Meaningful Inclusion of Students with Disabilities in Jewish Supplementary Schools

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Meaningful Inclusion of Students with Disabilities in Jewish Supplementary Schools

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This research is dedicated to:

My father Bud who taught me the value of an education and dreamed that his children would attend college

My mother Hannah and step-father Harold who shared my father’s dream and enabled my sisters and me to have a college education

My children Beth and Scott who taught me so much about patience, perseverance and working for something you really want in life

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Abstract

This basic qualitative research study describes how Jewish supplementary school directors and educators define inclusion, include students with disabilities in their religious school education programs, identify different components of the schools that benefit inclusion, and understand barriers that impede inclusion. Through in-depth interviews with Jewish supplementary school directors and educators, the study explored three important goals. The study first explored how Jewish supplementary school directors and educators define meaningful inclusion, and how they perceive their inclusive classrooms enable students with disabilities to have meaningful access to both academic information and socialization with their same-age peers who do not have disabilities. Next, the study investigated which educational, organizational, personnel, and congregational components of Jewish supplementary schools the directors and educators perceived as contributing to the meaningful inclusion of students with disabilities. Finally, the study sought to uncover what Jewish supplementary school directors and educators perceive as barriers to inclusion of students with disabilities with their same-age peers. The study found that participants identified five significant themes that promote inclusion: believing in the importance of inclusion; having a philosophy about inclusion; all stakeholders must support inclusion; social interactions help create inclusion; and Jewish supplementary school directors and educators promote social interactions more than academics within their classes and programs to advance inclusion. The absence of these themes are barriers to inclusion.

Keywords: Jewish supplementary schools, Jewish religious schools, Jewish students with disabilities, inclusion, meaningful inclusion, inclusive religious school
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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Most Americans believe religion is important in their lives (Carter, 2007). A survey conducted by the National Organization of Disability/Harris Interactive (2004) reported that 84% of adults with and without disabilities believe religious faith is either somewhat important or very important to them (National Organization on Disability/Harris Interactive, 2004). Having the ability to express their faith appears to be meaningful for people with disabilities and their families (Griffin, Kane, Taylor, Francis, & Hodapp, 2012). For people with disabilities, being a member of a religious community can enrich their lives by encouraging self-determination and increasing community inclusion (Carter, 2007). Recognizing the relevance of faith and participation in faith communities for people with disabilities and their families, organizations such as the American Association for Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities, TASH, and The Arc have issued position papers on spirituality and its expression for people with disabilities (Griffin et al., 2012). Houses of worship can offer people with disabilities many avenues to become integrated into their faith community (McNair & Smith, 1998): they can attend worship services, participate in congregational communal meals, join social groups, hold positions of leadership in the congregation or social groups, and/or participate in educational opportunities.

One way children and adolescents can become part of a faith community is to attend religious school (Sunday school) with their same-age peers. Jewish religious schools are often called Jewish supplementary schools and are defined as “programs that
meet on weekends and/or weekday afternoons when students have completed their
general studies schooling and that enroll the majority of children receiving a Jewish
education” (Wertheimer, 2009, p. XI). By attending Jewish supplementary schools,
Jewish children and youth can learn about Judaism while building friendships with peers.
In this study, the terms Jewish supplementary school, congregational school, and
religious school will be interchangeable.

**Students with Disabilities**

This research will utilize the definition of disability that is used in the Individuals
with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) to define students in Jewish supplementary
schools who would benefit from special education and/or related services. According to
IDEA 2004, a student with a disability is a student who has been evaluated through a
nondiscriminatory evaluation and is determined to have:

- Intellectual disability,
- a hearing impairment (including deafness),
- a speech or language impairment,
- a visual impairment (including blindness),
- a serious emotional disturbance,
- an orthopedic impairment,
- autism,
- traumatic brain injury,
- an other health impairment,
- a specific learning disability,
- deaf-blindness, or
- multiple disabilities, and who by reason thereof, needs special education and

Because Jewish supplementary schools do not test children for educational
disabilities, the children are usually identified as having a disability through testing from
their school district or through a private psychologist. In order for religious schools to
know about the student’s learning profile, parents need to share their child’s diagnosis
and/or IEP with the schools. There are many reasons parents may choose not to share
information about their child’s diagnosis and/or IEP. Sometimes parents are reluctant to share that information with Jewish supplementary schools because they want the schools to see their child’s strengths and not just the child’s disability (Christensen, Simon, Gettes, Zimmerman, & Remz, 2009). Parents may believe that their child’s IEP is only pertinent for the curriculum at secular school and would not be applicable for the religious school curriculum (Miller-Jacobs, 2008). Parents may also choose to have an educational setting where peers do not view their child as the special education student who takes medicine to get through the day (Miller-Jacobs, 2008). These reasons for not sharing their child’s diagnosis and/or IEP are especially pertinent if the parents’ goal for their child in religious school is to build social connections and the parents are less concerned about the child mastering academic information (Miller-Jacobs, 2008).

Another reason parents do not share information on their child’s diagnosis and/or IEP is that the child’s disability is not diagnosed because the parents do not want a formal diagnosis or treatment for their child (Shefter, L., Uhrman, A. L., Tobin, L., & Kress, J. S., 2017)

**Meaningful Inclusion**

Meaningful inclusion is a term that can be defined in many ways. For this study, the term meaningful inclusion will be defined using a modified version of the Policy Statement on Inclusion of Children with Disabilities in Early Childhood Programs that was crafted by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and the U.S. Department of Education (2015). Meaningful inclusion will be defined as:

- Including children with disabilities…, together with their peers without disabilities; holding high expectations and intentionally promoting participation in
all learning and social activities, facilitated by individualized accommodations; and...foster[ing] their development (cognitive, language, communication, physical, behavioral, and social-emotional), friendships with peers, and a sense of belonging. This applies to all...children with disabilities, from those with the mildest disabilities to those with the most significant disabilities. (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services & U.S. Department of Education, 2015, p. 5)

Additionally, meaningful inclusion enables students with disabilities to hear, participate in, and learn from the rich curriculum discussions and interactions among students and their instructors that occur in the classroom. Meaningful inclusion could help the student form a Jewish identity as well as build friendships and a sense of community with peers who do not have disabilities leading to full class membership and participation for students of all abilities.

**Research Problem**

There are approximately 900,000 children who are raised exclusively within the Jewish religion in the United States (Lipka, 2013). Approximately 402,447 students in grades one through twelve attend classes for their Jewish education (Schick, 2004; Wertheimer, 2008). Most children receive their Jewish education at Jewish supplementary schools (Kraus, 2008; Wertheimer, 2008). During the 2006-2007 academic year, the estimated number of students in grades one through twelve who attended Jewish supplementary schools in the United States was approximately 230,000 (Wertheimer, 2008). This number is substantially higher than the 172,447 students grades one through twelve who attended Jewish Day schools [Jewish parochial schools]
during the 2003-2004 academic year (Schick, 2004). At this point in time, there appears to be no known published information concerning how many students with disabilities receive their Jewish education from religious schools.

Although there seem to be no known studies in peer-reviewed academic journals that have researched whether students with disabilities attend Jewish supplementary schools and if so how they are educated and included within these schools, there is information from informal studies and articles that suggests that students with disabilities are attending religious schools (Christensen et al., 2009; Kopelowitz, 2013). Including children with disabilities in synagogues and religious schools is a priority in many Jewish communities and some Jewish communities in the United States and Canada have crafted specialized education and inclusive programs for students with disabilities (Christensen et al., 2009). There are basically four main branches of Judaism: the Orthodox branch is the most observant and adhere to all rituals; the Reform branch is the most liberal and least tied to ritual; the Conservative branch is between Orthodox and Reform in that they practice rituals but are more liberal than Orthodox; and Reconstructive branch that utilizes components of the other three and emphasizes cultural and historical aspects of the Jewish people. According to a survey of Jewish parents whose children with disabilities attended one of the Conservative branch of Judaism’s summer overnight camps, 73% reported they send their child with a disability to a Jewish supplementary school educational program during the academic school year (Kopelowitz, 2013). In an undated study by Winer, Aron, and Perman (n.d.) that surveyed temples affiliated with the Reform branch of Judaism concerning the 2015-2016 academic year, the authors noted that Reform temples have a “growing awareness of learners with disabilities [and
that some congregations are hiring inclusion specialists in order to address the needs of learners with disabilities” (Winer et al., n.d., p. 10). Winer, Aron, and Perman also discovered that at least eight reform congregations have inclusion specialists on staff and four more congregations were in the process of creating an inclusion specialist position to facilitate inclusion for their religious communities (Winer et al., n.d.) which could include their religious school. Currently, there are no known published research studies that confirm whether these synagogues and temples are typical or atypical for accepting students with disabilities in their religious schools. There also seem to be no known studies that confirm whether students with disabilities are educated in an inclusive or segregated setting within their Jewish supplementary school. However, at least one Jewish supplementary school appears to use resource rooms as noted in an article by Rigler, (2018) “…we had students with special needs who would go to a resource room, though we learned that their parents often did not want them removed from the class” (p. 3).

Inclusion is more than just a set of policies and practices (Hall, Dunlap, Causton-Theoharis, & Theoharis, 2013). Educators have learned that just allowing students with disabilities to attend school in a general education classroom, as opposed to a segregated special education classroom, does not mean they will master the curricula or create friendships with their same-age peers who do not have disabilities. Inclusion does not mean that students with and without disabilities are sitting next to each other in class. “Instead it must address the needs of the student being included, as well as the impacts on the greater learning environment” (Kochhar, West, & Taymans, 2000, p. 3). Inclusion is a belief system shared by the school community that welcomes all students to learn, and
because of the diversity among students, no single approach to learning is optimal for every learner (Friend, 2006). For inclusion to be successful, schools must be willing to support students with disabilities so they are able to succeed in the general education classroom (Kochhar et al., 2000). The same would hold true for the inclusion of students with disabilities in Jewish supplementary schools; the schools must be willing to provide the supports and/or services that will allow students with disabilities to succeed both academically and socially in their classrooms. Because children with disabilities are attending Jewish supplementary schools, it is important to understand how Jewish supplementary schools create inclusive classrooms to ensure that students with disabilities are meaningfully participating in their religious education program.

**Conceptual Framework**

The conceptual framework for this study is Vygotsky’s (1978) theory of the interaction between learning and development. Vygotsky believed that learning and development are interconnected but learning appears before development and children learn new skills through interactions with adults or more skilled peers (Vygotsky, 1978). Vygotsky argued that learners have two developmental levels. He identified the first level as the actual developmental level and described it as the “level of development of a child’s mental functions that has been established as a result of certain already completed developmental cycles” (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 37). The second level he labeled the zone of proximal development and described it as the “distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers” (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 38). He believed the zone of
proximal development described mental functions, which were in the process of maturing and would be mature in the near future (Vygotsky, 1978). Vygotsky believed a child’s mental development is a combination of the actual development and the zone of proximal development (Vygotsky, 1978). According to his theory, Vygotsky argued that learning was enhanced by working together with someone who is more skilled; either an adult or a more competent peer. He also believed the mental function that a child is able to complete with assistance would become a function the child would be able to complete independently imminently (Vygotsky, 1978). Using Vygotsky’s concept of the zone of proximal development, the learning process precedes the developmental process since children can accomplish tasks with assistance before they can complete them independently (Vygotsky, 1978).

Vygotsky believed that social interactions are extremely important for the learning and development processes and that children adapt to their environment and learn through social interactions with others (Vygotsky & Luria, 1934). He noted that “interactions provide the source of development of a child’s voluntary behavior” (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 39). This is explained by the fact that children learn to accomplish tasks through interactions with an adult or a more accomplished peer before they can complete the task by themselves. Vygotsky believed that a crucial feature of learning is that it creates the zone of proximal development and that learning stimulates a collection of “internal developmental processes that are able to operate only when the child is interacting with people in his environment and in cooperation with his peers. Once these processes are internalized, they become part of the child’s independent developmental achievement” (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 40).
Utilizing Vygotsky’s theory, it is possible that students with disabilities who attend inclusive classrooms may acquire more information and skills than students with disabilities who are learning in segregated classrooms because there is access to a wider variety of students, which may include students who could help them learn through the zone of proximal development. The converse could also be true such that students with disabilities could teach information and skills to their peers without disabilities. Vygotsky’s theory of social learning has been utilized in different approaches to teaching students with disabilities such as Peer Support Strategies and Peer-assisted Learning. Both methods use same-aged peers to teach students with disabilities. Carter, Cushing, and Kennedy, (2009) state that “students often learn best from peers” (Carter et al., 2009, p. 49). Perhaps when students with disabilities are included and supported in Jewish supplementary school classes with their same-age peers without disabilities, all students may be able to maximize their learning through Vygotsky’s zone of proximal development by acquiring skills, tasks, concepts, and processes through interactions with peers and teachers who are more knowledgeable in a particular area.

**Purpose Statement and Research Questions**

The purpose of this basic qualitative research study was to understand how Jewish supplementary school directors and educators define meaningful inclusion, how students with disabilities are meaningfully included in Jewish supplementary schools with their same-age peers, what educational, organizational, personnel, and congregational components contribute to inclusion, and what barriers impede inclusion in Jewish supplementary schools.

The research questions for this study were as follows:
1. How do Jewish supplementary school directors and educators define meaningful inclusion and in what ways do they perceive they have provided meaningful inclusion to their students with disabilities?

   a. In what ways do Jewish supplementary school directors and educators define meaningful *academic inclusion* and how do they perceive they have provided (meaningful) *academic inclusion* for their students with disabilities in their programs with same-age peers?

   b. In what ways do Jewish supplementary school directors and educators define meaningful *social inclusion* and how do they perceive they have provided (meaningful) *social inclusion* for their students with disabilities in their programs with same-age peers?

2. What educational, organizational, personnel, and congregational components do Jewish supplementary school directors and educators perceive as contributing to the meaningful inclusion of students with disabilities?

   a. What educational components (e.g., teaching methods, activities, curricula, instructional materials, and field trips) do Jewish supplementary school directors and educators perceive as beneficial for including students with disabilities academically and socially with their same-age peers in Jewish supplementary schools?

   b. What organizational components (e.g., the decisions directors make that impact teachers and instruction, directors’ leadership style, and building accessibility) do Jewish supplementary school directors and educators perceive as supporting inclusion for students with
disabilities in Jewish supplementary school programs with their same-age peers?
c. How do Jewish supplementary school directors and educators perceive the experiences of their personnel (e.g., beliefs, attitudes, training, directing/teaching experience, experiences with school inclusion, and experiences with people who have disabilities not in a school setting) in supporting inclusion for students with disabilities in their programs with same-age peers?
d. What supports do Jewish supplementary school directors and educators perceive the congregation provides to the school for including students with disabilities in their programs with same-age peers?

