linked her use of English in the classroom to her concern about enrollment decreases:

I don't want to lose any students . . . If students don't understand, I go and speak to them in English because they have to feel comfortable and want to come back because if not, they drop [the course].

Jewish and Israel Education

One way in which Hebrew differed from other world languages was the need to directly address, or at least be aware of, the separation of church and state. Teachers emphatically stated that they did not promote Judaism or cross the line between teaching about and proselytizing about Judaism. For most of the high school teachers, teaching about Judaism and Israel was not focused on promoting Judaism, but fit squarely into teaching about world cultures and religions, a component of almost all states' world language standards and curriculums. As one high school teacher said, "It's not forbidden to talk about it [Judaism]. We don't pray. We don't bless, but we talk about it, of course, because it's world knowledge, and it's part of religion." Often this separation meant navigating the use of religious elements in some of the textbooks used in classes. One teacher who uses TaL AM¹⁵ material in her class explained that she would pass over certain sections or readings if they were too religious in

¹⁵ TaL AM is a Hebrew curriculum designed to teach Jewish students in Grades 1 to 5. According to the TaL AM website, "The students' Hebrew and heritage literacy develops in a gradual and spiraled process, building new ideas and concepts on an expanding foundation of knowledge. The program helps foster Jewish identity by allowing children to explore their Jewish roots and traditions in fun and exciting ways. By making the study of Hebrew and Judaism relevant to the children's everyday lives, the program enables them to develop a true appreciation of their heritage, and understand the need for continued, lifelong Jewish study." <http://talam-italam.org/about-us/about-tal-am/?show=a1>

nature, telling her students that this material was meant for Jewish day school students and not for her classes. Another teacher using the textbook *Ivrit Min Hahatchala*,¹⁶ which includes Biblical and Modern Hebrew, explicitly exposed her students to the differences in these linguistic varieties and used examples as jumping-off points to discuss culture among Hebrew speakers, including different denominations in Judaism and different levels of religious observance.

Almost none of the teachers taught specifically about Israeli politics or the current geopolitical situation between Israelis and Palestinians. Only one teacher in an established program in the Northeast reported directly addressing this topic, and even brought parents and other community members into the classroom to discuss their opinions. Rather than addressing the centrality of the political situation in the lived experiences of Israelis, almost all of the teachers addressed Israel in a cultural framework and Judaism as a world religion. Though the line between state and religion was not overtly crossed, it was at times a difficult boundary to maintain, especially in cases in which Israel and Jewish nationalism were directly connected. For instance, one charter teacher spoke about teaching Israel in the following way:

So, I do Judaism, of course, and I also tell them the Israeli culture is Judaism. Today we talked about weddings [in the chapter] . . . and I told them that weddings in Israel you only can marry in your faith. There is no way to marry in Israel, Christian and Jew, Jew and Muslim. They have to go outside of the country . . . No one will officiate at your wedding.

Other common topics included learning about Israel through a focus on its geography, food, holidays, movies, famous celebrities, different types of communities in the country (e.g., kibbutz, moshav), and Israeli innovation in science and technology (e.g., Startup nation).

Classroom Curriculum and Assessment Tracks

Many programs operated independently and in isolation from other world languages programs. Guidelines varied in their levels of detail and expected outcomes: some classrooms used curricular goals from the textbook and other programs received flexible weekly or monthly goals and teaching suggestions. Others taught specifically toward a formal state or international assessment. For traditional public schools, most of the high school teachers used texts and activities from a variety of books like *Ivrit Min Hahatchala*, *Yesodot Halashon*, *Darkon L'Ivrit*, *Ivrit Shitatit*, and *Ivrit Latichon*. They found articles on Israeli news websites like *Ynet* and *Ha'aretz*, wrote their own original texts, or modified advanced texts to simplify them.

¹⁶ See the list of textbooks in Appendix B for publication information.

