

Data-Driven Insights to Support ECJE Hiring and Retention



Acknowledgements



Thank you to our national funders,

Crown Family Philanthropies, Jim Joseph Foundation, and Samuels Family Foundation for making this work possible.



CROWN FAMILY PHILANTHROPIES



JIM JOSEPH
FOUNDATION
Shimon ben Joseph



Samuels
Family Foundation

Gratitude for our national partners

This research was conducted as part of the ElevatEd initiative, a collaborative effort of the JCC Association of North America (JCCA), the Union for Reform Judaism (URJ), Jewish Federations of North America (JFNA), and several other national and local partners all working together to elevate the field of early childhood Jewish education.



JCC Association
of North America



Jewish
Federations
of North America

This work was completed in partnership with



We gratefully acknowledge the work of Fierce Outcomes, an education- and workforce-focused analytics, strategy, and talent-pipelines firm. Their expert team delivered the research, analysis, report drafting, and project guidance that shaped this report, bringing deep experience in closing talent gaps for employers such as ECJEs as well as transforming education institutions' outcomes, brand positioning, and perceived value through employer partnerships. 2

Executive Summary



To support the vitality of the Early Childhood Jewish Education (ECJE) workforce, ElevatEd commissioned this study to identify the key factors driving successful educator recruitment, as measured by retention in their early childhood centers. This report presents findings from a statistical analysis of 480 educators, conducted by the education analytics and talent pipeline strategy firm Fierce Outcomes. Using a logistic regression model, the study identified key findings that offer an evidence-based framework for strengthening the ECJE field.

It is important to note the study's primary limitations: the findings are correlational, not causal, and are based on director-reported data from a single academic year. The analysis revealed that successful hiring (based on retention in the center) is most significantly influenced by an educator's prior experience and their social integration into the workplace. The average 1-year retention rate for all reported new hires for the 2024-2025 school year (measured at the end of the school year) was only 74%. This is in line with national statistics for early childhood educators where average retention is just 18-months.

These findings in this report provide ECJE leaders and funders with a data-driven roadmap to focus on those key factors that are associated with 50-percentage-point higher retention

The most effective retention strategies are those that:

- leverage social networks for recruitment
- ensure robust onboarding for all new hires
- value direct ECE experience and career-focused educational pathways



Key Findings

1 Personal connection is a key driver of retention

Hires with pre-existing social connections with other employees, such as being a referral or being in a network with ECJE colleagues was associated with 11-percentage-point increase in retention rate.

2 Jewish identity alone does not drive retention.

The analysis found no statistically significant relationship between an educator being Jewish and their likelihood of retention. The retention benefit seen among some Jewish hires is linked to the higher likelihood of them being a referral, not the shared identity itself.

3 Prior ECE experience increases retention, especially when paired with specific degrees.

Educators with previous experience in an early childhood center saw a 10-percentage-point increase in retention. This effect was most pronounced for educators holding master's or associate's degrees.

4 Candidate "fit" is a significant predictor of retention.

A composite score of director-perceived attributes like warmth and professionalism was positively correlated with retention, with above-average scores leading to statistically significantly higher (5-10 percentage-point) retention rates. This finding should be interpreted with caution, as the ratings are subject to hindsight bias.

5 The absence of onboarding is the greatest risk to retention.

Hires who received no formal onboarding saw their retention rate drop by 18 percentage-points. The data indicates any formal onboarding, even a shortened version, is significantly better than none.

6 Some assumed factors are not primary predictors.

Factors such as compensation, benefits, and age were not statistically significant predictors in the final model, likely because their influence is intertwined with more significant factors like experience.

1. Methodology and Model 6

2. Key Finding: Familiarity Matters 10

3. Key Finding: Being Jewish Doesn't Matter 13

4. Key Finding: Experience matters 14

5. Key Finding: "Fit" influences retention 16

6. Key Finding: Onboarding is essential 18

7. What we didn't find and why 20

8. ECJE Hiring and Retention Action Guide 22



To identify the key drivers of educator retention, this study employed a rigorous analytical process. The foundation of this analysis is a comprehensive survey administered to Early Childhood Jewish Education (ECJE) center directors, designed to capture a wide range of factors related to hiring and employment. This section details the methodology used, from survey design and data collection to the statistical modeling and interpretation of the results.

