



EarlyJ

ANNUAL REPORT 2023





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CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER'S REFLECTIONS

As the Jewish community comes together during these challenging times, our hearts and souls are with Israel and the Jewish people of the diaspora. The immense challenges our people face today underscore the importance of supporting Jewish Early Childhood Education (JECE) to continue to build the engine of Jewish life, cultivate families' Jewish identities, and strengthen support networks. Our goal is to plant the seeds for the next generation of a strong Jewish people, guided by love and support for Israel.

Throughout the past 30 years, I have seen JECE from all angles — as a founder launching schools, as an educator leading classrooms, and as a parent bundling up her daughters for their first days of preschool. Each of these perspectives has led me to the same conclusion: high-quality JECE is life-changing for families, yet critically under-supported. For too long, a scarcity of opportunities for families, coupled with not enough investment in our educators, has stunted our JECE ecosystem's growth. In the Bay Area, 84% of preschool-aged Jewish children are not attending Jewish preschool, and 17% of our preschool educators live in poverty.

EarlyJ continues to be committed to transforming these dynamics and scaling up meaningful Jewish life for children across the Bay Area. Our pilot demonstrated we can move the needle on these appalling statistics. It solidified our theory of change that a multi-pronged approach is the most effective means for jumpstarting progress, acknowledging how intertwined JECE reach is with quality, a strong educator force, accessibility, and community. Under the expanded umbrella of EarlyJ, I anticipate more opportunities for trailblazing change — on an even larger scale across the Bay Area and beyond. Over the past year, we've already led a host of activities, from grantmaking to research to facilitating community collaborations to catalyze progress.

While we remain focused on our core goals, since October 7, we have increased flexibility to meet our JECE community's emergency needs. This includes deploying over \$273,000 toward helping our centers beef up security and provide families with some much-needed safety, along with convening directors for a community hearing with the security team at the Jewish Community Federation.

I am invigorated by the steady stream of messages our team receives from Jewish education organizations nationwide. The pilot paved a path to the forefront of JECE thought leadership, leaving our team poised to share a blueprint for thriving JECE communities from coast to coast. The prospect of EarlyJ's local approach producing large-scale impacts for our diasporic community is deeply motivating and underscores the pivotal role JECE, and EarlyJ's unique approach, play in strengthening our Jewish future. As we enter the next year, I remain more optimistic than ever that our team and our partners will move us closer to the JECE landscape our community needs and deserves.

None of this would have been possible without our funding partners who have enabled us to create this life-changing impact. Your vision and belief have propelled us forward and helped build a solid foundation from where we continue to grow. We are thrilled to announce that our funding leadership has grown. In addition to the Rodan and Koum Family Foundations, the Weingarten Family Foundation has joined as an anchor funder. We can't thank Zack Bodner, Yana Kalika, Elana Rodan Schuldt, and Shai Weingarten, our dedicated Advisory Board, enough for investing time, energy, and funding in EarlyJ. Together, we will continue sowing the seeds that nourish and fortify our Jewish community.



Founding President & Executive Director of
EarlyJ

MISSION



EarlyJ's mission is to build a vibrant JECE ecosystem that sparks lifelong relationships, identity, and practice for the next generation. We aim to transform the reach, quality, and impact of Jewish community among families with young kids in the Bay Area and beyond.