3. What barriers do Jewish supplementary school directors and educators perceive as impeding the meaningful inclusion of students with disabilities in religious school programs?

Researcher Experience

It is important to describe why I am interested in this topic and to expose any biases that I might have which could influence my collection and analysis of the data for this research project. I am a former Jewish supplementary school educator who taught for approximately 19 years in inclusive religious school classrooms. I am also the parent of an adult child with developmental disabilities who attended the Jewish supplementary school where I taught. My experience of teaching in an inclusive religious school was positive in the fact that all the directors I worked under believed in including students
with disabilities in their programs. However, I will need to bracket, or temporarily set aside, my experiences so that they do not contribute to bias or assumptions which could shape my expectations, influence my view of reality, or cause me to make judgments about what is appropriate or not appropriate regarding methods of inclusion in religious schools as I collect and analyze the data from this study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Nevertheless, in qualitative research it is difficult to completely remove the researcher from the study. Since the qualitative researcher is an essential part of both the research process and the results of the study, the researcher is always part of the study (Galdas, 2017). “The concern instead should be whether the researcher has been transparent and reflexive (i.e., critically self-reflective about their own preconceptions, relationship dynamics, and analytic focus…) about the processes by which data have been collected, analyzed, and presented” (Galdas, 2017, p. 2).

Because I have strong connections to both being an educator in an inclusive Jewish supplementary school and a parent of an adult child who has developmental disabilities, there were multiple strategies that I used to control for my bias so it did not influence my work. I used memos to record my thoughts and reviewed them for bias; I sought out contradictory information to make sure there were no other explanations for the results of my analysis; and I consulted with a group of qualitative researchers that I met with periodically and had them look for any bias in the questions for my interviews. By exploring and acknowledging my experiences, I hope to inform people of the biases I might bring to the study while I concede that all studies have inherent biases (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).
Significance of the Study

This study could have the ability to add scholarly research on how Jewish supplementary schools are providing inclusion for their students with disabilities and what impedes inclusion for students with disabilities. At this point in time, there is little academic research on children with disabilities in any type of Jewish educational programs (Isaacs & Levine, 1995; Olson, 2017; Ross, 2012). There is evidence that some Jewish supplementary schools accept students with disabilities into their religious education programs which has been documented in magazine articles and a few informal studies (Christensen et al., 2009; Kopelowitz, 2013; Winer et al., n.d). Currently there are few if any known studies on how students with disabilities are included in their religious school programs in peer-reviewed academic journals. This seems to indicate that rigorous scholarly research has not yet been completed on this topic. When discussing the dearth of research in Jewish special education, Novick and Glanz (2011) note “…the lack of research provides an array of exciting, relevant, and rewarding opportunities for serious scholarly investigation” (p. 1035).

This research study could identify different methods of meaningful academic and social inclusion for students with many types of abilities since there is no single method of teaching that is ideal for every student (Friend, 2006). It is important to understand and document how meaningful inclusion works within Jewish supplementary schools and my goal is to make the information available to Jewish communities as quickly as possible. Once this information is accessible to Jewish communities, Jewish supplementary schools who do not have students with disabilities meaningfully included in their programs may choose to utilize some of the methods of inclusion cited in the
study if they appear to have similar communities and student populations. Religious school directors and educators can use the thick, rich description of the study participants and their school settings to discern whether their schools could benefit from the methods of meaningful academic and social inclusion that are identified in the study. It is also possible that the findings from this study may apply to religious schools of other denominations who would like to create programs and classrooms that provide meaningful inclusion to students with disabilities if their communities and student populations are similar. Parents do not want their children in inclusive classrooms “if it means babysitting their children. Inclusion is good if it is meaningful, if children are learning” (Christensen et al., 2009, p. 80). For Jewish supplementary school programs to create meaningful inclusion for students with disabilities, not only do the children with disabilities need to be learning, they must be accepted by their peers without disabilities as integral members of the class. Because so many Jewish children, including children with disabilities, obtain their Jewish education through supplementary schools and since there seems to be a dearth of research information about meaningful inclusion in religious schools, conducting a rigorous study on how meaningful inclusion is accomplished could be one of the first pieces of scholarly research on this subject.

There are students attending Jewish supplementary schools who could benefit from individualized instruction and supports. Most people probably do not realize how many students have disabilities that qualify them for special education. Special education refers to individualized instruction that is tailored to the unique learning needs of the student (Turnbull, Turnbull, Wehmeyer, & Shogren, 2016). According to Berkman & Cohen (2013), there are approximately 200,000 Jewish children with disabilities in the
United States; a number that was gathered by Matan, an organization that trains teachers who work in Jewish supplementary and Jewish day schools in inclusive teaching practices.

When people think of the term inclusion, they often think of students with disabilities who require a significant amount of support attending classes with peers who do not have disabilities. However, there are other students in the class with disabilities who require individualized instruction and/or supports for them to learn optimally, and these students only need minimal or moderate support. According to the National Center for Education Statistics, 13% of all public-school students ages three to twenty-one receive special education services. Theoretically that would mean that approximately 13% of all Jewish supplementary school students would have educational needs that require individualized instruction and/or supports and/or services. Using that information, of the approximately 230,000 students who attend Jewish supplementary schools throughout the United States, approximately 29,900 students would qualify for special education services. For every classroom of 20 students, an average of 2.6 children would qualify for special education services. Most Jewish supplementary schools provide education for children from grades Pre-kindergarten through tenth grade. In a school with one class per grade there would be approximately 28.6 students who would qualify for special education services.

However, the number of students attending Jewish supplementary schools who have some type of learning issue may be higher. In an article written for the New Jersey Jewish News, Rubin (2009) quotes Eliot Spack, a former executive director of the Coalition for the Advancement of Jewish Education as saying “All of the clergy and
principals acknowledged close to 20 percent of their students had some type of learning
disability” (p. 1). In a personal conversation with the education director of a Jewish
supplementary school in the Midwest, the director told me that 29 percent of the students
in their religious school have some type of learning issue: they have an IEP
(Individualized Education Plan), a 504 Plan which mandates schools to provide
educational supports and eliminate educational barriers, or attend a school that specializes
in teaching students skills to offset specific learning disabilities. It is possible that these
Jewish supplementary schools have higher percentages of students with learning
difficulties because they include students who have 504 plans and those who attend
specialized schools as opposed to only those who receive specialized instruction and/or
services and/or supports in public school from their IEP. It is also possible that Jewish
supplementary schools have a higher proportion of students with learning difficulties
because these students may require more support and so were not accepted in Jewish day
schools because the day schools do not have the resources to provide an appropriate
education for children with certain types of learning difficulties. It is currently unknown
what the real percentage of students with learning issues is in Jewish supplementary
schools. Taking into account these higher percentages of students with learning
difficulties (20 to 29 percent), there are many students in Jewish supplementary schools
who could benefit from individualized instruction.

Meaningful inclusion within the general education religious school classroom
utilizing individualized instruction and supports could benefit students with disabilities
by helping them acquire new information, skills, and social abilities in a more effective
and efficient manner. It is very possible that creating instructional strategies and
accommodations for students with unique learning needs will benefit all the students in the class. Many of the strategies and accommodations utilized with students who have disabilities are also helpful to students who do not have disabilities (Miller-Jacobs, 2008). Inclusive general education religious school classrooms might also create classrooms where students of all abilities have full membership within the classroom culture. It is important for Jewish supplementary schools to create appropriate services and supports for students with disabilities so they can be included in the general education religious school classroom. When students with disabilities are educated in a segregated setting, students of all abilities miss the opportunity to learn information, skills, and concepts within a social context from more skilled peers and educators. Meaningful inclusion enables students with disabilities to hear, participate in, share their knowledge, and learn from the rich curriculum, discussions, and interactions among students and instructors that occur in the classrooms as well as build friendships and a sense of community with their peers without disabilities.

Understanding how Jewish supplementary schools create meaningful inclusive classrooms so students of all abilities can comprehend the curriculum and participate in social activities with their peers could also be useful for institutions that train Jewish educators and supplementary school directors. If Jewish educators and directors need more instruction in creating inclusive programs, the training institutions may wish to add courses on designing inclusive programs to their curriculum. Currently, at least two Jewish teacher training programs believe Jewish educators desire more training on how to implement inclusion within Jewish educational institutions (Hebrew College, n.d.; Kress & Uhrman, 2018). Hebrew College, a pluralistic Jewish college, offers a certificate in
Jewish special education as well as a master degree in Jewish education with a concentration in Jewish special education (Hebrew College, n.d.). The Jewish Theological Seminary, one of the Conservative branch of Judaism’s educational institutions initiated a concentration for disability inclusion and advocacy within their master’s program in Jewish education which began in the fall of 2018 (Kress & Uhrman, 2018).

Inclusive classrooms may also help students with disabilities find jobs when they become adults. When students attend Jewish supplementary school classes with peers of all abilities they have the opportunity to get to know each other, spend time together, create positive memories with each other, and realize that they may have common interests. These opportunities could contribute to creating life-long friendships. By creating friendships, inclusive classrooms could generate friendship networks which may help students with disabilities find jobs as adults. According to Flexer, Baer, Luft, and Simmons (2013) “…research indicates that self-friend-family networks account for more than 80 percent of the jobs obtained by students [with disabilities] after graduation [from high school]” (p. 194). Another way inclusive classrooms may contribute to helping people with disabilities find jobs is that after having successful relationships with people who have disabilities in religious school, employers may choose to hire people with disabilities for jobs in their companies. Finding employment is important for people with disabilities as they have a higher unemployment rate when compared with people who do not have a disability. From information gathered in 2018, the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics reported that the employment-population ratio- the proportion of the population that is employed- for people with disabilities was 19.1 percent. This is a much lower rate
than the employment-population ratio for people who do not have a disability which was 65.9 percent (Bureau of Labor Statistics, U.S. Department of Labor, 2019).

**Delimitations**

This basic qualitative research study took place between January 2020 and December 2021. The study was comprised of in-depth semi-structured interviews. The study’s goal was to interview a religious school director and an educator from each Jewish supplementary school. However, because of Covid-19, that was not always possible. During the interviews, the researcher gathered some demographic information about the participants and then asked the participant open-ended questions from the interview protocol. The in-depth semi-structured interviews were completed through Skype because of Covid-19. The sample of the study consisted of directors and educators from Jewish supplementary schools in different areas of the United States. The interviews were concerned with how Jewish supplementary school directors and educators defined inclusion, perceived they included students with disabilities in their educational programs, whether they perceived that educational, organizational, personnel, and congregational components contributed to inclusion, and what barriers they perceived as impeding inclusion at their schools.

**Organization of the Study**

This study is organized into five chapters, a bibliography, and the appendices in the following manner. Chapter 1 is the introduction to the topic of how Jewish supplementary schools create inclusive classrooms to ensure that students with disabilities are meaningfully participating in their religious education program. Chapter 2 presents a review of the related literature describing Jewish supplementary schools and
inclusion of students with disabilities in schools. Because there are few if any articles on inclusion within Jewish supplementary schools in peer-reviewed academic journals, the information discusses inclusion within public schools and utilizes some information on inclusion from Jewish summer camps and Jewish day schools. Chapter 3 describes the research design and methodology of the study. It describes the interview protocol used to gather the data, the procedures followed, and the criteria for the sample selected for the study. Chapter 4 will include an analysis of the data and a discussion of the findings of the study. The summary, conclusions, and recommendations of the study will be described in Chapter 5. The study concludes with a bibliography and appendices.

Summary

Many Jewish children and youth learn about their religion and heritage by attending Jewish supplementary schools. Students with disabilities also attend Jewish supplementary schools but there is little if any information in peer-reviewed academic journals as to whether these students are taught in segregated or inclusive classrooms with their peers without disabilities and how meaningful inclusion takes place in the programs that have inclusion.

The setting where a student receives his or her education is important according to Vygotsky’s sociocultural theory of development since children and youth learn through interactions with adults or peers who are more skilled at the tasks they are learning. Employing Vygotsky’s theory, students of all abilities who attend schools in inclusive settings might learn skills and concepts more quickly since they have access to teachers and peers who may be more capable to help them learn specific skills and concepts. However, just being in a classroom with peers without disabilities does not mean the
classroom is inclusive for students with disabilities. For Jewish supplementary schools to practice meaningful inclusion, they must be willing to provide specialized education and the supports and/or services that will allow students with disabilities to succeed both academically and socially in their classrooms. The purpose of this study is to understand how students with disabilities are meaningfully included in Jewish supplementary schools with their same-age peers, what educational, organizational, personnel, and congregational components contribute to meaningful inclusion, and what barriers impede meaningful inclusion in Jewish supplementary schools.

CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The review of the literature weaves together information from two different sources of inclusive education; one from public schools and the other from Jewish supplementary schools. The goal is for the reader to have a broad picture of inclusion as well as how it has developed in Jewish supplementary schools. Since there is minimal if any research in peer-reviewed academic journals on how Jewish supplementary schools provide specialized education, and/or supports, and/or services to students with disabilities in inclusive classrooms to ensure students are meaningfully participating in their religious educational programs, much of the information gathered on inclusion comes from studies about inclusion in public schools. Additional information about inclusion in the Jewish community comes from the areas of camping and Jewish day schools.

The review of the literature will define inclusion and least restrictive environment, describe how friendships are an important part of life, discuss some of the main barriers to inclusion, explain why every child has the right to be included in the classroom, review
the benefits of inclusion, consider pull-out programs/resource rooms, and present some
evidence-based methods of inclusion that could be appropriate for Jewish supplementary
schools. The review will also explain the importance of religious education in Judaism,
discuss Judaism’s historical acceptance of disability, describe Jewish supplementary
schools, depict the alienation from the Jewish community of families with children and
adolescents who have disabilities, enumerate components of Jewish supplementary
school that can enhance inclusion, and discuss ways to change the culture in Jewish
supplementary schools. The chapter will end with a discussion of the feasibility for
Jewish supplementary schools to design an inclusive program for their students when it is
typically an educational program that only meets a few hours per week during the
academic school year. The review of the literature is organized thematically to
understand information about inclusion and Jewish supplementary schools, and then
consider how inclusion could be utilized in Jewish religious schools.

**Definition of Inclusion and Least Restrictive Environment**

For children with disabilities in the United States, inclusion “refers to the
commitment to educate each child, to the maximum extent appropriate, in the school or
classroom he or she would otherwise attend. It involves bringing support services to the
child, rather than moving the child to the support services” (United States Department of
Education, 2008, p. 2). One important fact to note about this definition of inclusion is
that it does not mandate that students with disabilities must be educated with peers
without disabilities all the time. By using the phrase “to the maximum extent
appropriate” (United States Department of Education, 2008, p. 2), schools and parents
working together have the ability to decide the extent of time that students with
disabilities will be in classrooms with their peers without disabilities.