Survey design

The survey was strategically designed to capture structural, professional, and personal factors potentially associated with educator retention. Items were focused on four primary areas: (1) recruitment channels and techniques, (2) compensation and benefits, (3) candidate background and qualifications, and (4) employment status.

To capture nuanced data, the survey incorporated a mix of question formats, including Likert scales, multiple-choice questions, simple yes/no dichotomous questions, and 1-to-5 rating scales. This mixed-format structure was designed to maximize the richness and interpretability of the data. The survey was administered online, and directors completed it on behalf of individual educators, allowing for centralized and standardized data collection across the network.

Sample and data collection

In April and May 2025, over 100 ECJE center directors from 12 communities submitted survey responses for 480 educators hired during the 2024-2025 academic year. While this process yielded a robust dataset, it is important to note a few key features. First, some survey items had missing or incomplete responses, which limited the inclusion of certain variables in the final model. Second, the data is based on director's self-reporting. Because directors responded on behalf of educators, in some cases, recalling impressions from an interview that occurred months prior, the results may reflect administrative interpretations or be subject to hindsight bias, rather than reflecting direct self-assessment by the educators themselves.

A snapshot of the surveyed workforce

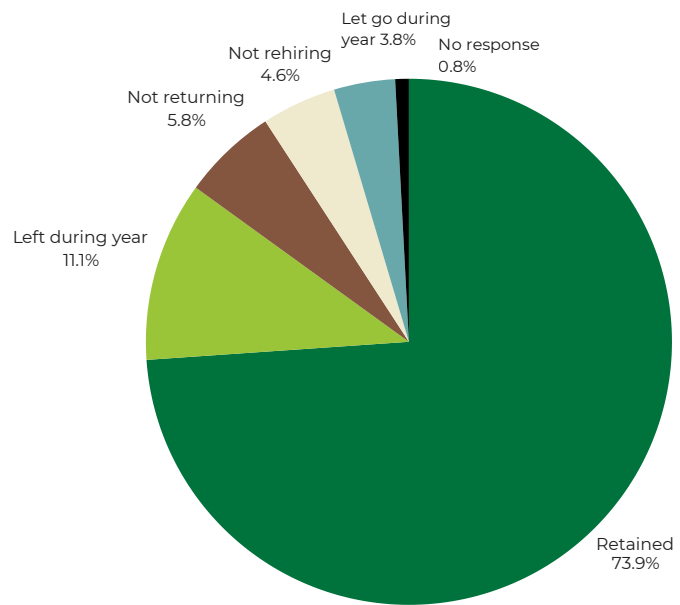
The survey captured a diverse cross-section of the ECJE workforce. In terms of role, Assistant Teachers comprised the largest group (36.5%), followed by Lead Teachers (21.7%), Floaters/Substitutes (20.0%), and general Teachers (17.5%). The sample was also educationally diverse: 38.0% of educators held a Bachelor's degree, 30.1% had a high school diploma, and 14.2% held a master's degree or higher. Geographically, the surveyed educators were distributed across all U.S. regions, with the highest concentrations in the South (32.8%) and Northeast (29.9%).

Methodology and Model

Employment Status

(N = 479)

- Retained (354)
- Left during the '24-'25 school year (53)
- Not returning for '25-'26 (28)
- Did not rehire for '25-'26 (22)
- Let go during the '24-'25 school year (18)
- No response (4)



Most educators in the study were still working in their centers at the time the data were collected, with nearly three-quarters (74%) continuing in their roles. A smaller group had already left: about one in ten (11%) chose to leave on their own, and fewer than 4% were let go. Looking toward the 2025–2026 school year, an additional 6% said they plan to leave, and directors noted that roughly 5% of staff would not be invited back. Only a handful of cases (less than 1%) did not have employment information available.

Educators who left their positions most often cited issues of “Fit” (65%), including personal health, relocation, burnout, or a role mismatch. About one-third (32%) left for “Career” related reasons such as higher pay, further education, or a career change. A small number (4%) gave other or no reasons.

