



EarlyJ



2024

# ANNUAL REPORT

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## CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER'S REFLECTIONS

“As my ancestors planted for me, so I plant for future generations,” (Talmud Ta'anit 23a). Throughout 2024’s challenges and triumphs, these guiding words shaped EarlyJ’s approach to changemaking. The past year brought an onslaught of threats to Israel and our Jewish diaspora, in turn highlighting the imperative of investing in a vibrant, proud Jewish future. We recognize Jewish Early Childhood Education (JECE) as the gateway to sowing the seeds for this future and have taken bold leaps to support preschools’ growth into sustainable hubs of Jewish life.

In under 2 years, EarlyJ has established itself as the primary leadership organization for Jewish preschools across the Bay Area and nationwide, providing guidance, support, and funding to address our community’s diverse needs. Our impact — distributing 26 grants totaling \$1,601,647 in 2024 alone — has garnered national attention from community leaders seeking to replicate our successes. The driving force behind this progress is our uniquely multi-pronged strategy of bolstering JECE. We understand that uplifting the JECE field to new heights requires simultaneous investment in preschools, educators, and families. From supporting community-responsive infant/toddler programs to leading professional development seminars in Israel to funding family engagement programs, we conceive of JECE as a holistic, community effort.

While we make strides in increasing JECE’s prominence as a critical driver of Jewish identity, we look forward to major partnerships, such as our trailblazing participation in Project Aleph Bet (PAB). In Fall 2024, EarlyJ was selected as the first and only JECE program to take part in PAB — a groundbreaking initiative launched by Israel’s Ministry of Diaspora Affairs and Combating Antisemitism and its UnitEd global education agency. This program aims to promote North American Jewish Education, with the goal of scaling up initiatives with proven success in increasing enrollment in Jewish schools. We eagerly anticipate taking part in this project over the next 2 years, standing alongside fellow grantees at the forefront of Jewish education leadership.

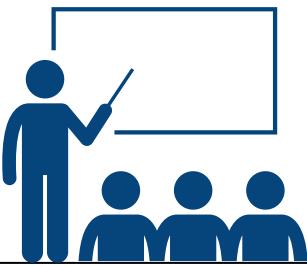
Such progress is only possible thanks to our generous funding partners who share our vision for a flourishing JECE ecosystem. Your passion and support have directly impacted the lives of thousands of young children, families, and educators, sending ripple effects throughout the entire Jewish community. We are proud to share that our grantmaking motivated additional funders to join EarlyJ in 2024, and we secured \$5,573,000 for our initiatives. Our work also motivated other funders to match our investment in JECE. In 2025, we look forward to continuing this journey of growth alongside these donors who see the long-term importance of robust JECE. We also thank our Board for their wisdom, commitment, and funding. Elana Rodan Schuldt, Yana Kalika, Shai Weingarten, and Zack Bodner — we are grateful for your instrumental leadership. Together, we will make true on our commitment, and plant for future generations of the Jewish community.