2023 MILESTONES

WE IMPACTED



\$14,848,000
Fundraised

**Funds raised during the pilot and 2023*

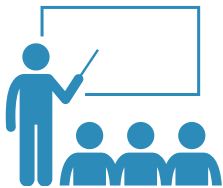
\$1,006,939
Distributed via 18 grants



566
Educators

46
Preschools

2,3333
Children 0-5



11 Educators

Joined the Early Childhood
Higher Education Program

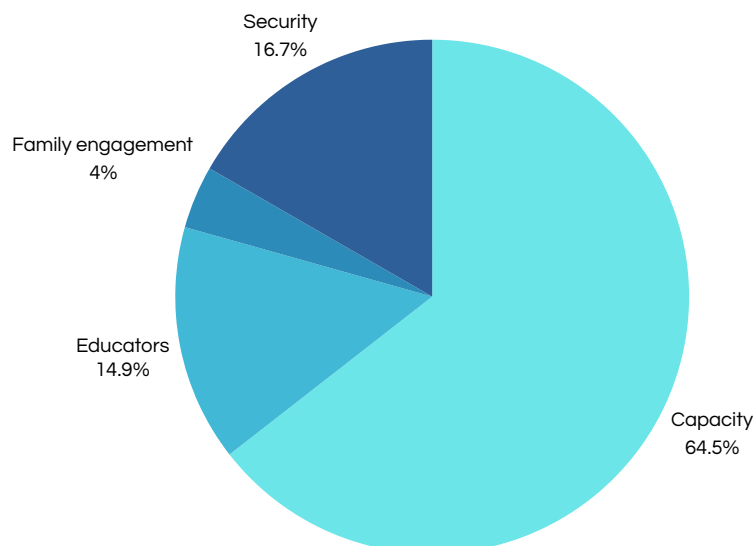
192 Spots

Added to Bay Area
Jewish preschools

3 New

Bay Area
Jewish preschools opened,
2 in "desert areas"

EarlyJ's Distribution of Grant Funding Across Key Areas



CORE INITIATIVES

We believe that laying the groundwork for sustainable and scalable impact requires significant investments and dynamic programs across 4 key areas: growing preschool capacity, investing in educators, centering family engagement, and ensuring preschool affordability.

GROWING PRESCHOOL CAPACITY

We provide grants to new and established preschools, helping them work within their infrastructure to maximize full-time enrollment and meet families' needs. In our inaugural year, EarlyJ allocated 8 grants to increase capacity, resulting in the creation of additional spaces for 192 students to enroll in Jewish preschools. We also helped establish 3 new preschools, including 2 in previously underserved "desert areas" lacking Jewish preschool options.

Opening infant/toddler programs is a critical opportunity for building a sustainable pipeline of students for JECE. For example, EarlyJ granted \$188,049 to the Peninsula Jewish Community Center to expand their JECE program to include infant/toddler services, growing their capacity by 28 children. Such efforts reflect EarlyJ's continued dedication to widening access to high quality JECE and fostering long-term enrollment stability.