Data preparation and definition of retention

Before analysis, the raw data underwent extensive preparation. To reduce statistical noise and reveal clearer trends, continuous variables (like age) were grouped into ranges, or “bins.” To allow for their inclusion in the model, categorical variables were converted into binary indicators. Finally, to ensure the model wasn't measuring the same underlying factor twice (a statistical issue known as multicollinearity), highly correlated variables were identified and refined.

A critical step in this process was defining the primary outcome: educator retention. For this study, a conservative definition was used. A hire was classified as “retained” only if they were both still employed at the center in Spring 2025 (end of the 2024–2025 academic year) and were being offered a position for the 2025–2026 academic year. Any other outcome, including resignation, termination, non-renewal, or plans not to return was classified as non-retention. This expansive definition ensures, regardless of the often subjective reasons given for departure, that the findings reflect a clear and deliberate continuation of employment.

Methodology and Model

Exploratory analysis

Following data preparation, an Exploratory Data Analysis (EDA) was conducted to develop a deeper understanding of the dataset before formal modeling. This phase involved assessing the distribution of variables, identifying statistical outliers, and evaluating the initial, two-way relationships between potential predictors and the retention outcome. The insights gained during this exploratory phase were vital for refining the set of variables included in the final models, ensuring a balance between statistical relevance and practical, real-world interpretability.

Modeling strategy

The analysis employed two complementary modeling techniques to ensure the results were robust and interpretable.

Logistic Regression: This was the primary model used for this report, selected for its ability to provide clear, interpretable insights. As the dependent variable in this study is binary, whether an educator was retained (1) or not (0), logistic regression is the appropriate technique. The model estimates how various independent variables predict the probability of this outcome. While its direct output is a set of statistical coefficients, these results were translated into more intuitive percentage point swings in retention probability to clearly communicate the practical impact of each factor on an educator's likelihood of staying.

Classification and Regression Trees (CART): A CART model was also developed as an exploratory tool to identify any complex, non-linear relationships that the logistic regression model might miss. While its overall predictive accuracy was comparable to the logistic regression model, its decision-making logic did not align with practical, real-world experience and was therefore difficult to interpret.

To ensure the findings presented in this report are both statistically sound and practically actionable, the results are drawn from the logistic regression model.



Methodology and Model

Control Variables

To better isolate the relationship between key predictors and educator retention, several control variables were incorporated into the model development process. The following categories were considered:

- Position Type
- Geographic Region
- Age Range
- Religious Affiliation
- Highest Education Level
- Start Date / Date Position Filled

All listed controls were tested to assess their individual and combined effects. While these variables were conceptually important, not all were retained in the final model. In some cases, a control variable did not meaningfully alter the model's outcomes. In others, controls were excluded due to statistical interactions that introduced multicollinearity or reduced model stability. The final model specifications prioritized interpretability and statistical performance, ensuring that key contextual factors were considered throughout the modeling process.

Model performance and interpretation

The final logistic regression model was run on 465 complete observations apportioning those randomly into training and testing datasets. During blinded, random testing it achieved an overall accuracy of 75.7%, meaning it correctly predicted an educator's retention status in approximately three out of four cases.

The predicted probability of 1-year retention for a given hire using an isolated, stepwise factor model was as high as 61% if all significant factors were present (different from the 74% descriptive statistic average retention across the population). With none of the predictive factors present, retention was predicted to be only 10%, a swing of over 50 percentage points. The percentage point improvements we share in the report are magnitude of impact off the 74% retention rate descriptive average, which are slightly higher than what we would report in the isolated factor, stepwise model

The model's McFadden's pseudo R^2 was 0.117. In social science research, where human behavior is influenced by countless factors that cannot be measured in a single survey, a pseudo R^2 in this range is considered meaningful and indicative of a solid model. It suggests that the factors included in the model provide a modest but important improvement over random chance.

While the model successfully identifies several key drivers of retention, it is important to acknowledge its limitations. The data is observational, which limits our ability to draw direct causal conclusions. Furthermore, the findings are based on a single academic year and do not speak to longer-term retention trends. Despite these constraints, the combined survey design and analytical methodology offer a transparent, rigorous, and practically relevant examination of the factors associated with educator retention in the ECJE field.