There is another model of inclusion, called full inclusion, which has several
different definitions. Many professionals believe that for full inclusion to occur, students
with disabilities are educated completely within the general education classroom and
receive accommodations and services within their classroom (Mastropieri & Scruggs,
2002; Miller-Jacobs, 2008) utilizing special education teachers as consultants and/or
support personnel (Mastropieri & Scruggs, 2002).

Full inclusion is generally taken to mean that students with mild disabilities would
not receive any instruction in “pull-out” settings, such as resource rooms staffed by
special education teachers. Rather, all specialized instruction, when needed, is delivered
in the general education classroom by the general education teacher, the special education
teacher, instructional aides, classroom peers, or other support personnel. (Mastropieri &
Scruggs, 2002, p. 297). When full inclusion is practiced, students with disabilities spend
their entire day in class with their peers who do not have disabilities. It is important to
note that the above definition specifies that only students with mild disabilities are not
pulled out of the classroom to receive instruction in other settings such as resource
rooms. It appears that not all schools practice full inclusion with all students who have
disabilities because schools need to be both inclusive and effective in meeting the needs
of their students (McLeskey, Rosenberg, & Westling, 2013). Meeting student needs may
require occasional time out of the general education classroom so the student can have
separate class instruction that is specialized for the particular student with a disability
(McLeskey et al., 2013). It is possible that students with disabilities may require
individualized instruction specifically designed for them in order to master specific concepts and skills. Another reason students may leave the general education classroom is that school personnel are simply not prepared to provide the supports necessary for the student (A. Regester, personal communication, October 7, 2018). Of note, there is a difference between inclusion and the older concept of mainstreaming. According to Miller-Jacobs (2008), “mainstreaming…assumes the child starts in a special education setting and is moved into the mainstream (i.e., the general classroom) as much as possible” (p. 124). In inclusion, the child starts in the general education classroom and leaves the class for specialized education, support, or services if needed (Miller-Jacobs, 2008).

Congress passed the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (PL94-142) in 1975. This law increased federal money for special education and directed states to create “full educational opportunities for students with disabilities” (Friend, 2006, p. 10). The Education for All Handicapped Children Act included the least restrictive environment (LRE) provision, which stated that states and their school districts are required to:

…establish procedures to assure that, to the maximum extent appropriate, handicapped children, including children in public or private institutions or other care facilities, are educated with children who are not handicapped, and that special classes, separate schooling, or other removal of handicapped children from the regular educational environment occurs only when the nature or severity of the handicap is such that education in regular classes with the use of
supplementary aids and services cannot be achieved satisfactorily…” (United States Congress, 1975, 20 U.S.C. Sec. 1412 [5] [B]).

The Education for All Handicapped Children Act was renamed the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) when it was reauthorized in 1990 (Flexer, Baer, Luft, & Simmons, 2013).

Least restrictive environment (LRE) and inclusion are similar concepts; both require schools to educate students with disabilities in general education classes with their peers without disabilities. Although IDEA requires each child with a disability to be educated in the least restrictive environment that is appropriate for his or her unique educational needs, it does not mandate that all children must be educated in fully inclusive settings (United States Department of Education, 2008). Because LRE does not require fully inclusive settings, schools have created a continuum of services for students with disabilities: segregated special education schools; segregated special education classrooms in schools where students without disabilities attend; resource rooms; and general education classrooms where the students with disabilities are learning with their same-age peers without disabilities (Sailor & McCart, 2014).

Historically in the United States, there are two very different philosophies about how students with disabilities should be educated (Sailor & McCart, 2014). One group believes that the best way to educate all students is in public schools where students with and without disabilities are in contact with each other for a great amount of the day (Sailor & McCart, 2014). The other group believes students with disabilities should be educated separately from their peers without disabilities because their unique educational needs can be better met with specialized instruction and services (Sailor & McCart,
Both of these philosophies on the best way to educate students with disabilities continue to have their followers. It would be appropriate to note that not all people support this either-or philosophy on inclusion. There are those who fall somewhere in between (A. Regester, personal communication, October 7, 2018).

The Importance of Religious Education in Judaism

Jews are called the People of the Book because of the value they have historically placed on the Torah [Hebrew Bible] and the traditional emphasis that every Jew has the opportunity and obligation to read and understand it (Simmons, 2002). Throughout Jewish history, every Jewish person is obligated to study the Torah “whether he is poor or rich, whether his body is healthy and whole or afflicted by difficulties, whether he is young or an old man whose strength has diminished” (Touger, n.d. translation, p. 4, Maimonides’ Mishnah Torah). This passage, written in 1180 BCE [Before the Common Era], denotes that Jews of all abilities have the opportunity and obligation to study Torah. Throughout the centuries, the Torah has been a guide to many Jews in the subjects of moral and religious teachings. It is considered an inheritance of every Jewish person (Simmons, 2002). According to the Babylonian Talmud, tractate Sanhedrin 91b, which is a collection of writings that form the basis for all codes of Jewish law, “one who denies a child knowledge of our religious heritage steals the child’s inheritance” (Miller-Jacobs, p. 125).

In order for Jews to acquire the skills to read and comprehend the Torah, they must have an education. Understanding the historical need for Jews to be able to read and interpret the information within the Torah explains why education has been highly valued in Jewish culture through the ages. “The moral and religious training of the people
from childhood up was regarded by the Jews from the beginning of their history as one of the principal objects of life” (Singer et al. (Eds.), 1901-1906, p. 1). Religious education has been stressed in the Jewish faith for thousands of years. It was not only for the “elite and the elect, but for everyone” (Hammer, 1979, p. 11). One prayer that is recited three times each day by observant Jews reminds parents that they are obligated to teach their children about their religion, its traditions, and its laws (Singer et al. (Eds.), 1901-1906). Parents are required to teach all of their children; the obligation is not contingent on the abilities of the child. The prayer “does not differentiate between any of our students, nor does it delineate that there are some students we should teach while others may remain out of our reach” (Englander, 2019, p. 1). For all branches of Judaism, sending their children to Jewish supplementary school allows parents to fulfill part of their obligation to provide a Jewish education for their children (Schoem, 1983).

Judaism realizes that all people learn differently and so children should have an education that is suited to their needs (Hammer, 1979). The Talmud notes that children need to be interested in the information and it should be presented appropriately. It suggests that treats and games be utilized to keep the child’s interest and arouse curiosity and that appropriate materials and techniques should be used which match the characteristics of each child (Hammer, 1979). In addition to the instruction provided by family members, Jewish families have used some form of schooling to teach children about their religion since 75 B.C.E., when boys were required to attend formal schooling (Bard, 2016).
Because the public schools have done a good job educating and including students with disabilities in general education classes, parents of children with disabilities want that model for their religious school (Miller-Jacobs, 2008).

Parents indicate that regardless of the type or severity of disability, they want their children to receive a Jewish education in their own community… They believe their children with special needs should attend the same school as their siblings. Many parents are not content to have their children with special needs at a different synagogue… even if the program might be a better match for their child’s learning. They want their children to feel comfortable in their own environment and want other parents and children in the community to know and interact with their children. … If the children are included in the local public school, parents want them to also be included in the congregational [religious] school. (Miller-Jacobs, p. 125-126)

Parents from all branches of Judaism still place a high value on Jewish education for their children and so do Jewish parents of children with disabilities. Parents of Jewish children with disabilities want their children to have a meaningful Jewish education so they identify themselves as members of the Jewish religion and are embraced as members of the community (Christensen et al., 2009).

Acceptance of Disability in Judaism

Judaism has had a mixed record of how disability has been viewed and accepted. Many traditional Jewish texts have addressed the topic of disability (Prouser, 2011). “Attitudes about the disabled in these sources range from acceptance and understanding to rejection and exclusion. However, all of these texts recognize that the Israelite and
later the Jewish community have always included people with special physical, emotional, and educational needs” (Prouser, 2011, p. 1). Jewish Biblical law recognizes the intrinsic worth of people with disabilities and notes that their lives have the same value as the lives of nondisabled people (Kaminetzky, 1977). When interacting with people with disabilities, Jewish individuals are prohibited from “defamation of character as well as placing him in a situation where he might incur either physical harm, psychological harm, or misguided Jewish character development” (Kaminetzky, 1977, p. 90).

Having a disability is not necessarily a limitation on one’s life in Judaism (Novick & Glanz, 2011). Some of the people in the Hebrew Bible had disabilities. Isaac and Jacob became blind, Jacob also wrestled with an angel who caused an injury which made him limp, Leah, one of Jacob’s wives had weak eyes, and Moses had a speech disability (Prouser, 2011). However, their disabilities did not diminish their lives or influence. Jacob prevailed in his struggle with the angel after he became injured and both he and his father Isaac continued the direct line of Abraham by blessing the appropriate son (Prouser, 2011). Moses was one of the strongest leaders of his people (Prouser, 2011).

The Torah gives directions on how to live a moral life. It recognizes that disability exists (Prouser, 2011) and is a part of life. Jewish tradition requires people to understand “that all people, at every level of ability, deserve understanding and compassion” (Prouser, 2011, p. 117). The Bible states that it is important to treat people who are deaf and blind with respect and to protect them when appropriate (Prouser, 2011). Interestingly, the Torah categorizes people with both short-term and long-term disabilities together rather than separating them by the duration of their disability.
(Prouser, 2011). Perhaps this occurs to help people understand that every person deserves our respect and support throughout her or his life regardless of the person’s situation or abilities.

…The Bible groups people with disabilities, whose needs may be lifelong, together with others who have shorter-term needs, such as the poor, widows, orphans, pregnant women, and women who have just given birth. By placing all of these people in a single category, the Bible teaches that the community must offer equal support to all rather than separate out those with permanent disabilities. (Prouser, 2011, p. 99-100)

The Jewish value of B’telem Elokim, that all individuals are created in the image of their creator, is often used to validate the acceptance of diversity of people and their inclusion in the community and religious education (Novick & Solomon, 2017). Another Jewish value often associated with acceptance of abilities and inclusion in supplementary school is that all Jews are responsible for each other, kol Yisrael arevim zeh lazeh. This would include guaranteeing that every child has the opportunity to attend Jewish institutions such as religious school (Novick & Solomon, 2017). According to the guidelines of Classical Judaism, which includes Biblical times through the second century CE [Common Era], the education of the entire population is the responsibility of the community and includes individuals of all abilities in order to bring them as much as possible into society (Kaminetzky, 1977). Historically, the Jewish community in the United States has not fully supported inclusive education for students with disabilities. However recently synagogues are improving their ability to serve individuals with
disabilities and their families (Olson, 2017) which would include acceptance in Jewish supplementary schools.

**Jewish Supplementary Schools**

**Description of Jewish Supplementary Schools**

Jewish supplementary schools, also called religious schools, congregational schools, or Sunday schools, provide both educational and socialization opportunities to children and youth. Initially, supplementary school was “designed to be a primarily cognitive instructional experience to supplement the Jewish learning and living that went on naturally within a home, a community, and a synagogue in which Judaism was woven into daily life” (Weinberg, 2008 p. 499). However, currently, many Jewish children learn less about Judaism in their home than in past generations (Weinberg, 2008) and often do not live in a predominantly Jewish community which does not facilitate a Jewish life with the members of their community. Because of these changes in family education and community, the Jewish supplementary school is becoming the main source of Jewish information rather than a supplement to the learning in the home, community, and synagogue (Weinberg, 2008). Jewish supplementary schools teach students skills and attitudes to prepare them to assume the responsibilities of an adult member of the Jewish community (Clark, 1982; Wertheimer, 2009). Jewish supplementary schools can teach a wide range of subjects which may include history, culture, holidays, Hebrew language, prayer and Torah [the Hebrew Bible] (Education Encyclopedia, 2018), as well as how to participate in religious services, to feel they are a member of the Jewish community, to know Israel is the Jewish homeland, to observe positive Jewish values while attending religious school, and to have positive feelings about being Jewish (Wertheimer, 2009). In
Jewish supplementary schools, students also learn how to participate in Jewish rituals enabling them to perform those rituals at home (Christensen et al., 2009).

**The History of Jewish Special Education in Supplementary Schools**

Unfortunately, before the eighteenth century, all children, adolescents, and adults in the United States of America with disabilities were treated disgracefully (Novick & Glanz, 2011). In the nineteenth century most people with disabilities were excluded from society, although people had a more charitable attitude towards them (Novick & Glanz, 2011). This change in society’s attitude went along with the trend toward more schooling for individuals with disabilities (Novick & Glanz, 2011). The curriculum of early special education in the United States was vocational training; preparing people with disabilities to become productive citizens so they would not drain resources from the country (Novick & Glanz, 2011). In the late 1960’s people thought of disability in a different way and people with disabilities were leaving the institutions where they had lived, to be integrated into the communities where their families lived (Greenberg & Greenberg, 2010). Unfortunately, there were not enough resources within Jewish communal and religious institutions at the time to help families with children who had disabilities (Greenberg & Greenberg, 2010).

Jewish special education in religious school has been moving slowly toward inclusion (Novick & Glanz, 2011). For many years, students with disabilities were excluded from organized religious education in the United States. The philosophy of educating all Jewish children has been around for many years. Classical Judaism, which encompasses the time period of Biblical times through the second century CE, “recognized the possibility of … developmental growth in the handicapped [sic] through
innovative medical and educational intervention” (Kaminetzky, 1977, p. 105). While there is little recorded information on Jewish special education before the 20th century, there was a segregated special education class at a Jewish day school in pre-World War I Hamburg, Germany (Schloss, 2001) which means that organized Jewish special education is at least over 107 years old. From research in the 1950’s and early 1960’s, some members of the American Jewish community began to recognize that they needed to create Jewish educational opportunities for children and adolescents with disabilities (Kaminetzky, 1977).