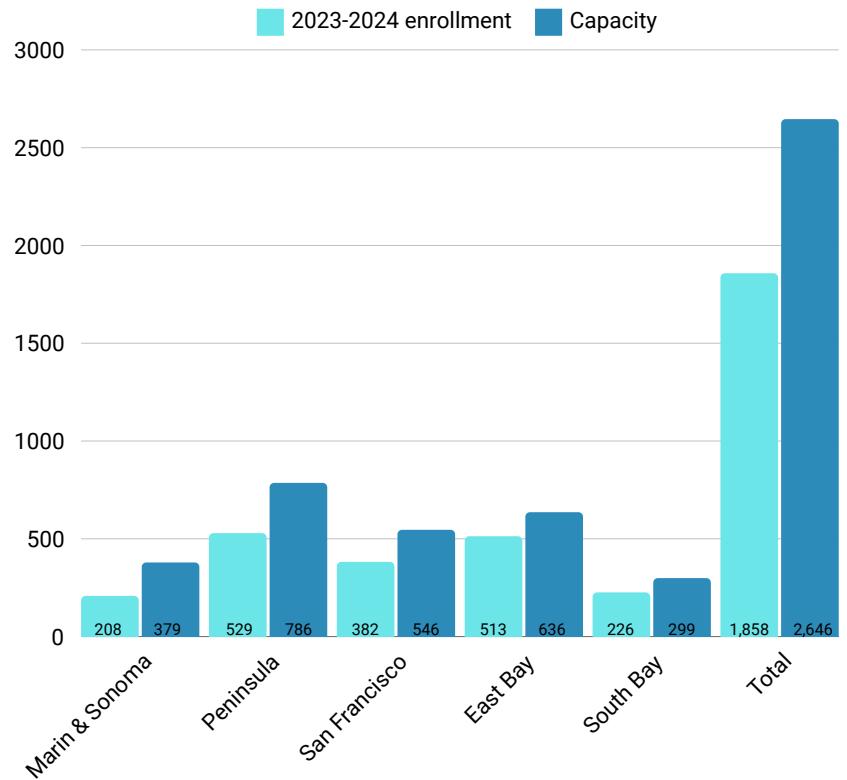


Bay Area Regions' Student Enrollment

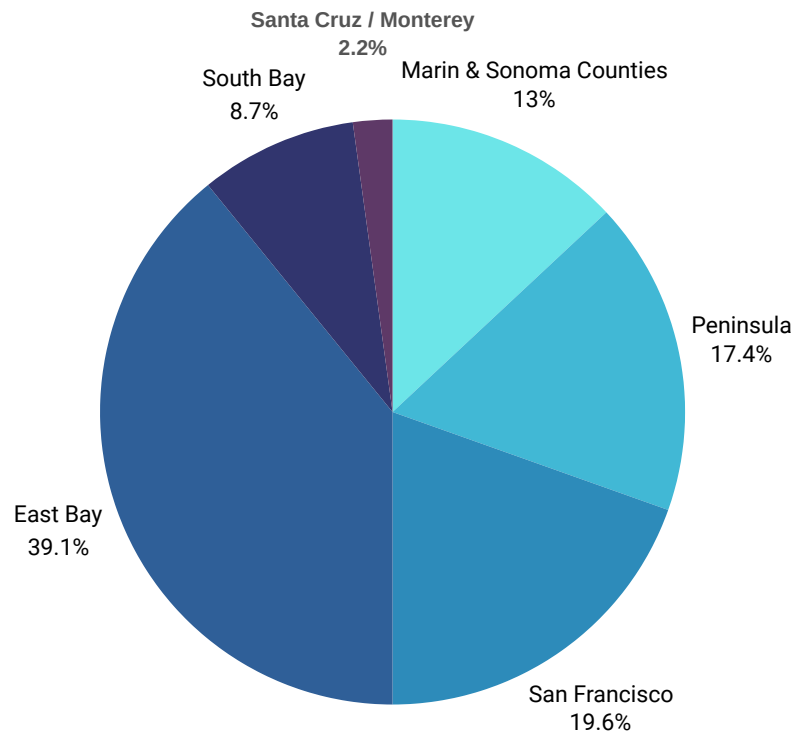
GRANT HIGHLIGHTS

We provided JCC Sonoma County with a \$100,000 2-year grant to support opening their new preschool. The preschool can now serve up to 24 students in an area with no other Jewish preschools and has inspired the growth of a vibrant Jewish community around the school. EarlyJ also provided JCC Osher Marin with an \$80,000 2-year grant to support the opening of a new satellite preschool in Mill Valley, serving up to 45 students, ages 2-5 years.

Distribution of Preschools Across the Bay Area



**Numbers collected from 31/46 preschools in the Bay Area in September 2023*



**46 preschools*

INVESTING IN EDUCATORS

We can't expand enrollment unless we invest in the heart and soul of JECE — our teachers. Too many gifted educators leave the field after struggling to make ends meet, suffering from burnout, or feeling insufficiently engaged as professionals. EarlyJ invests in sustainable programs to improve teacher quality, compensation, and retention.