Key Finding: Familiarity Matters



This key finding on the importance of familiarity in educator retention is derived from an analysis of the 2024-2025 Academic Year Hiring Survey, performed by the education- and workforce-focused strategy and analytics firm, Fierce Outcomes.

The survey, administered to ECJE center directors, included questions designed to capture insights into recruitment channels and candidates' existing connections within the community.

Specifically, directors were asked "From where was hire sourced?" allowing for multiple selections such as:

- referral or word of mouth
- applied directly to your ECJE Center, Synagogue, or JCC
- Social media

Additionally, the question "Who did hire already know in your community?" prompted directors to select from options including:

- other employees at your center
- your synagogue or JCC (friend of member, member, etc.)
- Jewish community in your city"

These questions were instrumental in exploring the role of pre-existing relationships and recruitment origins in predicting educator retention within the ECJE field.



Key Finding Familiarity Matters

The analysis revealed that an educator's pre-existing connections are a significant predictor of retention. This finding is composed of three interconnected variables: being hired through a referral, knowing other employees, and having no prior connections to the community.

Two of these factors were found to have a statistically significant relationship with retention:

Hired through a referral:

Hires who were sourced by referral or word of mouth had a retention rate a full 11 percentage points higher than the average. This difference was statistically significant (logistic regression, $p=0.03$).

Knowing other employees at the center:

In a separate but parallel question around networks a new hire had upon employment, hires who knew other employees at the center they joined had a retention rate 10-percentage-points over the average and is also statistically significant (logistic regression, $p=0.04$).

This question probed other potential network connections (knowing parents in the host synagogue, JCC, or school), or being a part of the Jewish community in the city, neither of which were significant. However, if a director indicated that a hire knew "none of the above" in the community (co-employees, members, or Jewish community), while only marginally statistically significant on its own (chi-squared, $p=0.11$), this response was highly collinear with the referral and knowing other employees factors above. In other words, hires who were not referrals and not in the social network of other employees in the ECJE were very likely to be the same hires who knew no one.

Taken together, these three variables indicate that a connection to or network of other employees, present before a hire even begins their work, is a key driver of retention. The data suggests that social integration into the workplace community is not just a benefit of the job, but a predictor of teacher retention.

Implications for the field

Familiarity Matters

The data provides a clear message: social connectedness and networks among colleagues is a significant driver of employee retention. Hires who begin their roles with a pre-existing sense of belonging are more likely to remain. This insight offers immediate, low-cost opportunities for ECJE centers to strengthen workforce stability.

Considerations for action

1. Structured referral program:

Implement a structured referral program that encourages and rewards current staff for recommending qualified candidates. Prioritizing outreach methods that intentionally tap into these existing social networks can yield a more dedicated and stable workforce.

2. Activate networks:

During the hiring process, it is advisable to prioritize outreach methods that specifically target and engage existing staff networks, encouraging referred candidates to apply. This approach acknowledges the power of social ties in attracting and retaining talent.

3. Onboard for social connection:

For all new hires, especially those without prior connections, design an onboarding process that intentionally fosters early social integration. This can include assigning peer mentors, facilitating formal and informal introductions to the team, and creating early opportunities for collaborative work. Building a sense of community for new educators should be considered as critical as any other form of professional training.

4. Leverage other retention drivers:

When sourcing candidates from general outreach platforms where pre-existing familiarity is absent, intentionally screen for the other retention drivers identified in this report to maximize likelihood of retention. This includes prioritizing candidates with prior early childhood education experience and those who demonstrate strong alignment with desired professional attributes, or "fit".

Key finding: Being Jewish is not necessary...



...for teacher retention

Context

Research from this study indicates that familiarity through direct social connections, such as being hired by referral or already knowing colleagues, is a significant driver of educator retention. This raises a related question: does a shared group identity, such as being Jewish in an ECJE setting, produce a similar effect on its own? This section explores that question. The analysis is based on director responses to a survey question identifying the religion of each hire.

Significant findings

The analysis found no statistically significant relationship between an educator being Jewish and their likelihood of retention. This finding holds true even when controlling for level of education; comparing Jewish and non-Jewish hires with associate's, bachelor's, or master's degrees revealed no significant difference in retention outcomes.