*Shavona Israeli-Roth*

Founding President & Executive Director,  
EarlyJ

# 2024 HIGHLIGHTS & MILESTONES



## \$1,601,647

Distributed via 26 Grants

### 7.9% increase

In Bay Area Students Enrolled in JECE Since EarlyJ's Inception

### 165 spots

Added to Bay Area Jewish Preschools

## 3 Leadership Programs

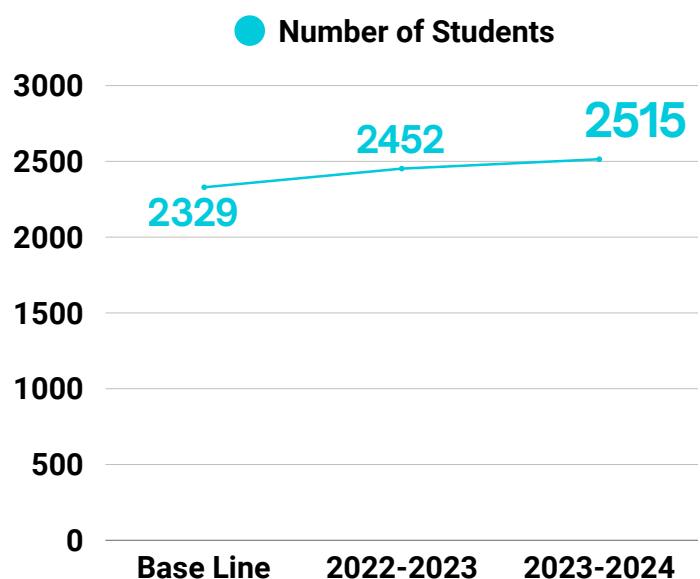
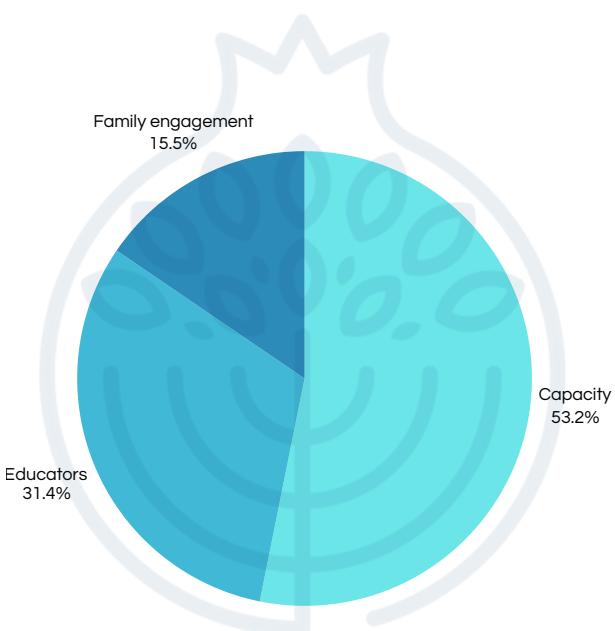
Early Childhood Higher Education Program

Early Childhood Jewish & Israel Cultural Ambassador Program

Z3 Early Childhood Education Leadership Lab

## We Impacted:

48 Preschools  
578 Educators  
2515 Children 0-5



# Mission



EarlyJ's mission is to transform the reach, quality, and impact of JECE in the Bay Area and beyond. To achieve holistic and sustainable change, we strategically invest in the following key pillars: growing preschool capacity, investing in educators, centering family engagement, and ensuring preschool affordability.

# GROWING PRESCHOOL CAPACITY

In 2024, we provided 14 capacity building grants, totaling \$795,623. These grants added 165 new spots for children to enroll in JECE. With this growth, the Bay Area JECE ecosystem's registration numbers have now increased by 7.9% since we started collecting data last year. Specifically, 6 of the grants supported the addition of infant/toddler programs, and 5 of the grants supported the creation of outdoor learning spaces. Our team distributed the infant/toddler program grants after a grantee shared their success story of opening an infant/toddler program in our "Pay it Forward" webinar series. This strategic grantmaking choice has helped preschools better meet working families' needs, as indicated in our [research](#) with the Koret Foundation, mitigating the flow of students to non-Jewish transitional kindergarten and thus strengthening the long-term pipeline for children to remain in JECE. In addition to our grantmaking, we facilitated consultation sessions for preschools, including chabads, providing guidance on how they can successfully open new programs or grow their existing programs.



## GRANTEE SPOTLIGHT:

### BETH EL NURSERY SCHOOL, BERKELEY

"We are so grateful to EarlyJ for the grant they provided for our 18-month-old Toddler program, Gan Nitzanim. Adding a toddler program will allow us to enroll more children and provide a Jewish preschool experience to families who would otherwise turn to other non-Jewish child care providers that offer infant and toddler care. Having families participate in Jewish experiences, culture, and rituals over three years instead of just two will help deepen the family's sense of belonging. This can have a powerful positive effect on their identity and connection to Jewish life, thus laying a stronger foundation for future engagement and a sense of belonging in the Jewish community at Beth El Nursery School, Congregation Beth El, and beyond."