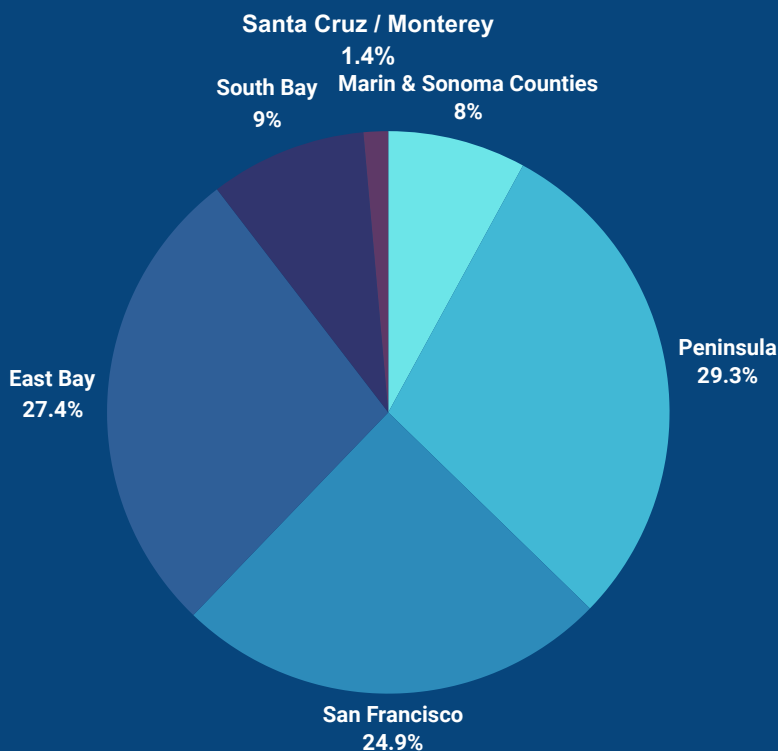
Our cornerstone program is the Early Childhood Higher Education Program, a partnership with the American Jewish University (AJU). This program supports teachers as they earn a master's degree in JECE (covering 90% of tuition costs and including local community-building events/retreats) and offers a substantial pay increase upon graduation. Compensation increases are funded in partnership between EarlyJ, the sponsoring preschool, and its host organization over three years and eventually sustained by the employer, proffering a long-term pathway to fair wages. After an extremely successful pilot cohort of 10 East Bay educators, we launched a second cohort across the Bay Area. We had over 30 applicants for 10 spots and ultimately launched a second cohort of 11 highly qualified educators.

Data from our pilot of this program demonstrates the lasting impact of salary increases and continued education. Directors reported a positive effect on teacher recruitment, with one director stating "the raises attached to the program definitely impact newer hires coming in at higher rates" and another adding, "it gives the candidates the message that we are lifelong learners and take our work seriously." Overall, the participating schools saw an increase in retention, with 84% of teachers returning to these preschools the next year, up from 75% reported the year prior. Additionally, all survey respondents agreed that the program improved the participants' ability to meet the needs of their preschools and ability to increase family engagement at their preschools. Participating schools have seen added parent education workshops, holiday events, and other family engagement opportunities, based on what they learned through the program.

Additional projects such as providing grants to support educators completing their qualifications, sending educators to the Z3 conference, providing access for online training at The Orchard, and providing JECE advising hours to Directors of new preschools, exemplify EarlyJ's strategies for assisting educators at all stages of their careers.

Moreover, following the onset of the war in Israel, our team stepped up to support the wellness of JECE educators. As a tribute to their invaluable role within our community, we supported them with breakfast and a mindfulness session when they needed it most.

**Distribution of JECE Educators
Per Bay Area Region**



**Total of 566 educators*

CENTERING FAMILY ENGAGEMENT

We aim to deepen the JECE experience for current families and expand the circle of families who enroll in Jewish preschool. Pursuant to these goals, we have supported the PJ Library Parent Connector Program, a proven, peer-led community-building initiative. In partnership with the Harold Grinspoon Foundation and the Jewish Community Federation, PJ Library Parent connectors have organized programs and built relationships with hundreds of young families across the Bay Area.

ENSURING PRESCHOOL AFFORDABILITY

We prioritize ensuring that JECE is inclusive of all Jewish households. Many young families simply cannot afford to enroll their children in JECE. Therefore, need-based tuition assistance is critical to ensure the broadest possible access for all. In addition to supporting scholarships in the past, we are looking at different strategies to help schools develop incentive-based scholarships to guarantee expanded access for Jewish families of all backgrounds.