The data does, however, reveal a significant connection back to the theme of familiarity from Key Finding I: "Familiarity Matters." The analysis found that Jewish hires are sourced through referrals significantly more often than non-Jewish hires (chi-squared, $p=0.00$). This might suggest that the retention lift is associated with Jewish identity, but a deeper analysis proves otherwise. When comparing the retention outcomes of referred Jewish hires to referred non-Jewish hires, the difference was not statistically significant.

This clarifies the initial finding. The retention benefit is linked to the act of being referred by a trusted source, not to the shared religious identity of the candidate.

Implications for the field

Being Jewish is not necessary ...for teacher retention

While creating a welcoming environment where Jewish educators can feel a sense of belonging is intrinsically valuable, these findings suggest that religious or cultural identity in and of itself does not influence retention outcomes. The data indicates that other factors likely play a larger role in an educator's decision to stay long-term. As seen in our first key finding, personal connections to other employees at a center are highly influential. This, combined with factors like having prior experience in early childhood education and a strong alignment with the desired attributes for a specific role, appears to be far more critical for retention than identity alone. For ECJE centers focused on workforce stability, recruitment and retention strategies should prioritize these actionable factors over assumptions about shared identity.

Key finding: Experience matters



Context

An educator's professional background is a critical factor in their career trajectory. To understand its impact on retention, the 2024–2025 Academic Year Hiring Survey included a question inviting directors to identify a hire's prior work experience. The analysis for this finding is based on responses to this question, which included options such as "Another early childhood center or similar childcare environment," "Career switcher," "Nanny," "Recent Immigrant," and "Direct from school, no full-time work experience."

Significant findings

The analysis revealed a clear and statistically significant link between prior, relevant experience and retention. Hires with previous experience in another early childhood center had a retention rate of 84%, a 10-percentage-point increase over the 74% average for all hires (logistic regression, $p=0.04$). This indicates that familiarity with the unique demands of an early childhood classroom environment is a key factor in whether a new hire is retained.

Experience and education

To explore the interplay between experience, education, and age, Fierce conducted a cluster analysis to identify distinct educator profiles. The analysis revealed four groups with different retention outcomes.

The group with the highest retention rate (79.6%) was composed of experienced early childhood educators who held either a master's or an associate's degree, degrees that often signal a deliberate career choice in education. In contrast, the group with the lowest retention rate (60.4%) consisted of young, recent graduates with no prior experience, most of whom had as highest degree a high school diploma.

Statistical tests (t-tests) confirmed that the retention rate for the most experienced master's/associate's group was significantly higher than the rates for both the less-experienced, high-school-educated group ($p=0.03$) and the recent-bachelor's graduate group ($p=0.04$).

This suggests a nuanced finding: while prior ECE experience is significant on its own, its positive effect on retention is most pronounced among educators whose educational background (a master's degree or an associate's) signals a focused career path in early childhood education.



Related findings

To add further dimension to this finding, the analysis explored the nature of this experience more deeply.

1. Years of experience are not significant:

While the simple "yes/no" question of having worked in another ECE center was a significant predictor, a more granular question about the number of years of experience was not.[1]

2. Experience in Jewish centers is not significant:

The analysis explored if there was a difference between prior experience in a non-Jewish or general ECE center compared to a Jewish ECE. A chi-squared test showed a strong and statistically significant association between the two ($p=0.00$). This suggests that, for this sample, experience in the general ECE field is closely linked with experience in the Jewish ECE field.

3. Inexperienced educators need support:

Hires without any ECE experience were most often recent graduates, a finding that held even after controlling for role type (e.g., Assistant vs. Lead Teacher). This indicates that recent graduates, regardless of position, are especially in need of additional support as they enter the classroom.

Implications for the field Experience matters

The findings point to a clear directive for hiring and talent development: direct experience is an asset for retention, while lack of experience necessitates intentional support. Prioritizing candidates with early childhood backgrounds promotes stability, but focusing only on experience can narrow the talent pool and overlook promising newcomers. A balanced approach is essential for long-term success.