The growing awareness of the ill effects of exclusion from programs available to others, the demonstration by the handicapped [sic] that they could benefit from programs which became special by virtue of their participation, rather than their exclusion, and the call by parents to provide education as a means of Jewish identification and integration within the Jewish community prompted the initiation of Jewish special education programs. (Kaminetzky, 1977, p. 110)

Jewish special education began in the 1960’s (Layman, 1997; Lerner, 1963; Shapiro, 1964; Syden, 1960). There were very few Jewish special education programs in North America and the programs that were available were segregated programs (Layman, 1997; Lerner, 1963; Shapiro, 1964; Syden, 1960). At that time, many Jewish students with disabilities did not attend religious school programs. It appears that some students with disabilities received a specialized Jewish education while others did not. Some Jewish supplementary schools offered programs for students with visible disabilities such as deafness, blindness, and intellectual disabilities but did not provide programs for
students whose disabilities were harder to see such as learning disabilities (Hammer, 1979; Lerner, 1963; Miller-Jacobs, 2008; Shapiro, 1964; Syden, 1960). Martin Syden, one of the teachers in the 1960 special education program at Temple Israel in Jamaica, New York, urged other congregations to create programs, curriculum, and new materials for Jewish students with intellectual disabilities. He stated that by having classes for students with intellectual disabilities, “The religious community is fulfilling its obligation in our Jewish way of life. Education and the transmittal of the Jewish heritage has always been paramount in Judaism” (Syden, 1960). When specialized education for students with disabilities was considered by Jewish communities, it seems it was because public schools were already addressing the issue. “The history of Jewish special education appears to have been more influenced by secular culture and history than by Jewish understandings of disability and differences” (Novick & Glanz, 2011, p. 1022). In 1968 the American Association for Jewish Education conducted a survey which revealed that over 80 communities and institutions sponsored Jewish programs for people with disabilities (Kaminetzky, 1977). Those programs included many different types of settings: “one day a week [Sunday schools], afternoon schools, day schools, and special education programs in summer camps” Kaminetzky, 1977, p. 106). Kaminetzky noted that the Jewish community considered the “issues of integration and mainstreaming … in the educational settings of special schools, special classes with provisions for association with normal [sic] peers, as well as efforts to integrate slow learners [sic] within regular Jewish education classes” (Kaminetzky, 1977, p. 106). At that time, some local Jewish education bureaus and synagogue commissions published educational materials and curriculum guides for teachers to use with their Jewish students with disabilities and
created special education courses to add to their Hebrew teacher training programs (Kaminetzky, 1977). Parents of students with disabilities, Jewish educators, and religious leaders initiated religious education programs for students who needed mild to moderate support (Kaminetzky, 1977). An organization of parents was created to promote programs, raise funds, and encourage legislation to expand and enhance Jewish special education services in 1972 (Kaminetzky, 1977). Research during the 1960’s and early 1970’s on Jewish educational programs revealed these reasons to provide Jewish educational opportunities for students with disabilities: the compatibility of Jewish thought about education for all and the effort to educate students with disabilities; the role of Jewish education as a way to become a member of the Jewish and general community; the positive relationship between community membership with emotional and social adjustment as well as employment opportunities; and Jewish education could help students with disabilities to become active Jewish adults and identify with the American Jewish community (Kaminetzky, 1977).

Kaminetzky (1977) stated that the limited efforts to educate students with disabilities may have been attributed to: students with disabilities attending Sunday school or afternoon school often had a difficult time learning the material and either voluntarily dropped out of the program or exhibited discipline issues which prompted school personnel to ask them to leave the program; students with disabilities who required minimum support, especially before the Education for All Handicapped Children Act, had a difficult time keeping up in their secular studies and their parents were reluctant to enroll them in another school-type program; and parents were concerned that their child would be teased by other students in the class.
Kaminetsky (1977) stated there was a study of Jewish educators’ attitudes and priorities about education for students with disabilities that was completed in the mid 1970’s. Among the study’s findings were: Jewish education was ranked the most important activity for the Jewish community; most educators believed that the community was responsible for providing a Jewish education to all students and that even in times of tight budgets and/or fewer educators, funds should not be taken away from the goal of enrolling more students with disabilities; while educators wanted to provide a Jewish education for students with disabilities, over half wanted that education to be accomplished in segregated classes; under ideal conditions, students with and without disabilities should have the most contact with each other during religious activities and the least contact with each other during classroom activities; The most frequent settings for Jewish special education programs were in Sunday schools and afternoon schools; and students with sensory-type disabilities such as physical disabilities, and hearing and vision impairments were seen to participate in religious and social roles more than those students with learning disabilities, emotional disabilities, and intellectual disabilities.

Although public schools had utilized inclusion for their students with disabilities for quite a few years, Jewish schools did not provide an inclusive education for students with disabilities until fairly recently (Novick & Glanz, 2011). Between 1993 and 1998, many Jewish special education programs were initiated (Miller-Jacobs, 2008). However, even then not all Jewish communities provided a Jewish education for students with disabilities. In 1993, a survey was disseminated to all the Jewish educational agencies in cities across the United States. A few of the cities stated that they did not have classes specifically for students with disabilities in any of the schools in their city (Isaacs &
Levine, 1995). One of the respondents who participated in the survey wrote: “Currently, Jewish education for special needs children [sic] has not been a community priority, nor to my knowledge have families come forward to request it” (Isaacs & Levine, 1995, p. 19). The Jewish Education Service of North America’s (JESNA) publication So That All May Study Torah: Communal Provision of Jewish Education for Students with Special Needs commented “It is a very sad commentary that in the rhetoric of inclusion and outreach…the subpopulations of physically, emotionally, and mentally challenged individuals and their families are rarely mentioned or considered, and therefore, plans are rarely made for meeting their needs” (Isaacs & Levine, 1995, p. 6). The Jewish community should make the opportunity of a Jewish education for all children and adolescents a priority because of Judaism’s inclusive nature. “Judaism[‘s]… emphasis on human worth and dignity… opportunities for self-expression [and] feelings of group expression” (Hammer, 1979, p. 14-15) should compel educators to create inclusive Jewish supplementary schools for all students with disabilities. “While public schools are legally obligated to provide an education for students with disabilities, Jewish schools are morally obligated to do so” (Miller-Jacobs, 2008, p. 125).

Like many other services for children and adolescents with disabilities, inclusive Jewish religious school programs were often initiated by parents because their children with disabilities were not allowed to attend supplementary school, participate in bar- and bat mitzvah preparation programs or be members of the youth group (Christensen et al., 2009). Because children with disabilities were in inclusive classrooms for their secular education, parents were “used to inclusion in the public schools and…wanted their
children to have the same consideration from their synagogues and religious schools” (Christensen, et al., 2009, p. 79).

**Importance of Jewish Supplementary Schools**

Jewish supplementary schools are important to families. Sending a child to religious school can help fulfill the parental obligation of providing a Jewish education for their child and links parents with their ancestors who also provided a Jewish education for their children through the centuries (Schoem, 1983). Attending Jewish supplementary school can affect how a family connects to their Judaism (Miller-Jacobs, 2008). Not all parents have a strong background in Judaism and some would like to learn more about their religion. These parents may choose to send their children to religious school so the children can learn information to teach the parents at home (Schoem, 1983). Some families live and their children go to school in areas where there are few Jewish people. These families may wish to meet and socialize with families that are Jewish. Jewish supplementary school and other educational experiences such as field trips and retreats may result in social contacts and friendships for the students as well as their parents (Schoem, 1983). For children and adolescents, attending religious school can lay the foundation, through key experiences, for spiritual growth (Carter, 2007). If congregations do not allow children and adolescents with disabilities to participate in activities, programs, and religious school, it is possible that those families will not maintain their membership with that congregation and will seek a congregation that will include all the members of the family (Carter, 2007).
Importance of a Bar or Bat Mitzvah to Parents of Students with Disabilities

Many Jewish supplementary schools train their students to participate in a bar or bat mitzvah ceremony. A bar or bat mitzvah ceremony is a Jewish lifecycle event that typically occurs at puberty, when a boy is 13 years old and a girl is 12 or 13 years old (Goldfarb, 2017). Traditionally, the Orthodox branch of Judaism considers girls to be bat mitzvah age at 12 and the Conservative and Reform branch of Judaism consider girls to be bat mitzvah at age 13. It is considered a transition from childhood to a more adult stage in life. Traditionally, this is the time that a child is held accountable for his or her actions (Goldfarb, 2017). Hebrew is a language where every noun has a gender; the word ‘bar’ translates to ‘son,’ the word ‘bat’ translates to ‘daughter,’ and the word ‘mitzvah’ translates to ‘commandment’ or can also be translated as ‘laws.’ The bar or bat mitzvah ceremony is an initiation ceremony that celebrates the child being considered old enough to observe the commandments of Judaism and be a fully participating member of the Jewish community (Goldfarb, 2017). Of note, a bar or bat mitzvah ceremony is not necessary for a Jewish person to be a fully participating member of the Jewish community; a Jewish boy automatically becomes a bar mitzvah on his 13th birthday and a Jewish girl automatically becomes a bat mitzvah on her 12th or 13th birthday whether or not there is a ceremony.

Vogel and Reiter (2004) studied the significance of a bar/bat mitzvah ceremony for the parents of students in Israel with moderate and significant developmental disabilities. The parents’ children studied together in school and had a group bar/bat mitzvah ceremony. They found that the bar/bat mitzvah experience was very positive for parents of children with disabilities in multiple ways (Vogel & Reiter, 2004).
theme of a bar/bat mitzvah is maturation. Parents noticed that the ceremony created a transition experience for both the children and themselves (Vogel & Reiter, 2004). Most parents noticed physical and/or behavioral changes in their children around the time of the ceremony. Parents also reported changes in their own behavior and expectations regarding their children and noted that they were “trying to give youngsters more jobs and responsibilities at home” (Vogel & Reiter, 2004, p. 297). One of the most important themes that Vogel and Reiter (2004) discovered was that families believed they had a normative lifecycle experience; they were able to celebrate a lifecycle event for their child that is celebrated by Jews throughout the world. “Parents felt that they and their children were ‘allowed to be part of society and have the same experiences that other children have’” (Vogel & Reiter, 2004, p. 298). A number of the parents viewed the bar/bat mitzvah ceremony as a religious experience which had religious significance for the children, their families, and the congregation in attendance. Some parents stated their children now recognized and were familiar with religious objects and learned some of the prayers said during services. One of the parents remarked on the “‘holiness’ he sensed that morning” at the service (Vogel & Reiter, 2004, p. 299) and some congregants remarked that the service was “one of the most meaningful and uplifting services they had ever attended” (Vogel & Reiter, 2004, p. 300). The parents noted the ceremony created a sense of connectedness in multiple ways: the children who studied and celebrated together felt more connected; parents invited close family members to the ceremony and were able to celebrate the experience together as a family; all the families involved created a sense of an extended family with each other; and because of the sacredness of the ceremony some congregants felt a “new sense of community” (Vogel &
Reiter, 2004, p. 300) which would include people of all abilities. This sense of connectedness “was indeed two-directional” (Vogel & Reiter, 2004, p. 300). Several parents believed the entire congregation had an atmosphere of “warmth, respect, and tolerance” (Vogel & Reiter, 2004, p. 299) and the families of the children with disabilities belonged to the congregation rather than being “flung aside” (Vogel & Reiter, p. 300). Some parents told Vogel and Reiter (2004) that they felt that their whole family, including their child with disabilities, felt part of the congregation and that “having the opportunity to participate in normative life events and being accepted by the community contributes to one’s sense of belonging to the community” (Vogel & Reiter, 2004, p. 300). Parents noticed the positive impact the ceremony had on their children’s self-image with the children feeling confident, competent, and having a sense of achievement. Parents stated that the ceremony created a lifetime memory for both their children and themselves.

Just like all Jewish parents, parents of children with disabilities want to celebrate a bar/bat mitzvah ceremony for their child which commemorates the transition from childhood to a more adult status. Some researchers have suggested that life transitions, such as turning 13 for Jewish families, can be stressful to families that include children with disabilities and remind them of the losses they have undergone by having a child with a disability (Vogel & Reiter, 2004). It is possible that by celebrating their child’s bar/bat mitzvah with their extended family, friends, and the congregational community, parents of children with disabilities can stave off feelings of stress and loss and enjoy a normal Jewish lifecycle event. Some Jews view a bar/bat mitzvah ceremony as another link in their family chain; connecting them to their ancestors. Bar and bat mitzvahs
arouse a sense of continuity which links current generations with previous generations (Vogel & Reiter, 2004). Perhaps that is why Jewish parents want their children of all abilities to have a bar/bat mitzvah.

**Goals of Jewish Supplementary Schools**

Jewish supplementary schools have many goals and some of the more important ones are: to teach information that is important for all Jewish adults to know about Jewish culture and history, some schools teach students to read Hebrew, to learn Jewish rituals that are performed in the home or in the congregation, and to create a Jewish identity within their students (Christianson et al., 2009; Clark, 1982; Education Encyclopedia, 2018; Wertheimer, 2009).

Creating a Jewish identity is very important to parents of most Jewish children. “Children with disabilities are entitled to have a sense of identity as a member of their faith community” (Christensen et al., 2009). This can be achieved through attending a Jewish supplementary school. A small pilot study suggests that Jewish culture, which can be acquired from family and religious school, can be a strong influence in young Jewish adults with learning disabilities’ identities (Bunning & Steel, 2006). Jewish supplementary school provides many children their original source of Jewish identification, gives them pride in their religion, and strengthens their ability to respond to uncomfortable situations (i.e., having friends at their religious school gave some students the ability to deal with uncomfortable situations pertaining to the fact that they were Jewish at their secular school) (Schoem, 1983). Research by Cohen and Kotler-Berkowitz (2004) suggested that students who attended any form of Jewish educational program twice a week or more scored higher in Jewish identity than peers who did not
attend any Jewish education program. They also noted that the number of years a student attended religious school was positively associated with increases in Jewish identity as an adult years later. Participating in Jewish supplementary school which meets two or more days per week for seven to twelve years along with two or three other forms of informal education (i.e., travelling to Israel, Jewish youth group, or Jewish camping) during the high school years can help create a positive Jewish identity in adulthood (Kraus, 2008).

Schoem (2010) argues that there is also an informal and hidden curriculum in religious school which is important to the individual. He argues the informal and hidden curriculum is comprised of community, connection, and friendship- the opportunity for students to form friendships, create a connection to peers, and build a community- and that they matter more to Jewish children and adolescents than organizations and institutions. Schoem (2010) sums it up by stating that it is “the relational, the personal, and the community” (p. 292).

It was the conversations with friends and parents in the carpool on the way to school, the acting out and misbehavior with friends in the classroom, the arguments with parents at home over whether one had to attend afternoon school in the first place, the hanging-out together with friends during the time before school started and during recess that were the critical moments of learning for most Jewish youth. (Schoem, 2010, p. 292-293)

Clearly, religious school offers students of all abilities many opportunities to learn how to be a Jewish adult, form a Jewish identity, create friendships and connections with others as well as the ability to build a community. These opportunities should not be denied to students with disabilities.
Concerns With Jewish Supplementary Schools

Students often attend supplementary schools between three and six hours per week and the schools only operate during the academic school year (Wertheimer, 2009). Because the schools operate for short periods of time each week, most of the teaching jobs are part-time. This can make it difficult to recruit and retain qualified teachers (Clark, 1982; Rotstein, 2017; Wertheimer, 2009). Currently research has suggested that there is a shortage of well-trained teachers for Jewish schools (Rotstein, 2017) due to low wages, inadequate benefits in the area of health, retirement, and life insurance, and the relatively low status of teachers in the Jewish community (Wertheimer, 2008). This creates a difficult situation as often religious schools are competing with each other to attract educators and school directors from a shrinking number of qualified applicants (Wertheimer, 2008).