## GRANTEE SPOTLIGHT:

### GAN MAH TOV, OAKLAND

"We are currently in the exciting phase of finalizing the design plans for our outdoor space, made possible by the generosity of EarlyJ. This grant is enabling us to create a developmentally appropriate and engaging space that will support the physical, cognitive, social, emotional, and sensory development of the children in our program. A family who recently joined, after considering several preschools in our area, was very encouraged to hear that we are in the process of revamping our outdoor space. This undoubtedly helped sway their decision towards our program."

This grant motivated an additional funder to join EarlyJ's efforts and match our grant.

# INVESTING IN EDUCATORS

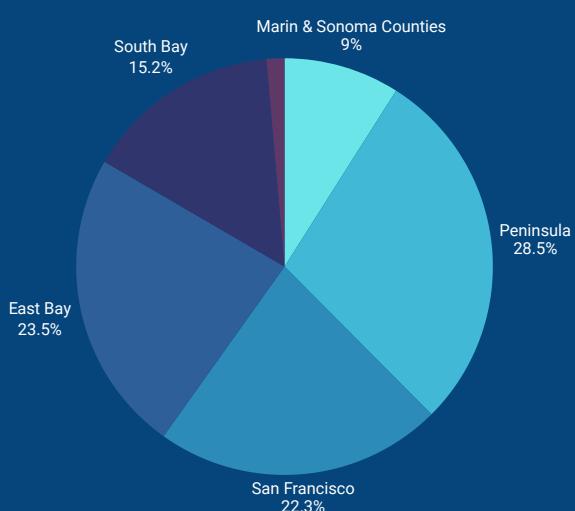
Improving the quality of JECE hinges upon the lifeblood of our preschools — our educators. EarlyJ remains committed to uplifting gifted and passionate educators by offering professional development opportunities and pathways toward salary increases. In 2024, we followed through on this commitment by allocating \$469,294 in strategic funding to innovative initiatives for educators:

## Early Childhood Higher Education Program:

This partnership with American Jewish University supports sustainably improving educator quality and compensation to uplift the future leaders of JECE. Participating educators have the opportunity to earn a master's degree in JECE and upon graduation, earn a significant salary increase which is funded initially by EarlyJ and eventually by their employer. Members of the program's first cohort, who graduated in Spring 2023, are currently receiving their second year of increased salaries. Also, in 2024, the program's second cohort of 8 educators entered their second year of the master's program. Beyond attending AJU courses, the cohort has participated in several networking opportunities hosted by EarlyJ.

*Testimonial from a participant in the second cohort: "The master's program grant has enabled me to pursue advanced studies in Early Childhood Education, which has already brought valuable insights back to our preschool. This opportunity has enriched our curriculum and strengthened our teaching practices. By deepening my expertise, I am now better equipped to support our team in delivering high-quality, developmentally appropriate education grounded in Jewish values. I look forward to continuing to share this knowledge with colleagues and parents, inspiring positive growth in our program and in our students."*

## Percent of Educators Per Region - 578 Educators



## Educational Qualifications of Early Childhood Educators Across the Bay Area



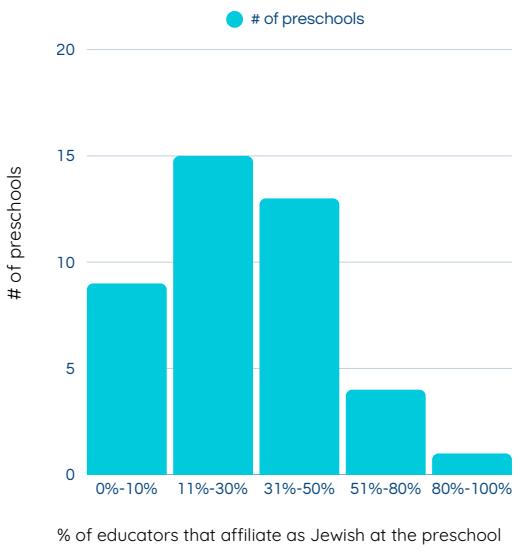
\*Data collected from 42/48 preschools, Summer 2024