Some programs that offered an International Baccalaureate track used suggested literary texts provided by the governing office in addition to their selected texts. They prepared their advanced students to take the standardized IB assessment that included literary comprehension and written analysis. Some high school programs not part of IB participated in the Avant STAMP test or in state testing. These tracks require students to complete a number of years of Hebrew, and this completion is indicated on student transcripts much like an Advanced Placement (AP) course. Because there is no AP Hebrew option, the IB, STAMP or state tests serves as the only way to acknowledge students' Hebrew achievements on high school transcripts or college applications. In addition, some programs offered membership in Hebrew Honor Societies or the Seal of Biliteracy as another way to elevate the prestige of Hebrew study. Inclusion of these rigorous and intensive tracks sometimes resulted in difficult programmatic decisions. As mentioned above, a New York-area teacher explained that she was forced to choose between offering lower levels or higher-proficiency classes that taught toward the final exam because of a maximum teaching load of five classes. Cutting lower-level classes would shrink the Hebrew program but sacrificing upper-level classes would end advanced testing eligibility.

Charter school teachers at Hebrew Public and Ben Gamla programs received guidance and supervision from a director of curriculum development. Although teachers ran their classrooms independently and often created original activities and materials, weekly topic outlines and themes were provided to them. Teachers modified the topics based on the linguistic proficiency level of the class.

Extracurricular Learning Opportunities

In addition to the Hebrew classes, schools also had a range of after-school clubs and classes, diverse in their content, frequency, participants, and goals. Several schools used after-school hours to engage in Jewish content that could not be addressed during school due to the religious subject matter. In Texas, Eleanor Kolitz Hebrew Academy had a Judaic studies after-school program that met three to four times per week and was run by the nearby JCC. Similarly, other schools hosted rabbis or instructors from NCSY¹⁷ or other communal organization staff to run after-school Jewish clubs. The Hebrew teacher was often, but not always, the club leader. Other clubs focused on Israeli culture and provided Jewish and non-Jewish students an opportunity to discuss Israeli current events, politics, sports, and advocacy. In addition to clubs, some programs partnered with schools in Israel and even ran exchanges or trips to Israel.¹⁸ Some teachers mentioned the desire to have a trip to Israel but cited the unwillingness of the school board or administrators to allow a trip because of safety concerns, State Department advisories, insurance liability, and financial constraints.

¹⁷ NCSY (formerly known as the National Conference of Synagogue Youth) is an Orthodox Jewish youth group under the auspices of the Orthodox Union.

¹⁸ For example, North Niles High School has an exchange program with Karmiel Israel.

Honors societies, mentioned in a previous section, not only offered recognition to students who received high marks in Hebrew over several semesters, but they also provided enrichment and additional hours of language exposure. Students in these societies organized holiday events, such as a *Yom Hashoah* (Holocaust) commemoration, and at a Chicago high school received pins or awards for their achievements.

FINDING 4: TEACHERS' GOALS

The interviews revealed a range of teachers' goals and expectations. Some of these reflected goals of foreign/second language teaching in general. For example, a small handful of teachers spoke generically about the importance of learning about a new culture and learning a foreign language for the sake of better understanding English, as well as expanding one's ability to think in and use another language. For one teacher, teaching a foreign/second language was a means of teaching tolerance and helping students "learn that there is more than English, and more than the American culture." The world language department chairs we interviewed who were not Hebrew teachers tended to espouse goals that were less specifically about Hebrew and more about the benefits of learning a language in general. One department chair explained the goals for language students in this way:

[For] all of my students in any language, I'm hoping that you can use this and apply this in your real life at some point. I'm also hoping that you're able to study this in college, maintain your language, travel, be able to interact with others in a natural way with your language, but then also just being able to grow as a person and to have a more dynamic world view from having studied these languages, Hebrew included. All the languages that we offer include having a more global perspective and being able to bring an educated viewpoint about other parts of the world to people who may be prejudiced or to people who may be closed off to other parts of the world. I think that that's very important in this particular modern climate.

However, most of the responses by teachers to questions about motivation and goals reflected a commitment to teach Hebrew as a way of teaching about Israel. For one teacher at a Hebrew Public charter school, teaching Hebrew was a way to educate about Israel to non-Jewish parents with little knowledge about the country. In her words:

It's so nice to see the parents come to me and say, "I didn't know that, I didn't know where's Israel. I didn't know that the language is so beautiful." So, for me it's kind of a—you can call it a mission.

Another teacher spoke about teaching Hebrew as a way for students to learn about Israel, so they could build a personal connection to something related to Israel that may or may not be related to Hebrew.

[M]y goal is that they walk away [with] that feeling they had a meaningful experience in Hebrew, whether that means they want to move to Israel, or whether that means they never want to speak a word of Hebrew again for the rest of their lives. But they figured out, "Oh my gosh, I love shawarma, or I love shakshuka or something." That's my goal, that they feel like they have a meaningful experience.