Many supplementary school educators do not have the training for their positions; they may be missing pedagogical training or they may not know enough about the Judaic content they are teaching (Clark, 1982; Schiff, 1982; Wertheimer, 2009). Some Jewish supplementary school teachers work at a full-time job or are students at a local university during the week and teach at a religious school as a second job on the weekends and/or on weekday afternoons. These teachers can be working in or training for careers that are in fields which are completely unrelated to Jewish education for children and adolescents. Religious school classes are seldom taught by special education teachers or teachers who have formal training in working with people who have disabilities (Carter, 2007). There are few experts in Jewish special education and training programs for Jewish special educators are scarce (Isaacs & Levine, 1995). With the increasing number of students
with disabilities enrolling in Jewish supplementary schools, religious school classroom
teachers may feel unequipped to teach all the students in their classrooms (Isaacs &
Levine, 1995). Most supplementary schools teach students from the ages of preschool
through high school, with some schools accepting students with disabilities. Most Jewish
supplementary school directors or principals do not have the training to oversee the
education of all the students within that age range (i.e. preschool through high school)
and ability range (i.e., from gifted through all the different areas of disability that children
and adolescents can have) (Clark, 1982).

It is possible that when students with disabilities are included in Jewish
supplementary schools, students who have disabilities that require more support may
have a different curriculum. These students may not be actively engaged in the same
educational activities or opportunities as their classmates even when they are in the same
classroom (Carter & Kennedy, 2006). Parents of children with disabilities have specific
goals for the inclusion of their children in Jewish supplementary schools; they want their
children to be able to access the religious school curriculum in a way that is meaningful
for the child and be accepted as a peer by the other students in the class (Christensen, et
al., 2009). Parents also want their children with disabilities to develop a strong Jewish
identity and feel that they are accepted and appreciated by their faith community
(Christiansen, et al., 2009).

**Alienation of Families with Disabled Children and Adolescents from the Jewish
Community**

It appears there is a very real possibility that families which include children and
adolescents with disabilities can feel alienated from the Jewish community. Olson (2017,
p. 28) quotes from an unpublished doctoral dissertation by Abigail Uhrman (2013) which states that some Jewish parents feel the Jewish community excludes their children. “Many parents…found that the Jewish community either neglects or excludes children with special needs from full participation in Jewish life” (p. 114). Some parents and students with disabilities feel that they do not know where they fit into their Jewish community (Miller-Jacobs & Koren, 2003). Uhrman (2017) studied parents of children with disabilities who attended a Jewish day school [parochial school] or had attended and left the day school. Her conclusions about community acceptance may be similar to the experiences of all Jewish families that include children and adolescents with disabilities. She found that some parents of children with disabilities felt alone and marginalized; they believed there were few educational programs for their children and few institutional supports for their family within the Jewish community (Uhrman, 2017). Some parents of children with disabilities stated that for them, the Jewish community was unwelcoming and unaccepting because they have a child with a disability. These parents:

…perceived an implicit intolerance of difference within the organized Jewish community…as a result, many described feeling embarrassed that their child has a disability. According to these families, the attitude is ‘hush-hush’; disabilities are not openly discussed, and they are certainly not embraced and/or celebrated. (Uhrman, 2017, p. 19)

Some parents of children with disabilities noted that the topic of disabilities was often not a concern of the Jewish community (Uhrman, 2017). They stated that the “community’s inattention to these issues is more a result of lack of awareness and ‘benign neglect’ than ‘malicious intent’” (Uhrman, 2017, p. 18-19). Because of the subtle messages some
parents of children with disabilities received, they felt it was “difficult to find a place within the existing communal structures and fully participate in Jewish life” (Uhrman, 2017, p. 19). Uhrman (2017) discovered that unless parents began the process of creating inclusive programs and classrooms themselves, inclusion was “rarely and/or inadequately addressed” (Uhrman, 2017, p. 18) by the Jewish community.

**Friendship as a Necessary Part of Life**

Most people have a strong desire to engage in social activities with peers and develop friendships. Friendships are extremely important to people with and without disabilities. Baumeister and Leary (1995) note that human beings have a basic need to form interpersonal attachments such as friendships in which the interactions are affectively pleasant or positive, and the relationships are long-term, involve the same individuals, and are rooted in a stable, caring, and concerned environment. Friendship is a positive social relationship between two people that involves mutuality (Gaventa, 1993) such that both friends are equal partners within the relationship. Friendship is characterized by mutual enjoyment, reciprocity, and acceptance (Gaventa, 1993). Friends enjoy each other’s company and can be useful to each other (Gaventa, 1993).

“Friendship… is necessary to life, since no one would choose to live without friends even if he had all other material goods” (Aristotle, 340 BCE).

Unfortunately, many people with disabilities do not have friends and are lonely. “…most people with developmental disabilities who are dependent upon the services system have very limited social networks and very few friends” (Amado, 1993, p. 67). Research suggests that up to one half of people with intellectual or developmental disabilities express feelings of loneliness (Amado, Stancliffe, McCarron, & McCallion,
Research suggests that people whom individuals with disabilities define as friends are other individuals with disabilities, staff, and family members (Amado, Stancliffe, McCarron, & McCallion, 2013). Studies have surveyed the size of the social networks for people with disabilities. One study suggested individuals with intellectual or developmental disabilities had an average of 3.1 people in their social network, and one of those persons was a paid staff member (Verdonschot, de Witte, Reichrath, Buntinx, & Curfs, 2009). Another study suggested people with intellectual or developmental disabilities had 12.5 people in their social network and at most, only one was a community member who was not disabled (Amado, Stancliffe, McCarron, & McCallion, 2013). In contrast, research indicates individuals who do not have disabilities can have up to 125 people in their social networks (Amado, Stancliffe, McCarron, & McCallion, 2013). Loneliness can affect a person’s physical well-being, mental health, and even his or her behavior (Amado, 1993). Until recently, the field of developmental disability has ignored friendship in both theory and practice (Gaventa, 1993). However, currently friendship is thought of as an essential component for integrating people with developmental disabilities into their communities (Gaventa, 1993). The lives of people with disabilities change when they develop friendships with others (Gaventa, 1993). Many people create friendships with people they meet at their houses of worship as they already have something in common with them. Children and adolescents who participate in inclusive classes in their Jewish supplementary school have the opportunity to create friendships with their same-age classmates.
Barriers to Inclusion

There are many barriers to meaningful inclusion for students with disabilities in general education classrooms. Ballard & Dymond (2017) argue that barriers to inclusion have changed over the years. They believe that initially, the barrier was physical access in the classroom; students could not enter and/or navigate the classrooms. The next barrier was social inclusion; students with and without disabilities did not interact in an inclusive classroom. They believe that the last barrier is access to general education curriculum; students with disabilities do not have access to the general education curriculum (Ballard & Dymond, 2017). School stakeholders, defined as administrators, general and special education teachers, paraprofessionals, and parents may believe that students with severe disabilities will have a difficult time functioning in an inclusive classroom and that the general education curriculum is too difficult or not relevant to the lives of students with severe disabilities (Ballard & Dymond, 2017). This may mean that students with severe disabilities are not receiving appropriate adaptations and/or modifications of the curriculum to make it appropriate for the students (Ballard & Dymond, 2017). With appropriate adaptations and/or modifications, much of the general education curriculum is relevant to the lives of students with severe disabilities. It is possible that having a fund of knowledge about history, current events, cultural information, and math concepts that concern money and time can allow students with disabilities to interact with students without disabilities in an age-appropriate manner with both students feeling that the relationship is equal rather than a helper-helpee relationship.
Another reason stakeholders may believe students with disabilities are unable to access the general education curriculum is associated with the way the curriculum is taught. Information taught in a didactic and lecture-based method may make it difficult to understand for some students with disabilities (Ballard & Dymond, 2017). Teachers who utilize methods such as Universal Design for Learning (UDL) do not need to use as many accommodations, adaptations, and modifications because the curriculum and instruction is easy for students of all abilities to understand (Ballard & Dymond, 2017).

Studies have suggested that teacher attitudes are important to effective inclusion of students with disabilities in general education classrooms (Martin, Ireland, Johnson, & Claxton, 2003). A study by Carroll, Forlin, & Jobling (2003) suggested that preservice teachers tend to focus on the disability instead of the person and have attitudes of “discomfort, fear, uncertainty, sympathy, vulnerability, and coping” (p. 76) that may be a barrier to inclusion. However, those attitudes can change; the more interactions a teacher has with students who have disabilities, the more likely the teacher is to develop a positive attitude about students with disabilities (Carroll, Forlin, & Jobling, 2003). For preservice teachers, increased interactions with students with disabilities was associated with higher feelings of comfort around students with disabilities (Carroll, Forlin, & Jobling). Center and Ward, (1987) note that teachers could have more positive attitudes about inclusion from experiences in their preservice training such as more opportunities to work with students with disabilities. Other factors may also influence teacher attitudes towards inclusion. Teachers are more positive about inclusion when students with disabilities in their classes have mild disabilities (Olson, 2017). The gender of the
A teacher may also influence a teacher’s attitude about inclusion. Female teachers seem to have a more positive attitude about inclusion than male teachers (Romi & Leyser, 2006).

Teacher attitudes not only impact the way the teachers view students with disabilities, but can also shape the way peers view classmates with disabilities. Olson (2017) argues that the attitudes that those who work closely with people who have disabilities can have a significant influence on the way others in a particular culture [such as a classroom or school] view disability and people with disabilities. Attitude and behavior are connected (Olson, 2017). If teachers believe students with disabilities are different from students without disabilities, they might unintentionally treat them differently. It is possible teachers could have lower expectations for students with disabilities, thus limiting their educational opportunities. In a study of preservice teachers working with struggling readers by Scharlach (2008), the preservice teachers’ beliefs “influenced both their expectations for struggling readers and their explanations for their students’ successful or unsuccessful achievement of those expectations” (Sharlach, 2008, p. 11). Teachers need to understand that attitudes toward disability and people with disabilities are important since a teacher’s attitude can make the difference between exclusion and inclusion for a student with disabilities (Olson, 2017) in the classroom because of the way the teacher and peers think about and interact with a student who has disabilities.

Research has identified that general education teachers believe they lack training in necessary skills to implement successful inclusion programs and desire both appropriate preservice and in-service training programs to help them become more successful teachers of inclusive classrooms (Martin et al., 2003). A study by Center and
Ward (1987) suggests that teachers’ negative attitudes about inclusion are based on both a lack of confidence in their own ability to provide instruction to students with disabilities, or efficacy, and the quality of support personnel provided for them. The study also noted that teachers were positive about inclusion when the teachers had students whose disabilities did not require the teachers to use other instructional and management techniques than those they already use in the classroom (Center & Ward, 1987). A small survey of Jewish supplementary school educators discovered that the teachers desired professional development and other learning opportunities to help them identify the learning needs of students with disabilities (Christensen et al., 2009). A preservice teacher’s confidence level in her or his ability to teach students with disabilities or efficacy, appears to be a factor in how comfortable she or he is with teaching students of all abilities (Jung, 2007). Teacher training programs that include guided field experiences, exposure to specific situations, and knowledge utilizing explicit interventions appear to increase preservice teachers’ confidence levels (Jung, 2007). It seems that more education concerning inclusion, both at the preservice level and while teachers are actively teaching may give general education teachers a strong knowledge base on how to implement inclusion which could help them feel comfortable with the process.

Special education teachers are more supportive of inclusion than general education teachers, and the more training a teacher has in working with students with disabilities, the more likely they are to be successful in creating an inclusive classroom (Martin et al., 2003). Also of note, special education teachers see many positive outcomes resulting from inclusion of students with disabilities in general education
classes while general education teachers see few, if any, advantages for the students (Martin et al., 2003). It is possible that when teachers feel comfortable working with students who have disabilities and understand that they may acquire knowledge at a slower but steady rate, they are able to see each student as a fully functioning individual and can see the growth the student has achieved in the general education classroom, even if it is at a slower pace than some of the student’s peers who are not disabled.

Paraprofessionals can inhibit social and academic interactions in inclusive classrooms. While many parents want their children with disabilities to have a one-to-one paraprofessional during class, there are no research studies that suggest that one-to-one paraprofessional assistance is required for students to access curriculum (Carter, Cushing, & Kennedy, 2009). Research has also not shown that paraprofessionals are a more effective method for teaching academics (Carter et al., 2009). Students who utilize one-to-one paraprofessionals in their classes: have fewer interactions with their classmates; are stigmatized by the constant presence of an adult around them all the time; have less interactions with certified, highly qualified teachers because the paraprofessional adapts and teaches the material to the student; may have lower academic achievement and engagement because the paraprofessional lacks special education training; and may have fewer opportunities to develop self-determination skills (Carter et al., 2009).

Other stakeholders can provide barriers to inclusion. School principals and other administrators provide leadership for the teachers who work under them. That leadership extends to implementing inclusion within their schools. Principals and administrators who do not believe that students with disabilities should be educated with their peers
without disabilities create barriers to inclusion while principals and administrators who see the value of inclusion for both students with and without disabilities create an environment that encourages successful inclusion (Kochhar, West, & Taymans, 2000). Some ways principals and administrators can influence inclusion is by how they distribute funds for school programs, how they develop school policies, and how they allocate and train personnel. All of these can encourage or discourage meaningful inclusion for students with disabilities (Kochhar et al., 2000).

Kochhar, West, and Taymans (2000) argue that there are three categories of barriers to creating inclusive classrooms: organizational, attitudinal, and knowledge. Organizational barriers encompass “the differences in the way schools and classrooms are structured and managed, how they define their goals, and how they design instruction” (Kochhar et al. 2000, p. 67). In addition, the category of organizational barriers includes the architecture of the building and whether students of all abilities can utilize all areas of the building. People who cannot participate in all the activities of a congregation because they are unable to access all areas of the building do not feel like they enjoy full membership in the congregation and may choose to join another congregation where they can access all activities and areas of the building (Carter, 2007). Attitudinal barriers include “beliefs, motivations, and attitudes that different teachers have about educating children and youth, accommodating students with special needs in general education classrooms, communicating with parents, and the community participation of students” (Kochhar et al., 2000, p. 67). Knowledge barriers are “related to the differences in the knowledge and skills of various teachers about instructing special needs students, providing support services, adapting curriculum, and instruction, and
structuring the classroom for optimal inclusion” (Kochhar et al., 2000, p. 67). These three categories appear to be a way to cluster and explain the different types of barriers to implementing inclusion.