Considerations for action

1. Screen for experience:

During the hiring process, screen for relevant early childhood experience to identify candidates who are more likely to integrate smoothly and remain in their roles long-term.

2. Provide internships and apprenticeships:

For hires without prior early childhood experience, such as recent graduates or career switchers, provide work-based learning experiences such as internships and apprenticeships to help them build the confidence and job-specific skills crucial for success.

3. A balanced strategy:

Adopt a balanced talent strategy that pairs experience-based screening with a commitment to providing targeted support for less experienced hires. This ensures that promising new educators are developed, not overlooked, strengthening the overall talent pipeline for the future.

[1] This could be due to ambiguous wording in the survey, which asked for years of experience in "early childhood education or related" fields, potentially diluting the data with experience from adjacent but dissimilar fields.

Key finding: “Fit” influences retention



Context

Beyond experience and background, the intangible qualities of a candidate are frequently discussed in hiring, which we are calling “personal qualities fit.” To quantify this concept, the 2024–2025 Academic Year Hiring Survey asked directors to think back to the hiring interview and rate a hire on a 1-to-5 scale across five key characteristics: warmth/compassion, professional attitude, commitment to early childhood education, being a collaborative team player, and adaptability.

The analysis identified high multicollinearity among these five attributes, meaning they were so closely related that they were likely measuring a single underlying concept. To create a more reliable predictor, Fierce Outcomes engineered a new feature: a single numeric score representing the sum of the ratings across all five characteristics. This score serves as a proxy for the candidate's perceived alignment with the role's desired attributes.

Significant findings

The analysis revealed that this “personal qualities fit” score has a statistically significant, positive relationship with retention (logistic regression, $p=0.00$). In practical terms, hires with above-average alignment scores achieved retention rates ranging from 5-10 percentage points higher than the average.

However, it is critical to interpret this finding with caution. Directors were asked to recall their impressions from the initial interview well after the time of hire. Therefore, their responses could be colored by their subsequent experiences working with the employee, a phenomenon known as hindsight bias. A positive or negative employment outcome could unconsciously influence how a director “remembers” the candidate's initial attributes.

The holistic impression of a candidate

The high degree of multicollinearity found among the five character attributes (warmth, professionalism, etc.) confirms that they are not easily distinguishable from one another in practice. From a measurement perspective, the analysis found the attributes to be largely interchangeable. This reinforces the decision to combine them into a single “personal qualities fit” score, as it more accurately reflects that directors likely perceive these traits as a holistic package rather than as distinct, independent qualities.



Implications for the field

Fit influences retention

While the measurement of "personal qualities fit" in this study is subject to hindsight bias, the finding nonetheless suggests that a candidate's alignment with a school's desired professional and interpersonal attributes is a powerful driver of retention. The challenge for the field is to find reliable ways to assess these qualities prospectively, not retrospectively. Systematically evaluating alignment earlier in the hiring process could help improve workforce fit and reduce early turnover.

Considerations for action

Define and measure key attributes:

Incorporate a structured alignment-scoring system into the interview or application review process. Defining key attributes (like collaboration, adaptability, and commitment to the field) and evaluating all candidates against the same rubric can help prioritize those whose profiles best match the role's needs and the center's culture in a more objective, forward-looking manner.

Key finding: Onboarding is essential



Context

The initial period of employment is a critical window for integrating a new employee into the workplace culture and preparing them for their role. To measure the impact of this process, the 2024–2025 Academic Year Hiring Survey asked directors a direct question: "Did hire participate in formal onboarding before starting?" Directors could select from "Yes, full onboarding and training," "Yes, shortened onboarding and training due to constraints," or "No."

Related findings

To ensure the effect of onboarding was not simply a proxy for when an educator started their job, the analysis controlled for the hire's start date. Even after controlling for whether a hire started at the beginning or middle of the academic year, the lack of onboarding remained a statistically significant predictor of non-retention. This indicates that the importance of onboarding holds regardless of when a hire joins the center. Furthermore, mid-year hires as a group did not have significantly lower retention rates overall. It should be noted, however, that the retention period for these hires is shorter. Given the survey was administered in April and May 2025 for the 2024-2025 academic year, retention for a mid-year hire could reflect an employment period of only a few months. Even with this context, the data suggests that centers with higher retention may be successfully providing some form of onboarding or integration support to all hires, regardless of when they start.