It is important to note that the ways in which Hebrew teachers framed their work as a "mission" is less common among teachers of other foreign/world languages, as one high school world language director noted, and is more akin to how Hebrew teachers at day schools and congregational schools speak about the importance of Hebrew in building and sustaining Jewish identity. Israel advocacy was a common theme we heard from many of the novice Israeli teachers, who saw themselves as distinctly separate from American Jewry and representing Israel. As one noted, American Jews could never be "full" members of Israeli society because they do not live there, but Hebrew represented a way of building some attachment. In her words: "If there is anything that you can be part of Israel besides giving your money . . . it's the language." Other teachers spoke about the importance of Hebrew programs in enabling students to take on roles of future Israeli ambassadors to "protect us and to protect the state."

Teachers also spoke about the importance of teaching Hebrew for pragmatic communication reasons. That is to say, teachers wanted students to "actually" know Hebrew and feel a high degree of ease when using the language with other Hebrew speakers. They wanted their students to feel "at home" in Israel when visiting. One Israeli charter school teacher described her objectives in teaching Hebrew in this way:

They'll be able to either go to Israel and be able to converse and be able to go do whatever sightseeing, do whatever they want to do in Israel, but do it on their own, independent. Or if they had someone coming to visit from Israel, they'd be able to have a full-on conversation with them, be able to share about themselves and learn about the person in front of them, conversing in the Hebrew language.

Teachers also hoped that students would continue to see learning Hebrew as a lifelong goal that continued beyond high school. In other words, some high school teachers defined their goals as inspiring students to study Hebrew in postsecondary education and even hoped that their students would be able to place out of introductory levels of college Hebrew. Other teachers pointed to the hope that their students would be interested in taking an *ulpan* in Israel. The continued interest, they believed, would lead to "strong Jewish citizenship"; that is, becoming leaders in the American Jewish community. As one teacher recounted, her former students had organized Hebrew clubs, Israel clubs, and felt motivated to join Hillel or other campus Jewish organizations on college campuses. However, the goals of inspiring future studies did not just pertain to Jewish students. One Chicago high school teacher reported that as a result of taking her class, a Syrian non-Jewish student had changed her college major and decided to major in Middle Eastern studies.

Other teachers spoke about their desire to influence how students felt about being Jewish and about the American Jewish community more generally. In the tongue-in-cheek words of one educator, "My hope is that they remember I was a nice rabbi who taught them some Hebrew and that being a Jew is not that bad." On a more serious note, this educator described how one non-Jewish student had discovered that she had some Jewish ancestors and became interested in learning more about being Jewish. A different teacher recounted a particularly moving story of one of her students from a non-affiliated and non-observant Jewish family who told her upon graduation that "because of you, I'm more interested in Judaism" and that he was going to keep kosher and become more religiously observant.

Finally, it is important to recognize that not all of the schools had cohesive goals for teaching Hebrew. One teacher at a Hebrew Public charter school noted a lack of collective reflexivity regarding the purpose of teaching Hebrew and what they hoped to achieve. While individual teachers had their own motivations, high faculty turnover did not lend itself to these more philosophical questions, she explained:

With the teachers, we haven't actually had conversations about what is their motivation for coming to teach in our school in terms of what they want to achieve for the kids. This is another question, but none of the teachers have been here long enough to develop a future or horizon of what they actually want to achieve with their work.

CONCLUSION

This report provides a baseline picture of the growth of and demand for Hebrew language programming in public schools across the United States. There are programs all over the country, and their diversity uniquely represents the needs and characteristics of local geographic populations. Despite the differences, many of the teachers aim to teach the same content and concepts and face many of the same pressing problems.