## **Early Childhood Jewish & Israel Cultural Ambassador Program:**

In order to educate the next generation of Jewish students, JECE educators must learn about and connect with Israel and Judaism. Understanding this critical need, EarlyJ created our one-of-a-kind program to support JECE educators looking to incorporate teachings on Israel and Jewish life into their classrooms. In 2024, we sent the first cohort of 10 educators to the fully-funded 17-day seminar in Israel designed to strengthen Jewish identity, nurture a connection to Israel, and cultivate partnerships among JECE educators. Participants also received a bonus and 5 academic credits from Oranim College. Each educator who participated in the program has since hosted new initiatives at their preschool to bolster students' connection with Israel, driving a ripple effect of knowledge. Given the impactful success, we look forward to launching a second cohort in Summer 2025.

Testimonial from a participant in the first cohort: "This summer's seminar at Oranim College is adding more layers to my identity as a Jewish Early Childhood Educator. As Oranim presents us with different pedagogies specific to Jewish and Israeli early childhood education, I'm reflecting deeply on my own practices at Congregation Emanu-El Preschool and making robust connections with my colleagues from the Bay Area. The humanist philosophy embedded at Oranim creates a unique environment for our group to challenge, inspire, and learn together, all the while growing as individuals eager to share with our colleagues back home." For more testimonials, see [here](#).

### **Jewish Affiliation Among Educators Across Preschools**



% of educators that affiliate as Jewish at the preschool

\*Data collected from 42/48 preschools, Summer 2024



### **Z3 Early Childhood Education Leadership Lab:**

Recognizing JECE as a critical driver of Jewish identity, EarlyJ partnered with the Z3 Project in November 2024 to provide 20 educators from the Bay Area and Los Angeles with training on how to incorporate Zionism into their educational environments. The Leadership Lab included a 2-day in-person conference, 2 virtual meetings, and participation in the leadership cohort throughout the year. The initiative aimed to enhance participants' understanding of the Jewish community's relationship with Israel and elevate JECE professionals as leaders within the broader Jewish community.



# CENTERING FAMILY ENGAGEMENT

When young Jewish families feel connected to their preschools and surrounding families, they are more likely to continue with long-term participation in Jewish community life. Therefore, throughout 2024, we sought to deepen the JECE experience for current families and expand the circle of families who enroll in Jewish preschools. In pursuit of this goal, we invested \$231,730 in a trio of community engagement initiatives that catalyze community and strengthen young families' connections to Judaism:

**PJ Library Parent Connector Program:** This community-building initiative provided families with opportunities to engage with their peers and form new friendships. In 2024, 8 parent connectors led gatherings and family activities at 14 Jewish preschools.

**Music by Heart:** By fully funding this transformative music program in 5 Bay Area preschools, we helped train educators on how to combine music, storytelling, and technology to create engaging Jewish and Israel-related educational experiences. In 2024, the program included community-wide music events and an artist workshop, benefitting 124 educators and 459 students and their families.



**Shinshinim Program:** Shinshim are Israeli high school graduates who serve Jewish communities around the world for a year before their mandatory army service. In 2024, we launched a pilot program where Shinshinim joined Bay Area preschools for a few hours each week. These Shinshinim led educational activities related to Jewish and Israeli culture, holidays, and the Hebrew language. We are thrilled to expand this program next year, placing 4 Shinshinim full-time in 8 preschools.



We have also identified the huge potential for **Jewish Parenting Centers (JPCs)** to build connections between preschools and young families, leading to preschool enrollment. In October 2024, we launched a Request For Proposals, inviting preschools to create JPCs. These centers will support expectant parents and families with children ages 0-2 by providing educational resources and community-building occasions. We look forward to further developing this opportunity and sharing case studies, curriculum, and financial models with participating schools.



## ENSURING PRESCHOOL AFFORDABILITY

This year we engaged in conversations with fellow JECE organizations to assess diverse models of promoting preschool affordability and initiated a think tank with preschool directors in the Bay Area to catalyze the affordability conversation. Meanwhile, we made concrete accessibility strides by providing security grants to local Jewish preschools. These grants ensured preschools did not have to raise tuition to cover heightened security measures. Our \$795,623 in capacity grantmaking also freed up preschools' funds to invest in their scholarship programs. We look forward to further exploring innovative approaches to supporting affordability in the coming years.