Significant findings

The analysis demonstrates that the absence of onboarding has a significant negative relationship with retention. Hires who received no formal onboarding had a retention rate a full 18 percentage points lower than the average for all hires. This finding is statistically significant (logistic regression, $p=0.05$) and represents the largest difference in retention rates observed across all key findings in this study. Interestingly, the analysis found no statistically significant difference in retention outcomes between hires who received a "full" onboarding and those who received a "shortened" one. This indicates that the critical factor is the presence of a formal onboarding process itself, rather than its duration.

Implications for the field

Onboarding is essential

The data sends an unequivocal message: formal onboarding is a foundational element of a successful retention strategy. Skipping this crucial step can leave new hires feeling unprepared and disconnected, significantly increasing the likelihood of an early exit. To build a stable and effective team, ECJE centers must view onboarding as a mission-critical investment.

Considerations for action

Onboard every employee: Prioritize and implement a formal onboarding process for all new hires, regardless of their prior experience. Given its dramatic effect on retention, ensuring every employee participates should be a non-negotiable part of the hiring cycle.

Use onboarding to build relationships: Design onboarding programs that intentionally build social capital, directly addressing the core insight from the "Familiarity Matters" finding. By incorporating relationship-building elements like peer buddies, structured team introductions, and scheduled check-ins, schools can help create the sense of belonging for new hires that referred candidates often have from day one. This helps all employees, regardless of how they were sourced, feel supported, valued, and socially integrated from the very beginning.



What we didn't find, and why



In predictive modeling, the factors that do not emerge as statistically significant are often as instructive as those that do. While our initial hypotheses suggested that compensation, benefits, and age would be strong predictors of retention, the analysis found that these variables did not have a direct, statistically significant relationship with retention outcomes, even when controlling for position type, geographic region, age range, religious affiliation, highest education level, and start date / date the position was filled. This section explores these "non-findings" and the critical context behind them, primarily, that the influence of these factors is often captured by other, more powerful variables in the model.

No significant relationship was found between pay or benefits and retention – but that doesn't mean they don't matter.

The survey invited directors to share information on a hire's compensation and to indicate which benefits they received from a comprehensive list, including health insurance, retirement plans, and paid leave.

Despite this data, the analysis found no direct, statistically significant relationship between pay levels or individual benefits and educator retention. When tested individually against retention outcomes, none of the specific benefits emerged as a significant factor. For instance, key benefits such as health insurance (chi-squared, $p=1.00$), retirement plans (chi-squared, $p=0.38$), paid vacation (chi-squared, $p=0.32$), and professional learning reimbursement (chi-squared, $p=0.44$) all showed no statistical correlation with whether an educator was retained.

One of the most likely reasons for this, particularly regarding overall compensation, is a statistical concept known as multicollinearity. In this case, pay is highly correlated with other variables in the model, such as an educator's highest attained education, their specific role in the center, and their prior ECE experience. Because these factors overlap, it is difficult for a statistical model to isolate the unique contribution of pay. Its impact is likely real but is effectively "masked" by these other powerful predictors. To account for regional economic differences, the analysis also incorporated US Census state-level cost of living data as a control variable when testing pay's impact. Even when controlling for cost of living, pay did not emerge as a statistically significant predictor of retention.

Considerations for action

Continue to offer competitive compensation and benefits. While not a direct predictor in this model, fair pay is a foundational component of a quality job and is essential for attracting talent in the first place. Its impact is intertwined with, not replaced by, other factors.

What we didn't find, and why



Age alone did not have a significant relationship with retention, but it could be acting as a proxy for experience.

The survey also collected data on the age of each hire. The analysis found that age, on its own, was not a significant predictor of retention.

There was one exception: the 35–44 age group showed a marginally significant association with retention (chi-squared, $p=0.06$). However, a deeper look revealed that educators in this age bracket were also significantly more likely to have prior experience in another early childhood center (chi-squared, $p=0.03$). This strongly suggests that age is not the driver but is instead acting as a proxy for relevant professional experience. This reinforces the finding from section 5, that hands-on ECE experience is a key predictor of retention.