SECURITY AND SUPPORT INITIATIVES

During the October 7 War

In the wake of the October 7 attack and subsequent war in Israel, we answered the call to provide immediate support to Bay Area preschools in 3 main ways: giving grants to preschools to increase security, providing funds to support JECE educators, and holding a mindfulness session.

Recognizing the community's needs, EarlyJ facilitated a discussion about enhancing security protocols with the security team at the Jewish Community Federation and preschool staff.

With the generous support of the Jim Joseph Foundation, the John Pritzker Family Fund, the Koret Foundation, the Koum Family Foundation, the Rodan Family Foundation, the Taube Family Foundation, and an anonymous donor, we swiftly raised \$273,000 and provided 11 security grants to preschools (the grants were provided during 2023 and 2024). Additionally, we provided funding to help Israeli children displaced during the war to attend our local preschools.

RESEARCH

As we have continued to grow beyond the East Bay pilot's scope and serve the full Bay Area, EarlyJ funded additional research to understand:

- Where JECE programs are located across the Bay Area and how this aligns with the geographical distribution of Jewish families
- Profiles of JECE programs, including trends in enrollment and staff compensation
- Pathways and barriers to enrollment for families

This research was funded in partnership with the Koret Foundation and conducted by Rosov Consulting. To share our key learnings, we hosted 3 community forums with over 180 guests, including ECE directors, lay leaders, host organization Executive Directors, and national Jewish foundations.

Our team conducted further data collection by meeting 1-1 with nearly all Bay Area Jewish preschools and gathering information from them regarding enrollment numbers and staff headcounts. This essential information has helped map the local JECE landscape and will inform future capacity and educator development initiatives.



MEET THE TEAM

Our work is made possible by our Advisory Board, expert advisors, and professional team. Bringing a wealth of strategic philanthropic and sector expertise, EarlyJ's leadership team provides essential guidance to ensure that we continue to further our mission.

Advisory Board



Elana Rodan Schuldt,
President of the Rodan
Family Foundation

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Yana Kalika,
President of the Koum
Family Foundation

[read more](#)



Shai Weingarten,
Executive Director and co-
President of the
Weingarten Foundation

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Zack Bodner,
CEO of the Oshman Family
JCC

[read more](#)

Advisors



Mark Reisbaum,
Independent Philanthropy
Advisor

[read more](#)



Alexandra LaForge,
Director of Programs at the
Koum Family Foundation

[read more](#)



Iryna Gubenko,
Director of Programs at the
Koum Family Foundation

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Professional Team



Sharona Israeli-Roth,
Founding President &
Executive Director

[read more](#)



Maayan Sorek,
Director of Operations

[read more](#)



We anticipate hiring additional staff to support EarlyJ's important and growing work.

FUTURE PLANS

Looking toward the next fiscal year, our team will kick off a strategic planning process supported by Third Plateau to ensure continued impact. From a programmatic standpoint, we plan to continue to expand our proven programs, including the Early Childhood Education Program and capacity increase grants (with a focus on continued growth of toddler/infant care programs).

We will continue to test new programs and grants to expand impact. This includes the launch of the Early Childhood Jewish and Israel Cultural Ambassador Program with Oranim College in Israel — a 17-day immersive seminar in Israel, combined with Israel-related curriculum expansion the following year. This effort reflects our hope to immerse teachers in the global Jewish community and provide them with opportunities to share and recognize their knowledge. We also plan to host a “Pay It Forward” lecture series in which preschool grantees will share their knowledge with fellow preschool educators. These unique opportunities (and more!), layered on top of our continual grantmaking, seek to foster a collaborative and thriving JECE ecosystem.



THANK YOU

Thank you to the generous donors who have supported EarlyJ's trailblazing work and laid a strong foundation for the future of JECE. We are excited to continue building a legacy with no limits.