## PAY IT FORWARD SERIES

Tying together our core values of continued education and community engagement, we launched an exciting webinar series called "Pay it Forward," where grantees lead webinars for fellow JECE educators. Past topics include how to open infant/toddler care programs at preschools and how to facilitate community and connection for young Jewish families. We also expanded our webinar offerings to include varied topics, such as a session led by an independent consultant on the financial aspects of JECE programs. Moving into 2025, we anticipate building upon the Pay It Forward series's momentum and our wider webinar programming, encouraging networking and the spread of JECE knowledge. This effort will drive collaboration between preschools and ultimately create stronger professional relationships across the JECE field.



## STRATEGIC PLANNING

Beyond grantmaking, in 2024, EarlyJ also took major operational steps to grow our reach. We engaged in a strategic planning process with Third Plateau, crafting an updated road to impact including specific goals and mapping opportunities for future collaborations. We look forward to sharing the results with our community in 2025.



## EARLYJ IN THE MEDIA

Our work elevating the JECE field has not gone unnoticed by the broader Jewish community. In 2024, publications such as *The Jewish News of Northern California* and *eJewishPhilanthropy* highlighted our bold strategies and impact.

Article spotlights:



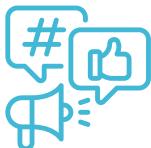
[Read here](#)



[Read here](#)



[Read here](#)



We also launched our social media presence on [LinkedIn](#) and [Facebook](#). With regular posts on each platform, this outreach initiative opened new avenues for reaching potential partners and announcing our progress to the community.

## FUTURE PLANS

EarlyJ holds steadfast to our goal of fostering a strong, self-sustaining JECE ecosystem in the Bay Area — an ecosystem where Jewish preschools are competitive and accessible options, where educators have support, where preschool quality is strong, and where families find meaningful entry points to Jewish community. Turning to 2025, many organizations across the U.S. have reached out to our team, seeking advice and support. In response to these calls from the community, we envision scaling our programs beyond the Bay Area, reaching more families and enhancing the overall quality of the JECE field. This work can create change across entire communities, as families and children who first come to Jewish community through JECE remain involved over the course of their lives.



# THE TEAM BEHIND THE WORK

Our work is made possible by our Board 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.

## 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](#)

## Professional Team



**Sharona Israeli-Roth,**  
Founding President &  
Executive Director



**Maayan Sorek,**  
Director of Operations



**Lital Goldberger Raz,**  
Project Manager



**Zehava Dahan,**  
Early Childhood Higher  
Education Program  
Facilitator

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# Thank you

Thank you to the generous donors who supported EarlyJ's groundbreaking work in 2024 and continue to prioritize the future of JECE. We are honored to partner with you in building a lasting legacy of Jewish education.

**Donors:**

**Laura & Justin Alanis**  
**Bruckman Family Fund**  
**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**  
**Jewish Community Federation and Endowment 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**  
**UnitEd**  
**Weingarten Foundation**





# EarlyJ

*“We are at a transformative moment in the history of Jewish Early Childhood Education in America, and EarlyJ is leading, setting the standard of support, and creating solutions during this historic moment of transformation. The increased professionalization of the entire field of early childhood education, the acknowledgement of its vital importance for building the emotional, intellectual, and Jewish foundations for children, and the recognition of the value of our teachers, is due to the unwavering vision and commitment of EarlyJ and its donors. Moreover, EarlyJ is now the model for how to support Jewish Early Childhood Education and the teachers in other communities throughout our nation. This is already happening in cities and organizations in the United States.”*

Dr. Bruce Powell  
Dean, School for Jewish Education and Leadership  
American Jewish University

EarlyJ is lighting the way for a vibrant Jewish future. We look forward to continuing this forward momentum into 2025, energizing the JECE space with strategic investments and innovative initiatives. We welcome additional funding partners to join us on this journey of impact.

