

The Case for CASJE

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This is the story of an education school dean and a district superintendent who have had a longstanding conversation about the virtues of applying education research to the improvement of practice, an idea they both have worked on for more decades than they care to admit. When an invitation to join the advisory board of the Consortium for Applied Studies in Jewish Education (CASJE) came our way, we jumped at the opportunity. Why — you might ask?

The Consortium for Applied Studies in Jewish Education (CASJE) is a remarkable venture set in motion by lead funding from the Jim Joseph, AVI CHAI, and Mandell and Madeleine Berman Foundations. It is managed by Rosov Consulting, and its advisory board is chaired by Lee Shulman, Professor Emeritus at Stanford and former President of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching. Its goal is to enrich and expand the evidence base to guide the improvement of practice and investment of resources in Jewish education. CASJE's basic proposition is that rigorous interdisciplinary research (hence the idea of "consortium") can generate useful knowledge for the field. "Applied" study means research that is rooted in theory and evidence, oriented to practical problem solving, and fueled by early and sustained engagement between researchers and potential users of research.

Why is CASJE so special to us? For the dean (Feuer), CASJE is a bridge connecting two of his passions: applied social science research for education and the advancement of Jewish life and learning. For the school chief (Goren), CASJE reconnects him to his Jewish roots and gives him a new opportunity to think about the two-way relationship of research and practice.

Feuer comes to the project with 30+ years of experience at the busy and somewhat hazardous intersection of social science

research and education policy. At the National Academy of Sciences he led efforts to bring high quality scientific research to bear on daunting policy challenges in education: testing, standards, access, instruction, governance, and finance, to name a few. In his role at the National Academy of Education he continues this work. Feuer has a long and deep involvement with the Jewish community: he has lived and studied in Israel, led the Washington branch of the American Jewish Congress, served on the board of Temple Micah, and was a senior scientist at the Jewish People Policy Planning Institute. His two children lived and studied in Israel too. During his years at the NAS and now even more so in his capacity as Dean at GW, Feuer has established strong ties with the Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities, the Western Galilee College, the Interdisciplinary Center, and the Mandel School of Educational Leadership. One of his recent ventures is a new Masters degree program at GW. Supported by a generous grant from the Jim Joseph Foundation, the program prepares students for careers in museums, Jewish community organizations, camps, and other organizations where Jewish learning is less a matter of content delivery and more a matter of *experience*.

Goren has spent over 30 years at that same hazardous intersection of education research, policy and practice, curious

about how evidence can inform and improve practice and even more curious about why research does not do so more often. A former middle school teacher, he has worked and led research, evaluation and accountability offices for the San Diego City Schools, the Minneapolis Public Schools and the Chicago Public Schools. After three years leading child and youth development at the MacArthur Foundation, he served as Senior Vice President at the Spencer Foundation leading efforts to link research to practice and to understand how educators make sense of the data and information available to them. Goren knew Shulman as a professor while earning his doctorate, and as a member of the Spencer Board, Goren remembered the call he received from Lee (“an offer I could not refuse”) when Goren led the Consortium on Chicago School Research. That Consortium has spent over 20 years examining and analyzing the Chicago Public Schools in collaboration with district partners – in the service of helping teachers, administrators and decision makers improve their practice. Goren currently serves as Superintendent of the Evanston/Skokie (IL) elementary school district where he needs, on a daily basis, useful, useable and rigorous information to inform and improve practice.

Applying his experience to an emerging venture focused on the improvement of practice in Jewish education was, as he told his friend Michael, too delicious an opportunity to turn down. Goren had just celebrated his youngest son’s bar mitzvah and during that process for all three of his kids he had found a renewed connection to Jewish education, how traditions continue across the generations, and how the development of Jewish identity occurs for young teens. This journey continues this fall as his eldest started her college career at Brandeis. To be able to apply his knowledge and experience from the worlds of practice, policy and research and to engage with colleagues to develop a new model that can make a difference in the lives of Jewish children and Jewish institutions means a great deal professionally and personally.

We assume that our invitation to join the CASJE board is based on the hope that our prior and ongoing experiences will contribute to the implementation of CASJE’s complex goals. But it’s a two-way relationship, and we are grateful for a healthy “balance of trade:” contemplating the definition of *leadership* as it pertains to Jewish day schools, for example, and helping craft a set of research questions and metrics to guide improvement, provides a new lens through which to examine problems in our rather more secular settings. Similarly, thinking about Hebrew language instruction or about Jewish camping has both obvious and subtle implications for some of the toughest questions facing education policy, practice, and reform generally.

We are honored to be part of this venture, and humbled to work with our brilliant colleagues. We welcome the opportunity

to speak with any member of the NRJE community and beyond about CASJE’s enormous potential and why we are so excited to be a part of it.

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NEWS from American Jewish University

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We are pleased to announce the launch of the AJU Teaching Israel Fellowship, a year-long fellowship for professional Jewish educators designed to explore and enrich their teaching about Israel. Led by Dr. Sivan Zakai, the fellowship has chosen a diverse group of seasoned educators representing Los Angeles area Jewish educational institutions across the denominational spectrum to study together monthly for the duration of this academic year. Participants reflect a plurality of backgrounds, viewpoints, generations, teaching audiences and subject matter specialties. What they share is a passion for Israel education and a desire to make teaching about Israel relevant, nuanced, and meaningful for their students. By examining the leading thinking on Israel education today, working as a Critical Friends Group focused on examining their own Israel education practices, and participating in ongoing research about Israel education and teacher professional learning, the fellows will emerge as a cadre of thought leaders who will be prepared to enhance the teaching of Israel in their own classrooms, programs, and institutions.