**The Right to be Included in a Classroom**

Inclusive education ensures that all students learn that belonging in the classroom is a right and not a privileged status that needs to be earned (Kunc, 1992). In order to achieve inclusion, teachers and directors need to create classrooms and schools that celebrate and welcome the diversity within the human race (Kunc, 1992). Inclusion is a mindset; a belief that everyone is valuable and has important contributions to make to the group (Hall, Dunlap, Causton-Theoharis, & Theoharis, 2013). Inclusion is “…not a place, a program, or a time-limited opportunity, …” (Hall, Dunlap, Causton-Theoharis, & Theoharis, 2013, p. 2). Inclusion is not easy; to successfully include students “requires effort, creativity, and a unique commitment to the success of each child in a program” (Hall, Dunlap, Causton-Theoharis, & Theoharis, 2013, p. 3). Teachers and directors always need to be vigilant and monitor the words, actions, and dynamics of their students to make sure exclusion is not occurring. Even in an inclusive classroom, students can be excluded (Novick & Glanz, 2011). In an inclusive school and classroom, Children and adolescents with disabilities do not need to change to be valued members of the class.

When inclusive education is fully embraced, we abandon the ideas that children have to become “normal” in order to contribute to the world. … We begin to look beyond typical ways of becoming valued members of the community, and in doing so, begin to realize the achievable goal of providing all children with an authentic sense of belonging. When children are given the right to belong, they
are given a right to their diversity. They are wholly welcomed …. as ones who enrich our lives, without the construction of rehabilitative hoops through which they must jump in order to become “normal enough” to belong. (Kunc, 1992, p. 18-20)

Benefits of Inclusion

Friendships with same-aged peers impact learning in school. “The interactions that typically take place among students within general education classrooms comprise an important element of educational contexts that promote learning and social development” (Carter, Moss, Hoffman, Chung, & Sisco, 2011, p. 108). Studies have documented that both students with and without disabilities benefit socially and academically from effective inclusion programs (Ryndak, Jackson, & White, 2013; Shogren, et al., 2015) which also includes peer support programs that can be used with students who have disabilities that require more support (Carter & Kennedy, 2006). When it comes to learning academic information and classroom social etiquette, it is possible that students take corrective feedback more seriously and make more of an effort to change when it comes from a friend than when it comes from a teacher or peer who is not a friend. This may enhance the learning process of all students including those with disabilities.

The world includes people of many different abilities, and classes within schools should reflect that diversity. However, in the past, segregated classes have made it difficult for students with and without disabilities to meet each other. Research suggests that some of the obstacles to social relationships between students with and without disabilities are: the students are not in the same classes; they have few opportunities to see each other in school; [some] students with disabilities are always in close proximity
to paraprofessionals; and the students without disabilities do not know students with
disabilities (Han & Chadsey, 2004). In some schools, students with disabilities pass from
one class to another at a different time than the rest of the student body (Copeland et al.,
2004) inhibiting opportunities to meet and create friendships among students of all
abilities. The inability to know one another because students do not come in contact with
each other, is an example of an organizational barrier to inclusion (Kochhar et al., 2000).
They occur because of the “way schools and classrooms are structured and managed…”
(Kochhar et al., 2000, p. 67). This structure is a conscious choice that has been made by
the school or school district. Since it is a choice that has been made, people who are
supportive of meaningful inclusion can potentially reverse it. It could be easy to have
students with disabilities pass from class to class at the same time as all the other
students. Having inclusive classrooms where paraprofessionals are utilized to help all
students in the class, and classmates are encouraged to help each other might allow
students of all abilities to interact with one another.

**Academic Benefits for Students with Disabilities**

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) requires that students
with disabilities participate in the general curriculum to the maximum extent that is
appropriate for each student. Students with intellectual disabilities who are in inclusive
classrooms are more likely to have access to and participate in the general education
curriculum than students who are educated in segregated settings (Wehmeyer, Lattin,
Lapp-Rincker, & Agran, 2003). In their review of the literature on inclusion, Salend and
Garrick (1999) determined:
That benefits of inclusion for many students with disabilities include gains in academic achievement, increased peer acceptance and richer friendship networks, higher self-esteem, avoidance of stigma attached to pull-out programs, and possible lifetime benefits (e.g., higher salaries, independent living) after leaving school. (as cited in Wiebe Berry, 2006, p. 490)

There are some concerns that students with disabilities will lose individualized instruction time when they are included in general education classes that utilize peer-mediated approaches to assist them rather than being assisted by paraprofessionals. This might be a knowledge barrier to inclusion (Kochhar, et al., 2000), in that if teachers and principals are not up to date with inclusion literature they may not realize that if special education teachers train and provide appropriate and timely feedback to one or two peers, students with moderate to severe disabilities can access the curriculum in a general education classroom. Studies suggest that in classes that utilize peer-mediated approaches, although students with disabilities do not receive individualized instruction from paraprofessionals, they do receive the same amount of individualized instruction from peers without disabilities who have been taught how to adapt the general education curriculum and provide individualized instruction under the training and supervision of special education teachers (Cushing & Kennedy, 1997). Research suggests that students with moderate to severe disabilities who in the past might have utilized a paraprofessional to assist them in general education classes are able to learn information, have high academic engagement, and acquire skills when they work with one or two peers (Carter et al., 2009). It is possible that instructional time spent with an adult may not be that important when attempting to maximize academic success; rather the amount
of time spent in individualized instruction may be more important (Cushing & Kennedy, 1997). Moreover, perhaps students with disabilities enjoy working with same-aged peers more than they enjoy working with an adult and stay more engaged in the lesson and information when working with a peer.

**Academic Benefits for Students without Disabilities**

Parents, educators, and school administrators sometimes believe that students without disabilities may decrease their academic performance if they provide peer support for students with severe disabilities. This may also be a knowledge barrier to inclusion (Kochhar et al. 2000) in that teachers and principals who may not stay current with inclusion research would not know that it can be academically beneficial for some students without disabilities to assist their classmates with disabilities in the classroom. Multiple studies suggest that some students without disabilities may actually improve their academic performance when accepting the responsibility of assisting their classmates with disabilities (Cushing & Kennedy, 1997; Shukla, Kennedy, & Cushing, 1998). For students without disabilities who have moderate to high grades, such as A’s or B’s, their grades remain the same and do not decrease when they volunteer to be a peer support for a classmate with a moderate to severe disability in a peer mediated arrangement (Shukla et al., 1998). Students without disabilities who have lower grades, such as C’s and below, who volunteer to be a peer support for a classmate with a moderate to severe disability appear to improve their academic performance in the areas of: academic engagement, assignment completion, higher grades on assignments, and perceived classroom participation by others (Cushing & Kennedy, 1997; Shukla et al., 1998) and follow-up data indicates the increases in academic engagement, assignment
completion, higher grades, and perceived participation were maintained for up to two months (Cushing & Kennedy, 1997). Of note, it appears that the adult interactions by the special education and general education teachers with the peer support student [the student without disabilities] positively influences the academic performance of those students who have lower grades (Cushing & Kennedy, 1997). If teachers and principals would communicate the research information to parents of students who volunteer to assist students with disabilities, the parents would probably no longer have reservations about their children working with peers who have disabilities.

**Social Benefits for Students with Disabilities**

Positive peer relationships in school can have a positive effect on students’ social life and poor or no social relationships can have a negative effect. “Peer relationships can make important contributions to students’ development, influence their engagement in school, and impact their well-being and overall quality of life” (Carter et al. 2009). Effective inclusion within a classroom encourages social interaction and supports social relationships between classmates. Inclusive classrooms can create frequent and high-quality interactions between students with and without disabilities that can continue in other settings beyond the classroom (Carter et al., 2009). These relationships can develop into friendships (Carter et al., 2009; Shogren et al., 2015). Students of all abilities who are members of inclusive classrooms feel a strong sense of belonging to their schools and a connection to their teachers and peers (Shogren et al., 2015).

Inclusion in general education classrooms offers students with disabilities more opportunities to interact with peers who do not have disabilities than they would have in self-contained classrooms (Carter & Kennedy, 2006). Students with and without
disabilities have many opportunities to interact using peer support strategies in a general educational classroom. “The general curriculum provides a natural context for peer interaction as students work together on shared learning tasks, providing a meaningful context for acquiring social-related skills, accessing social supports, meeting additional classmates, and developing new friendships” (Carter & Kennedy, 2006 p. 287). Peer support strategies can increase the frequency and length of social interactions between peer support dyads. Shukla, Kennedy, and Cushing, (1998) studied three dyads of middle school students in a peer support situation where one of the dyad members had a moderate to severe disability and the other did not have a disability but was having academic difficulties. Their study utilized three experimental conditions. The conditions included a baseline where the peer without disabilities worked alone while the peer with disabilities was supervised by an adult. In the Peer Support condition, peers with and without disabilities worked together and were both supervised by an adult. In the Adult Involvement condition, peers with and without disabilities were supervised by an adult as in the Peer Support condition but the peers worked separately from one another other. The study suggests that middle school students with moderate to severe disabilities interacted more often and the interactions lasted longer when the students with disabilities worked with their peer supports in the Peer Support condition than when they worked with adults (Shukla, Kennedy, & Cushing, 1998). Of note, Shukla, Kennedy, and Cushing’s study also suggests that the involvement of special education teachers in the Peer Support condition positively influenced students without disabilities to improve their academic performance.
Students with severe disabilities may have some unacceptable behaviors and social skills that they exhibit throughout the day. Because students with disabilities may desire friendships with peers who do not have disabilities, they may work hard to display behavior and social skills that would be acceptable to their peers without disabilities. One way to learn appropriate behaviors and social skills is by imitating peers. By using students without disabilities as role models, students with disabilities may learn more acceptable behaviors (Sailor & McCart, 2014) and social skills (Carter et al., 2009). Students with disabilities can access multiple social supports in inclusive classrooms and expand their social networks by spending time with different peers in the classroom (Carter et al., 2009).

**Social Benefits for Students without Disabilities**

Students without disabilities benefit from inclusive classrooms. By attending school with peers who have disabilities they develop an appreciation of the diversity within human beings, make lifelong friendships, have the opportunity to provide and receive social support, and develop the ability to advocate for others and themselves (Carter et al. 2009). If the students without disabilities provide peer support to a student with disabilities in their class they have additional communication, feedback, and attention from the adults in the classroom and develop increased self-confidence because they are successful peer supports (Carter et al. 2009). Research suggests that students without disabilities believe that being a member of an inclusive classroom gives them the opportunity to get to know peers with disabilities and create relationships with them (Shogren et al. 2015).
Pull-Out Programs/Resource Rooms vs. Inclusion

Educators’ understanding of specific reading disabilities created resource rooms where students with disabilities could participate in specialized reading instruction (Bentum & Aaron, 2003, as cited in Novick & Glanz, 2011, p. 1030). However, the effectiveness of resource rooms has not been thoroughly researched (Novick & Glanz, 2011). A meta-analysis of 11 studies completed by Wang and Baker in 1985 compared struggling readers who were mainstreamed in general education classes to students in special education classes including resource rooms. Their research suggests that there was no advantage to separating out struggling readers (Wang & Baker, 1985, as cited in Novick & Glanz, 2011, p. 1031). In a longitudinal study, Bentum and Aaron (2003) found that placement in a resource room could result in lower achievement for some students. In their study, students did not show significant reading improvement and declined in both spelling and IQ and the decline in spelling and IQ was positively correlated with the length of time spent in the resource room. These results may suggest that resource rooms provide suboptimal learning environments (Bentum & Aaron, 2003, as cited in Novick & Glanz, 2011, p. 1031).

In 2004, Wiener and Tardiff studied 117 Canadian children in grades 4 through 8, comparing paired support paradigms: in-class vs. resource room, or self-contained classroom vs. inclusive classroom. The researchers evaluated social and emotional functioning in both pairs and found that the students in the more inclusive environments did better (Wiener & Tardiff, 2004, as cited in Novick & Glanz, 2011, p. 1031). Rea, McLaughlan, and Walter-Thomas, 2002 as cited in Novick & Glanz, 2011) compared eighth grade students in the United States who were in inclusive programs with those
who were in pull-out programs. Their research indicated there were significant academic advances for the students in inclusive settings (Rea, McLaughlan, & Walter-Thomas, 2002 as cited in Novick & Glanz, 2011, p 1031).

Luchow (1992) appears to have the only published study of resource rooms in Jewish schools in the United States. He looked at resource rooms in 19 Jewish day schools over a three year period. His findings suggested that parents, administrators, students, resource room teachers, and general education teachers believed that students attending the resource room were making progress in the resource room and to a lesser extent in the general education classroom. In addition, parents wanted more information about the goals and objectives of the program. (Luchow, 1992). However, with the exception of Luchow (1992) the findings in these studies generally suggest that pull-out programs and resource rooms may not be the best placement for students with disabilities; none of the studies show convincing evidence that pull-out programs and resource rooms help students make academic and social gains (Novick & Glanz, 2011).

Social and Behavioral Disadvantages of Segregation or Pull-Out Programs

Students who receive their education in segregated classrooms or schools, or who participate in pull-out programs, miss important opportunities to learn with and from their peers without disabilities. In addition, their peers without disabilities miss important opportunities to learn with and from students with disabilities. Students of all abilities have a great deal to teach each other and if they are not in the same classroom, they miss that opportunity.

Some students with disabilities who need more support may have inappropriate behavior around others. One way for them to change those behaviors is to use peers who
have appropriate behavior as role models. Perhaps when students remain in segregated schools or classrooms, they never have an opportunity to observe and imitate appropriate behavior that is modeled by their peers (Sailor & McCart, 2014).

It is possible that when students with disabilities are in segregated classroom situations, they lack role models to show them appropriate classroom behavior, and may act out. Studies suggest that whenever students with disabilities are subjected to seclusion and/or restraint, it almost always occurs in segregated settings such as special education classrooms or special education schools (Sailor & Burrello, 2009). This may suggest that students with disabilities may exhibit more serious behavior problems in segregated settings in part because they lack appropriate behavioral role models. However, it is also important to remember that students with disabilities who are in segregated schools or special education classrooms may be in those settings because of underlying behavioral issues.

Pull-out programs are a disruption for students with disabilities. Students with disabilities stated they enjoyed being members of inclusive classrooms and did not enjoy being pulled out for related services such as speech therapy; their preference would be to have related services personnel come to their classroom (Shogren et al. 2015). Students with disabilities believed when they left the classroom, they missed valuable learning opportunities (Shogren et al. 2015). Of note, students without disabilities stated that they would be embarrassed to be pulled out of a classroom for related services. The students without disabilities also believed that segregated classrooms would limit students with disabilities’ opportunities to participate in the general education curriculum and create
friendships. These comments from students without disabilities highlights the importance of class membership (Shogren et al. 2015).