The first key question of the study aimed to map and describe existing programs. The programs are run by both veteran and highly-trained expert educators as well as teachers just at the beginning of their teaching careers. Their ages, first languages, exposure to education training, and materials vary. Some are situated within world language departments or in larger networks. Students in these programs come from diverse racial, religious, and socioeconomic backgrounds. However, among these vastly different learning situations the challenges were remarkably similar. These included difficulties in finding, training and retaining teachers; creating a curriculum suitable to the student population; and defining student learning outcomes and goals. The second key question addressed programs' learning goals. Although programs held a general consensus about the need for teaching about Israeli culture and holidays, the linguistic and symbolic learning goals were often

undefined. Based on what teachers reported, students, teachers, and administrators were often not on the same page when it came to their reasons for supporting Hebrew learning.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. **Building a pipeline.** One of the best ways to guarantee that students consider taking Hebrew in high schools is to offer Hebrew in middle schools. If students start a different world language in middle school, it is more difficult to recruit them to Hebrew in 9th grade because they are already on a language track, and they can place into advanced levels in high school. Starting instruction in middle school also offers the advantage of being able to cover more Hebrew content, as teachers will have an additional year or two to teach the language. Finally, offering Hebrew at the middle school level provides an option for students who graduate from Hebrew charter elementary schools to continue with their Hebrew studies. It also offers an opportunity for Jewish students who are considering leaving elementary day schools for public middle schools.
2. **Identifying new sources of teachers.** To date, there have been two main sources of Hebrew teachers in public schools: Israelis who have chosen to live in the United States and turn to Hebrew teaching as a career option, and Israelis living in the US on a temporary basis who have plans to return to Israel after several years. In both cases, there is an element of convenience involved and not as much intention. There is a third option to consider: children of Israeli-Americans who have grown up and been educated in the US. These second-generation American Israelis have Hebrew proficiency and also know the norms and culture of the American classroom. This hybrid background represents for many the ideal conditions that schools are looking for in their language teachers. It would be beneficial to think of ways to identify, recruit, and incentivize Israeli-American youth interested in going into the field of education to consider a career in Hebrew teaching.
3. **Offering college credit.** Currently Advanced Placement (AP) Hebrew is not offered. Having an AP Hebrew option could recruit more students. Additionally, students with AP Hebrew credit can be prospective recruits for advanced Hebrew classes at colleges and universities. We spoke to Judith Morag, Language Group Director of ETS,¹⁹ and learned that years ago when the subject of AP Hebrew came up, there was not enough demand from schools or students to warrant the College Board creating a new course track. With the growth of Hebrew study in public schools, it is worthwhile to revisit this topic and investigate what it would require to develop an AP course and give students college credit for Hebrew. At the same time, it might be beneficial to look into how colleges with a Hebrew program link up with high schoolers learning Hebrew. The University of Minnesota's "College in the Schools" program, for example,

¹⁹ ETS provides assessments, research and related services for educational institutions around the world.

trains public high school teachers to teach university-accredited Hebrew courses at their schools.

4. ***Sharing resources.*** Our research shows that Hebrew teachers in many schools are working on their own to build curriculum, develop lesson plans, and write classroom material. Each teacher is essentially recreating the wheel. There is an urgent need for a central database or online platform where Hebrew teachers can share their ideas and interact with one another. Our interviews revealed that teachers are very interested in this and want to feel part of a broader Hebrew professional teaching community. This need is especially acute for newer teachers who are struggling to figure out what to teach, particularly in school districts in which they are the only Hebrew teacher and do not have others to consult with about curriculum, assessment tools, and materials. A repository would also serve as an archive for veteran teachers when they leave the field or retire; it would enable them to pass down and make their ideas and resources accessible to the next generation of teachers. One possibility for networking might be through the National Association of Hebrew Educators and Teachers or through the Council for Hebrew Language and Culture in North America. Such a platform could also serve as a site for discussions or interactions.
5. ***Encouraging certification.*** One of the central problems we identified is that Hebrew instructors who lack certification credentials cannot be employed in a traditional public school, and in some charter schools depending on the state. Hebrew teachers in day schools or supplemental schooling cannot make the jump to public schools without certification and cannot take advantage of the social and financial benefits that working in public schooling offers. However, certification requirements are complicated and each state is different; for anyone who has tried independently to get certified in a given state, it is clear that the process is daunting, expensive, time-consuming, and confusing. Two steps are needed to certify more people to teach Hebrew. The first is to help prospective teachers navigate the procedural and logistical aspects of getting certified. This would include helping prospective teachers learn what the process is and which schools provide certification and connecting them with certification programs. This latter step might require working with universities with established schools of education to develop online certification programs for Hebrew teaching. Prospective teachers need convenient and accessible programs that are inexpensive and close to their homes, if they are not online. The second step is to incentivize Hebrew teachers to get certified. If there is an interest in growing the number of Hebrew programs at American public schools, it must come with the financial support to ensure that it can be achieved. Although certification may seem like just a procedural step and an unnecessary hoop to jump through, state certification is also the primary means by which states ensure there is a qualified teacher in the classroom with the requisite pedagogical knowledge to be successful in the short and long term. Having underprepared and inexperienced Hebrew teachers is not good for the students or the programs, and often leads to a less-than-ideal