DONORS

Laura & Justin Alanis
 Anne Bakar & Yossi Zadik
 Colen Family Foundation
 Ruth & Michael Fletcher
 Fooksman Family Foundation
 Amy & Mort Friedkin
 Miriam & Gerald Friedkin
 Jennifer & Abe Friedman
 Jocelyne & Jason Gardner
 April Gruber & Aric Shalev
 Frederick J. Isaac Philanthropic Fund
 Jim Joseph Foundation
 Amy & Tom Kelly
 Koret Foundation
 Koum Family Foundation
 Libitzky Family Foundation
 Mickelson/Brody Multigenerational Fund

Sharon Petrowsky
 John Pritzker Family Fund
 Rodan Family Foundation
 Eileen Ruby
 Carol & Harry Saal Family Fund
 Jackie & Dan Safier
 Jill & Dan Saper
 Taube Family Foundation
 Weingarten Foundation

EarlyJ is paving the way for a thriving and interconnected Jewish future. We welcome additional funding partners to join us on this journey.



Appendix A: EarlyJ's 2023 Grantmaking List

American Jewish University

2023: \$138,000

Grant to allow 11 educators from the Bay Area to receive an MA in JECE

JCC Sonoma County, Santa Rosa

2023-2024: \$100,000

Grant to support the opening of a new preschool, serving up to 24 students from a "desert area" with no other Jewish preschools

Silicon Valley JCC, Los Gatos

2023: \$12,000

Grant to support the rollout of no-cost transitional kindergarten, covering a teacher's salary and the development of a family engagement program

Gan Ilan, Lafayette

2023: \$11,360

Grant to support educators completing supervisor or director qualifications, educators working with students with special needs, and educators participating in a mentorship program

JCC Osher Marin, Mill Valley

2023-2024: \$80,000

Grant to support the opening of a new satellite preschool in Mill Valley, serving 45 students, ages 2-5 years

Sherith Israel, San Francisco

2023-2024: \$90,000

Grant to support the opening of a new preschool, providing an art studio/maker space and improved outdoor area to up to 75 students

Cole Valley Gan, San Francisco

2023: \$40,000

Grant to support the hiring of an additional assistant teacher to increase the preschool capacity by 4 students

Beth El Nursery School, Berkeley

2023: \$27,830

Grant to support the Katanchicks program to enhance family engagement and bring more students to the preschool

Gan Shalom Preschool, Berkeley

2023: \$39,200

Grant to support the renovation of the preschool's yard

Peninsula Jewish Community Center, Foster City

2023: \$188,049

Grant to support the expansion of the PJCC's ECE program to include infant/toddler services for up to 28 children

Netivot Shalom Preschool, Berkeley

2023: \$100,900

Grant to support the opening of a toddler program, make modifications to the preschool, and hire a new teacher

Gan Outdoor Preschool, San Rafael

2023: \$11,000

Grant to support hiring a teacher to facilitate the registration of Israeli children who arrived in California during the war in Israel

Helen Diller Family Preschool - JCCSF, San Francisco

2023: \$25,000

Grant to support strengthening security measures due to heightened concerns for the safety of students, staff, and families during the war in Israel

Rosenberg Early Childhood Education Center - JCCSF, San Francisco

2023: \$25,000

Grant to support strengthening security measures due to heightened concerns for the safety of students, staff, and families during the war in Israel

Brotherhood Way - JCCSF, San Francisco

2023: \$25,000

Grant to support strengthening security measures due to heightened concerns for the safety of students, staff, and families during the war in Israel

Gan Noe Preschool, San Francisco

2023: \$25,000

Grant to support strengthening security measures due to heightened concerns for the safety of students, staff, and families during the war in Israel

Sinai Nursery School, San Jose

2023: \$25,000

Grant to support strengthening security measures due to heightened concerns for the safety of students, staff, and families during the war in Israel

Shalom School, San Francisco

2023: \$43,000

Grant to support strengthening security measures due to heightened concerns for the safety of students, staff, and families during the war in Israel