It is possible that there could be multiple types of barriers to inclusion within classrooms and schools. For example, one type could be organizational barriers where the way schools and classrooms are structured and managed may not allow for diversity within the abilities of the students (Kochhar et al. 2000). Perhaps this can be explained by attitudinal barriers of principals, other administrators, and general education teachers who believe that students with more severe disabilities will limit the academic achievement of the other students in the class (Kochhar et al., 2000). This might be related to knowledge barriers if educators do not keep up with cutting edge research and so may not know that peer mediated support systems can actually increase academic engagement, class participation, and grades for certain students without disabilities (Carter et al., 2009; Kochhar et al., 2000; Shukla et al., 1998).

Pull-out programs may also be based on more than one barrier to inclusion. Perhaps organizational barriers such as time constraints and specialists’ case load of students with disabilities do not allow students with disabilities to be serviced in the classroom because the specialist needs to work with more than one student at a time and the students are in different classes (Kochhar et al., 2000). Maybe the principal and teachers do not realize that students with disabilities believe they are missing important class experiences when they are pulled out of their classroom for specialized services and do not wish to leave their classroom (Kochhar et al., 2000; Shogren et al., 2015).
Segregated Programs in Jewish Supplementary Schools

Although many parents want an inclusive religious school program for their children with disabilities, many believe they must give up that goal to procure a Jewish education for their children (Miller-Jacobs, 2008). Some Jewish supplementary schools have self-contained classes for students who are not able to progress in the general education classroom (Miller-Jacobs, 2008). These classes are often very small with as few as three students (Miller-Jacobs, 2008). Some schools have created a consortium to create a regional program that is comprised of “self-contained classes, pull-out programs, or tutors and/or consultants to the religious schools” (Miller-Jacobs, 2008, p. 127). In some cities, parents have created programs when they believe religious schools have not met the unique needs of their children (e.g., children on the autism spectrum) who may need more support and/or more specific teaching methods that are not supplied by the supplementary school (Jacobs-Miller, 2008).

Jewish Supplementary School Components that Can Enhance Inclusion

Many of the components that can enhance inclusion in religious schools are also frequently barriers that can impede inclusion; it often depends on whether they are available or absent from the congregation members, congregational leadership, directors, teachers, classrooms and/or programs.

Educational Components that are Beneficial for Inclusion

Educational components can include teaching methods, activities, curricula, instructional materials, and field trips. To create an inclusive classroom, the most important aspect is the method that is used to teach the information. Using teaching methods that make information accessible to all learners allows everyone to understand
the material and participate in discussions, projects, reports, and class activities.

Teaching methods are extensively covered in the next section under Evidence Based Approaches for Effective Teaching and Learning in Inclusive Classrooms but suffice it to say that using methods that allow all students to participate, access the information, and be full members of the classroom is important for meaningful inclusion. Because Jewish supplementary schools meet for only three to six hours each week during the academic year, subjects will usually be covered in breadth but not necessarily in depth.

Himmelfarb (1975) argues that religious school topics should be of short duration, substantially informative, and enjoyable. He believes that students in Jewish supplementary schools can get a good Jewish education if the teachers have pedagogical knowledge of their subject, the classroom climate is conducive to learning, the parents and community encourage students to attend religious school, and students attend for enough years (Himmelfarb, 1975). Instructional materials, activities and field trips need to be accessible for all students, interesting, and should tie into the topic the students are learning. Teachers should build a curriculum that links what the students are learning to their everyday lives. One area that may need some rethinking is the requirement that some schools have to teach all students to read Hebrew. Reading Hebrew can be difficult; it has a completely different alphabet where the printed and cursive versions of the letters look totally different, the vowels can be under the letter, to the left side of the letter, or at the top of the left side of the letter, and it is read from right to left- the opposite of English. In an article by Rubin (2009), she quotes from Wendy Dratler, a presenter at a professional development conference on special education. Dratler recognized that one of the most difficult decisions to make is whether students with
disabilities can and should master the ability to read Hebrew. She noted that in most cases, children are able to learn to read Hebrew, although “some brains are just not wired to do it” (Rubin, 2009, quoting Wendy Dratler, p. 2). However, there is a solution to that problem; it is possible to use transliteration, the use of English letters to write out the Hebrew words, to learn the prayers and the Torah portion for a student’s bar or bat mitzvah. According to Dratler, (as interviewed by Rubin, 2009) many children who are unable to learn to read Hebrew believe they are letting their families down. Dratler stated that once she tells children with disabilities that it is all right to read using transliteration as long as they say all the words, they completely let go of their anxiety (Rubin, 2009).

In order for all children to be meaningfully included in Jewish supplementary schools, there may need to be accommodations, like using transliteration, made for children who have difficulty learning to read Hebrew. Other accommodations could include teaching students by utilizing their strengths. Teachers could create materials for visual, auditory, or kinesthetic learners within the same lesson.

**Organizational Components that are Beneficial for Inclusion**

Organizational components can include the decisions the director makes that impact teachers and instruction, the director’s leadership style, and physical barriers within the campus and activity sites. Leaders play a crucial role in creating a successful inclusive program (Buysse, Skinner, & Grant, 2001; Hall, Dunlap, Causton-Theoharis, & Theoharis, 2013; Novick and Glanz, 2011).

It is organizational leadership that can change policies and procedures that open the doors for a diverse range of people. Leaders can find resources to help make physical changes to facilities or provide needed training for staff. The
commitment and support from leadership is critical to success and will make a powerful statement to the community at large that everyone is welcome. (Hall, Dunlap, Causton-Theoharis, & Theoharis, 2013, p. 2-3)

Research by Newmann, Rutter, and Smith (1989) suggests that when administrators supply teachers with help, support and recognition, teachers acquire a greater sense of community and unity. This could enhance their teaching abilities, their ability to manage behavior, and give them an overall increase in their feelings of efficacy. Directors, educators, and parents of students with disabilities believe that administrative leadership and support as well as a well-articulated philosophy and a set of program standards, which is often created by Jewish supplementary school directors, contribute to quality inclusion of students with disabilities (Buysse, Skinner, & Grant, 2001). Also, physical access to all areas of learning is important and when students and their parents have access to the entire religious school and other places where learning occurs they feel they are full participants in the classroom culture (Carter, 2007).

**Personnel Components that are Beneficial for Inclusion**

Personnel components that are beneficial for inclusion can include many areas such as teacher attitudes which include their beliefs, teacher training, length of time they have taught, professional development opportunities, experiences with inclusion, and experiences with people who have disabilities that were not in a school setting. Teacher attitudes have already been covered in this paper. One component that teachers often forget is that relationships matter; there should be a strong positive relationship between the teacher and each student. Students should believe that the teacher likes them and is concerned about their lives beyond the classroom. Students are aware of how teachers feel
about them (Schoem, 1980). Teachers need to create relationships with their students and construct a classroom environment where students build relationships with each other. The goal is for all the participants in the class to create social networks with each other (Woocher, 2012).

Having qualified teachers to create inclusive classrooms and programs is essential and was identified as a crucial component for inclusion by parents and professionals (Buysse, Skinner, & Grant, 2001). One appropriate way to have teachers create lessons that all students can access and show their knowledge is by using differentiated instruction. Novick and Glanz (2011) found that many teachers are not taught to use differentiated instruction and are not committed to the philosophy of inclusion. The best way to ensure having qualified teachers is to have excellent teacher training programs and to supply teachers with continuing professional development. Teacher preparation programs that include methods for training teachers how to work with learners of all abilities help teachers feel competent and increase their feelings of efficacy. Jung (2007) argues that teacher training should be lengthened to help raise the self-efficacy and confidence level of preservice teachers related to teaching students with disabilities. Teachers who are comfortable teaching inclusive classes have had experiences working with students who have disabilities in their training programs (Jung, 2007).

Unfortunately, research has indicated there is a shortage of well-trained teachers in Jewish schools and retaining the strong teachers who are there is challenging because the positions are only part-time (Rotstein, 2017). There are few Jewish teacher training programs, and not all Jewish schools employ trained teachers. Sadly, supplementary
schools and informal education programs are the least likely to have teachers who have graduated from a Jewish training program on their staff (Novick & Glanz,).

It is important to provide teachers with ongoing professional development activities on inclusion (Miller-Jacobs, 2008). Professional development is especially important for part-time teachers and directors who were not specifically trained for their positions (Kraus, 2008). Providing high-quality professional development for these staff members that is designed for their particular job can help them become competent and confident in their roles (Kraus, 2008). Kraus (2008) suggests that professional development programs “should range from intensive year-long programs to sophisticated on-site training, from the development of short-term courses designed to meet specific needs to the use of internet and computer technology” (p. 393). When religious school teachers participate in professional development together, they have “the opportunity to learn together, experiment with new approaches and reflect on their impact on students with special needs” (Miller-Jacobs, 2008, p. 130). However, many Jewish supplementary schools lack the funds to provide this service for their teachers (Novick & Glanz, 2011). Jewish supplementary schools could utilize ideas from innovative educators and organizations such as MATAN, Gateways, Yachad, and others (Shefter, Uhrman, Tobin, & Kress, 2017). Some of these organizations have free internet learning sessions on inclusion. Congregations often are comprised of people who have many talents. It would be important for the director of the religious school to find congregants who have expertise in inclusion, special education, speech and language pathology, occupational and physical therapy, and social work and ask if they would mind giving one professional development session each year or as needed. These speakers might consider providing their expertise
on a volunteer basis or the congregation could give them a small honorarium of a gift card. Many people love to share their knowledge with others and may enjoy the opportunity to speak with the religious school staff.

**Congregational Components that are Beneficial for Inclusion**

Congregational components that are beneficial for inclusion could include: money for programs, equipment, and/or staff; volunteers from the congregation to act as shadows; congregants who are in the field of inclusion could help design differentiated instruction lessons for classes; support from the clergy who would state the importance of inclusion in services and bulletins; support from the congregational board members who could give time and expertise; support from the youth group advisor and board members who could make sure that the youth group activities are accessible and provide a buddy for a student with disabilities when he or she joins the group; and support in making sure the campus is accessible from the executive director of the congregation. Having an inclusion committee as a standing committee is important to inclusion by identifying needs and creating and sustaining inclusive environments (UJA-Federation of New York, n.d.).

**Evidence-Based Approaches for Effective Teaching and Learning for Inclusive Classrooms**

In order for Jewish supplementary schools to have inclusive classrooms where students with disabilities are meaningfully participating in their religious education program, students with disabilities need to be able to access the curriculum, demonstrate their learned knowledge, and be an accepted and valued member of the class with full class membership. Learning content in an academic environment is more problematic for students with disabilities than students without disabilities. Students with disabilities
have a more difficult time successfully participating in instructional activities that help them learn the curriculum content or they only slightly benefit from their participation (McLeskey, Rosenberg, & Westling, 2013). This is because they “may have difficulty attending to lectures and discussions and comprehending important concepts; reading assignments and comprehending what they read; and writing reports or taking written tests related to the instructional content” (McLeskey et al., 2013, p. 231). However, there are effective teaching strategies, often called evidence-based practices, that are known to work well with students who have disabilities in secular school so they can access the information in the curriculum. Some of these strategies also have the ability to increase social interactions with peers of all abilities and possibly encourage friendships among classmates with and without disabilities. It is possible that some of these strategies could be successful in helping students with disabilities understand their religious school curriculum thus encouraging them to participate in class in a way that is meaningful for them.

Evidence-based practices are “practices and programs shown by high-quality research to have meaningful effects on student outcomes” (Cook & Odom, 2013, p. 136). To be designated as an evidence-based practice, the evidence of meaningful effects on student outcomes is “based on rigorous research having been conducted and also requires that the impact of the intervention on outcomes is substantial” (Hornby, 2014, p. 62). The evidence-based practices below were chosen for review in this study because they could be familiar to teachers and pre-service teachers as they may be included in textbooks used to teach about inclusive classrooms in teacher preparation programs (Mazur & Doran, 2010; McLeskey et al., 2013; Salend, 2011; Turnbull, Turnbull,
Wehmeyer, & Shogren, 2016). Many teachers and pre-service teachers may even have experience using these evidence-based practices as many school districts utilize them in their schools.

**Response to Intervention**

There are many types of Response to Intervention (RTI) frameworks used in schools to teach academic skills (McLeskey et al., 2013). “The central element of RTI is a series of increasingly intensive tiers of support, available to all students- those with and without disabilities- based on an assessment of individual needs” (McLeskey et al., 2013, p. 46). Many of the response to intervention methods use three tiers of support (Fletcher & Vaughn, 2009; McLeskey et al., 2013). Tier 1 is a high-quality educational program that uses evidence-based instruction (McLeskey et al., 2013). Students are assessed using short probes every one to four weeks to see if they have achieved specified levels of growth in the subject area (Fletcher & Vaughn, 2009). If the student’s growth level is not sufficient, students are moved into Tier 2 which has more intensive instruction that could include any or all of the following: more instruction time on the subject, smaller learning groups, repeated practice, differentiated instruction, or flexible learning groups (Fletcher & Vaughn, 2009; McLeskey et al., 2013). Students who are not making sufficient academic progress in Tier 2 are moved to Tier 3 where the instruction is more intense and often individualized specifically for the student (Fletcher & Vaughn, 2009; McLeskey et al., 2013). Teachers who instruct students in Tier 3 are often special education teachers or more specialized teachers (Fletcher & Vaughn, 2009; McLeskey et al., 2013). Response to intervention allows students to move seamlessly up or down the tier system to accommodate the learning of the subject matter. An advantage to using response to...
intervention is that students who have trouble learning information can be moved immediately to the next tier where the student will have more intense instruction without having to wait for psychometric testing which is often required to obtain more resources for the student (McLeskey, et al., 2013). Response to intervention can also be used for screening and identifying students who qualify for special education services (Fletcher & Vaughn, 2009; McLeskey, et al., 2013).