Considerations for action

When hiring, look beyond age to the underlying attribute that truly matters: relevant experience. Rather than using age as a shorthand for stability, focus on identifying the specific professional background and skills that, as the data shows, directly contribute to higher retention.

It is critical to interpret these "non-findings" with care. Just because factors like pay, benefits, and age did not emerge as primary statistical drivers in this model does not mean they should be ignored. For these factors, the issue of multicollinearity suggests they are part of a complex, interconnected web of influences where a higher salary is often tied to deeper experience, and age is often a stand-in for that same experience. Similarly, the lack of a clear link between director training and educator retention points not to the irrelevance of professional development, but to a potential gap between learning and implementation. This suggests an opportunity to design training that is more readily translated into practice and better equipped to address the specific challenges that impact retention.



A practical framework for building, supporting, and retaining educators in Jewish early childhood centers.

1

Attracting and Recruiting Candidates

Implement a Structured Referral Program

- Create incentives (recognition, bonuses, small stipends) for staff, parents, and community members who refer strong candidates.
- Tap into professional networks and synagogue/community channels intentionally.

Activate Existing Networks

- Ask current staff to share openings within their professional and social circles.
- Prioritize referred applicants, given their higher likelihood of long-term retention.

2

Screening and Hiring Practices

Screen for Relevant Early Childhood Experience

- Ask targeted questions to assess classroom/childcare experience.
- Use experience as a predictor of smoother integration and retention.

Define and Measure Key “Fit” Attributes

- Use a uniform scoring rubric across interviews/applications.
- Evaluate for attributes such as collaboration, adaptability, and commitment to Jewish early childhood education.

Improving Retention for Early Childhood Educators

Positive predictors

+11%
with referral

+10%
knowing other
employees

+10%
previous ECE
experience

+5%
with master’s or
associate’s degree

+5-10%
“fit” with key attributes

3 Growing Future Educators

Provide Support for Inexperienced Hires

- Create apprenticeships, internships, or mentoring tracks for graduates/career changers.
- Pair inexperienced hires with veteran colleagues to build confidence and skills.

Adopt a Balanced Strategy

- Combine experienced hires with intentional investment in developing new talent.
- Ensure the long-term educator pipeline stays healthy and sustainable.

4 Onboarding & Belonging

Formal Onboarding for Every Employee

- Make onboarding universal and non-negotiable.
- Cover role expectations, culture, and mission.

Onboard for Social Connection

- Assign peer mentors or “buddies.”
- Structure introductions to staff and community.
- Create early opportunities for collaboration.
- Goal: Build belonging, not just knowledge.

5 Retention Foundations

Leverage Multiple Retention Drivers

- For candidates without prior connections, ensure strong screening for experience and “fit.”
- Reinforce support through coaching or PD.

Offer Competitive Compensation & Benefits

- Benchmark salaries and benefits locally and nationally.
- Communicate fairness and transparency as part of your culture.

Improving Retention for Early Childhood Educators

No impact

0%

- Jewish/Non-Jewish
- years experience
- experience in Jewish ECE vs. general ECE

Negative Predictor

-18%

without onboarding

-14%

recent HS or college graduate without experience

About ElevatEd

ElevatEd is a groundbreaking national initiative transforming early childhood Jewish education (ECJE) by addressing the critical shortage of early childhood educators through innovative recruitment, training, mentoring, and support. Launched in 2023 as a five-year pilot, ElevatEd is a collaborative project of the Jewish Community Centers Association of North America (JCC Association), Jewish Federations of North America (JFNA), and the Union for Reform Judaism (URJ), funded by major philanthropies including the Jim Joseph Foundation, Crown Family Philanthropies, and the Samuels Family Foundation.

Focused on professionalizing the field, ElevatEd strives to bring more than 500 new educators into ECJE across communities nationwide by providing personalized learning curricula, mentorship, financial support, and career development. ElevatEd pioneers bold solutions to empower educators who nurture young children and engage families, ensuring the vitality and continuity of Jewish life for generations to come.



Uplifting early childhood
Jewish educators and
their communities.

A revolutionary partnership in early childhood Jewish education