learning experience and higher rates of teacher turnover. Even for charter schools that do not require certification, it is desirable to have teachers who have undergone professional training in second language acquisition. Finally, professional development should not end with certification. Novice Hebrew teachers need ongoing inservice professional development that includes participating in apprenticeships, working with mentors and expert teachers, and receiving ongoing support as they build their capacity to be successful Hebrew educators for the long term.

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APPENDIX A – PARTICIPATING SCHOOLS

The table below includes a comprehensive list of the schools that participated in this study.

School	Location	# of Students in 2017-18	Type of School	Grades	# of Hebrew teachers
Adlai Stevenson High School	Lincolnshire, IL	40	Traditional	9-12	1
Agamimr Classical Academy	Hopkins, MN	260	Charter	K-8	3
Beachwood High School	Beachwood, OH	45	Traditional	9-12	1
Beachwood Middle School	Beachwood, OH	17 ²⁰	Traditional	6-8	1
Bellaire High School	Bellaire, TX	50	Traditional (magnet)	9-12	1
Ben Gamla Charter School	Hollywood, FL	660	Charter	K-6	4
Ben Gamla Charter School (Kendall)	Miami, FL	249	Charter	K-8	1
Ben Gamla Charter School (Palm Beach)	Boynton Beach, FL	291	Charter	K-5	1
Ben Gamla Charter School South (Plantation)	Plantation, FL	426	Charter	K-6	1
Ben Gamla Preparatory Academy	Hollywood, FL	450	Charter	7-12	2
Beverly Hills High School	Beverly Hills, CA	95	Traditional	9-12	1
Carmel High School	Carmel, IN	60	Traditional	9-12	1
Caruso Middle School	Deerfield, IL	10	Traditional	6-8	1
David A. Boody (IS228) Junior High School	Brooklyn, NY	36	Traditional (magnet)	6-8	1
Eleanor Kolitz Hebrew Language Academy	San Antonio, TX	325	Charter	K-8	6
Evanston High School	Evanston, IL	17	Traditional Online only	9-12	1
Forest Hills High School	Queens, NY	168	Traditional	9-12	1

²⁰ All 98 6th grade students must take a 6-week rotation of each foreign language, including Hebrew. Then in 7th and 8th grade, they choose one language to study (a total of 17 students in 2017-18).

School	Location	# of Students in 2017-18	Type of School	Grades	# of Hebrew teachers
Glenbrook North High School	Northbrook, IL	122	Traditional	9-12	2
Great Neck High School	Great Neck, NY	190	Traditional	9-12	1 full-time 1 part-time
Great Neck Middle School	Great Neck, NY	100	Traditional	6-8	2
Harlem Hebrew Language Academy Charter School	Harlem, NY	400	Charter	K-5	16
Hatikvah International Academy Charter School	East Brunswick, NJ	437	Charter	K-8	16
Hebrew Language Academy 1	Brooklyn, NY	700	Charter	K-8	17
Hebrew Language Academy 2	Brooklyn, NY	162	Charter	K-5	6
Highland Park High School	Highland Park, IL	110	Traditional	9-12	1
Kavod Charter School	San Diego, CA	180	Charter	K-8	16
Lashon Academy Charter School	Van Nuys, CA	444	Charter	K-6	5
Lone Star Language Academy	Plano, TX	~30	Charter	K-3	1
New Trier High School	Winnetka, IL	80	Traditional	9-12	1
Nicolet High School	Glendale, WI	40	Traditional	9-12	1
Niles North High School	Skokie, IL	75	Traditional	9-12	1
North Central High School	Indianapolis, IN	80	Traditional	9-12	1
Oceanside High School	Oceanside, NY	29	Traditional	10-12	1
Sela Public Charter School	Washington DC	230	Charter	PreK-5	8
Shepard Middle School	Deerfield, IL	8	Traditional	6-8	8
St. Louis Park High School	St. Louis Park, MN	30	Traditional	9-12	1

APPENDIX B – TEXTBOOKS REFERENCED IN TEACHER INTERVIEWS

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