Response to intervention is often used in schools to address instruction and academic challenges. It requires the teacher to take a great amount of data on students to make sure they are always in the correct tier so they receive optimal instruction. It would seem that it would not be feasible for a Jewish supplementary school because they are only in operation for a few hours per week and the amount of data needed to understand each class member’s learning would take up most of the class session. Also, besides learning to read and write Hebrew in certain grades (often somewhere between second and seventh grade), much of the curriculum deals more with Jewish culture, current events, helping others, learning rituals, understanding the meaning of holidays, creating a community within the class, and feeling connected to Judaism which are less fact-based topics. However, it is possible that a modification of the tiered system could be used for teaching some students how to read Hebrew with the instruction delivered in three tiers of support, depending on the level of support needed for each student. Of note, it is unknown if there are evidence-based methods for teaching students Hebrew, which is the most academic aspect of many Jewish supplementary schools.
School-wide Positive Behavioral Supports

School-wide positive behavioral supports (SWPBS) is a “systems-level and evidence based method for improving valued social and learning outcomes for all students” (Turnbull, Turnbull et al., 2016, p. 273). School-wide positive behavioral support systems give students the parameters they need to understand how they should behave when they are on school property and hopefully generalize that behavior throughout their world. This approach “is a proactive strateg[y] for defining, teaching, and supporting appropriate student behaviors to create positive school environments” (United States Office of Special Education Programs, 2018, p. 1). School-wide positive behavioral support programs are created for a school or a school district (OSEP Technical Assistance Center on Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports, 2017). The objective is to teach behavioral expectations for students in the same way that teachers present the core curriculum to the class. Schools concentrate on three to five behavioral expectations for students which are enforced throughout the school property; both in classrooms and non-classroom areas such as the playground, the bus, the bathrooms, and the hallways (OSEP Technical Assistance Center on Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports, 2017). School personnel always present the expectations in a positive statement that is easy for everyone to remember, such as “Respect Yourself, Respect Others, and Respect Property” (OSEP Technical Assistance Center on Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports, 2017, p. 1). All teachers and school staff teach and reinforce the expectations exactly the same way so there is a high level of consistency within the school. When the students exhibit appropriate behavior, they are recognized for that behavior; praise is the most important way to recognize students’
positive behavior (OSEP Technical Assistance Center on Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports, 2017). Many schools use a gotcha program where staff members recognize students with a piece of paper or certificate when they are acting appropriately. The gotcha program also reminds school staff members to look for students doing correct behavior rather than singling them out for inappropriate behavior (OSEP Technical Assistance Center on Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports, 2017).

School-wide positive behavioral supports are comprised of a continuum of positive behavior supports (United States Office of Special Education Programs, 2018). Tier 1 is the first level of support. It is the high-quality support that all the students in school receive. Tier 2 is for students that are not able to control their behavior using Tier 1 supports and move to a higher level of support. This level is utilized by only a targeted group of the students at the school (United States Office of Special Education Programs, 2018). Students who are not able to control their behavior using Tiers 1 and 2, move into Tier 3 supports which are very individualized (United States Office of Special Education Programs, 2018). Students can move up and down the Tier system depending on their needs. A school-wide positive behavioral support program can change the culture of the school by changing the behaviors the students exhibit. School-wide positive behavioral support systems make inappropriate behaviors “less effective, efficient, and relevant, and desired behavior more functional” (United States Office of Special Education Programs, 2018, p. 1).

This program could be beneficial for students who attend Jewish supplementary schools. Most of the students attend religious school on Sunday mornings between two
and three hours and may also attend on a weekday afternoon between two and three hours after they have completed their secular school day. It would not be a mischaracterization to state that some students are not always enthusiastic about attending supplementary school because they wish to sleep in on Sunday mornings or they are exhausted from school and have a hard time sitting still and learning new information in the late afternoon on a weekday. It could be that the main aspect students enjoy about supplementary school is the ability to talk with their friends. Because many congregation members send their children to their congregation’s preschool and then religious school, many students have been in class with the same peers since they began preschool and have made strong friendships. Often it appears these friends do not attend the same secular school and they enjoy getting together during the week or weekend at religious school. When students prefer to talk to their friends or are tired and do not want to learn new material, inappropriate behavior may occur. Having a program that reinforces accepted behavior and discourages inappropriate behavior which is practiced and reinforced the same way throughout the religious school could change the school environment. However, it is currently unknown whether a school-wide positive behavioral support plan is needed in Jewish congregational schools or could be successful at a religious school because a religious school’s function and its population may be too fundamentally different from a secular school to have the same results.

**Multi-tiered Systems of Support**

Multi-tiered systems of support (MTSS) is a term used when taking into account both response to intervention for academic performance and school-wide positive behavioral supports for behavior performance. “MTSS models have resulted from the
merger of two innovative school-wide procedures, response to intervention and positive behavior supports, both of which promote progress and success in academics (RTI) and behavior (PBS)” (Turnbul et al., 2016, p. 47). Students receive high-quality, evidence-based instruction and supports and if needed receive more intensive supports so they will be successful (Turnbull et al., 2016). Sometimes response to intervention is called multi-tiered response to intervention and encompasses both the academic and behavioral aspects of multi-tiered systems of support (McLeskey et al., 2013).

Multi-tiered systems of support would probably not be an appropriate choice to use at a Jewish supplementary school for the same reasons that response to intervention and school-wide positive behavioral supports; it would require a great amount of data collection from the educator and it is hard to make a case for a strong behavior program for a school that only meets three to six hours per week and whose population and function may be different from that of secular school.

**Peer Support Arrangements or Strategies**

Peer support arrangements or strategies are “arranging for one or more peers without disabilities to provide ongoing social and academic support to their classmates with severe disabilities while receiving guidance and support from paraprofessionals, special educators, and/or general educators” (Carter et al., 2009, p. 10). Students without disabilities often volunteer to be a peer support and may receive elective course credit for being a peer support (McLeskey et al., 2013). For students with severe disabilities, having a peer support in class generally results in increased active engagement: attending to class activities and working on class assignments (Shukla et al., 1998). They also have an increase in frequency of interactions with their peer support provider and those
interactions last for longer periods of time (Shukla et al., 1998). Although peer support strategies can potentially offer all students without disabilities benefits, they seem to be especially beneficial to students who are at risk of failing a course (Carter & Kennedy, 2006; Shukla et al., 1998).

While peer support strategies can be used for any student who needs academic support or improved social skills, it works best for students with more severe disabilities (McLeskey et al. 2013). Because students without disabilities work closely with and take some responsibility for students who have significant support needs, the student who is the peer support [the student without disabilities] should want to take on the responsibility and volunteer for the position. Peer support strategies not only help students with more severe support needs stay academically engaged and progress towards their educational goals, they can develop new friendships, increase their social competencies, increase their communication skills, increase their sense of belonging to the class, and increase expectations for them from teachers and classmates (Carter et al., 2009). Students with disabilities who participate in peer support arrangements also increase their self-concept (McLeskey et al., 2013). Making friends and increasing social skills are important outcomes for students with more severe support needs as these are often Individual Education Program goals for them (McLeskey et al., 2013).

Peer support strategies could be a very promising option for students who need a significant amount of support in their religious school classroom. Students with disabilities gain both academic and social skills and are considered full members of the class which allows students and educators to see them in a different light, thus changing expectations of them. These changes in attitudes about students who need a significant
amount of support could foster peers to consider them for friendships. The students who choose to be peer support providers also have positive experiences by gaining confidence in their ability to take responsibility for others, having more quality time with educators and/or classroom staff as they discuss how best to support their partner and maybe even make a new friend. The experience of being a peer support provider could bring out nascent leadership qualities that could grow over time as the peer support provider becomes more confident in her or his abilities to work with her or his peer.

**Peer-assisted Learning (Strategies)**

Peer-assisted learning (PAL) is a whole-class peer-tutoring program that is often used for teaching reading (University of Missouri, 2011). Peers work in pairs which are determined by the teacher to practice reading using immediate feedback from their peer who corrects reading mistakes. It allows “students to practice reading skills with immediate feedback and to have extensive reading practice” (University of Missouri, 2011, p. 1). One of the reasons peer assisted learning may be successful is because students often learn best from peers (Carter et al., 2009). It also avoids the possibility that a student who has trouble reading will stand out in a reading group because he or she receives a great deal of corrective feedback; instead, only one peer will know that the student requires a great deal of assistance with reading (Carter et al., 2009). Peer-assisted learning concentrates on reading, paragraph shrinking [identifying the main idea of the paragraph] and prediction relay where students make predictions about a half page of text (Salend, 2011). Peer-assisted learning strategies can be used as a Tier 1 Response to Intervention strategy (McMaster, Kung, Han, & Cao, 2008). When creating pairs for
Peer-assisted Learning, it is important to make sure that the pairs of students can work well together (Mastropieri & Scruggs, 2002).

Interestingly, Judaism has used a type of paired learning for centuries (Brown & Malkus, 2007). It is called hevruta, and consists of two students studying biblical texts together in which they take turns reading the text, explaining their interpretation of the text, and listening to their partner’s reading and explanation. The word hevruta comes from the root word, hever, which means friend. When practicing hevruta, each partner’s “insights are honored, supported and treasured” by the other partner (Milgram, n.d. p. 1). Students can discuss how to apply the information to world problems or to their own lives (Schultz, n.d.). Some students who utilize hevruta learning find that some of the most important aspects of hevruta are the opportunities to create friendships and build a community from the learning process (Brown & Malkus, 2007). It is possible that friendships could develop through peer-assisted learning pairs.

It is possible that peer-assisted Learning Strategies could be used to teach Jewish supplementary school students how to read Hebrew in the same way it has been successful in teaching “reading fluency, vocabulary, and text comprehension to kindergarten, elementary, and secondary students and English language learners…” (Salend, 2011, p. 386). Currently, many Hebrew programs only teach reading and may not teach vocabulary or text comprehension. If peer-assisted learning strategies were used for teaching Hebrew, it may expand the program from just teaching reading to teaching reading, vocabulary, and text comprehension. Students with disabilities would have the opportunity to learn from peers which may be why the program is successful (Carter et al., 2009). It is possible that because hevruta, or paired learning, has been used
as a method of teaching biblical text to older students including adult learners, it could be a very acceptable way for students of all abilities to acquire Hebrew reading skills. Depending on how the teacher introduces the method, hevruta, or peer-assisted learning, could contain a special aura for students of all abilities because it is a Jewish method of learning. Peer-assisted learning strategies in reading can increase reading skills, improve students’ sense of responsibility for themselves and others, and improve students’ attitudes towards the class and the content area (Mastropieri & Scruggs, 2002).

Universal Design for Learning

Universal design for learning (UDL) is a way to design curriculum as well as spaces and environments so that information is more accessible to students with many different types of abilities (McLeskey et al., 2013; Turnbull et al., 2016). It helps students with disabilities access the general education curriculum by using technology or instruction to make modifications in the curriculum (Turnbull et al., 2016). Many students with disabilities become discouraged or frustrated because they have difficulty accessing curriculum in school. By using UDL, students can learn the material in different ways, have options as to how they wish to demonstrate what they have learned, and the teacher motivates the class to learn by utilizing creative and fun methods. “The principles of UDL require that [the teacher] consider a variety of ways to present material to students, consider different ways for them to show what they have learned, and consider unique ways to motivate them to be engaged” (McLeskey et al., 2013 p. 231).

UDL has three guidelines for learning that were created by the Center for Applied Special Technology (CAST, 2011). The first guideline is the way in which information is presented to students. Teachers should provide multiple means of representation (CAST,
Teachers can present instructional material in multiple ways to students. By using multiple means of presenting information to students, teachers reduce perceptual or learning barriers making the information more understandable to all students (McLeskey, 2013). The second guideline is the way students can demonstrate what they have learned. Teachers can provide multiple means of action and expression (CAST, 2011). This encourages students to use their strongest mode of communication to demonstrate their command of the material. The third guideline is the way teachers engage their students. Teachers can provide multiple means of engagement (CAST 2011). Teachers can use their students’ interests to decide which modes to use for presenting material and allowing students to demonstrate their learning (McLeskey et al. 2013). It is important to remember that all instructional materials must also be created using universal design for learning (Turnbull et al., 2016). UDL allows teachers to create unique instructional materials that meet the needs of each student in the class (Turnbull et al., 2016). “It focuses on a student’s strengths, takes the student’s learning capacities into account, and offers each student a full opportunity to benefit from the general education curriculum” (Turnbull et al., 2016, p. 41).

UDL could be an excellent method of teaching religious school students such that students of all abilities can understand the core curriculum. Because teachers can allow the students to demonstrate their knowledge in many ways, it is possible that teachers would have the ability to know exactly what knowledge students have acquired. Also, students with disabilities would have the opportunity to express their knowledge in their strongest mode allowing their peers without disabilities to see their strengths rather than their deficits. This could help peers without disabilities see that students with disabilities
are more like them than they are different and allow friendships to blossom. Designing creative lesson plans that take advantage of the students’ interests can encourage engagement which might decrease student misbehavior. Because it is possible that one of the main reasons students attend supplementary school is to spend time with friends, teachers can build socialization into the curriculum by having students do group work that allows them to socialize while learning information or creating something to present to the class. It is possible that some of the positive outcomes of Jewish supplementary school is for students to create lasting friendships, feel that they are a part of the classroom community, and create a Jewish identity. UDL could help students accomplish those goals by providing experiences in the classroom and on field trips that allow students to spend time together creating positive memories with one another that may lead into friendships, feelings of belonging, and creating a Jewish identity. This may assist students with disabilities to have meaningful social inclusion in their religious school classrooms.

**Differentiated Instruction**

Differentiated instruction is designed to create learning environments where teachers can meet the needs of students with diverse abilities. Teachers design lessons by taking into account the strengths and weaknesses of students so students can understand information through different modalities and grasp key features of the information (McLeskey et al., 2013). Students can demonstrate their knowledge through their abilities and skills (McLeskey et al., 2013). Teachers who use differentiated instruction understand that inclusive classes include students of all abilities and the amount of the information students learn can be variable. With differentiated instruction, teachers
realize that “students will learn material to different breadth and depths, but it focuses on all students learning the most essential components, or the most powerful ideas of the materials” (McLeskey et al., 2013, p. 223). When designing lesson plans, teachers identify the “concepts, principles, and skills” that they want all students to understand and then plan the lesson using backward design to include that information (Salend, 2011, p. 288). Teachers tailor instruction by using “at least four different classroom elements based on student readiness, interest, or learning profile” (Thomlinson, 2003, p. 1). The elements that can be changed are different content, different processes, accepting different products from students, and the ability to change the learning environment (Tomlinson, 2003). Content refers to “What the student needs to learn or how the student will get access to the information” (Tomlinson, 2003, p. 1). Process refers to the “activities in which the student engages in order to make sense of or master the content” (Tomlinson, 2003, p. 1). Products are “culminating projects that ask the student to rehearse, apply, and extend what he or she has learned in a unit” (Tomlinson, 2003, p. 1). In differentiated instruction, the learning environment is “the way the classroom works and feels” (Tomlinson, 2003, p. 1). By using differentiated instruction, all students in the class can be successful (Salend, 2011).

Like UDL, differentiated instruction could be an excellent way to teach students of all abilities in an inclusive supplementary school class. Teachers can decide which concepts, principles, and skills should be included in the core curriculum that all students would learn and students can extend their learning depending on their abilities. Students could demonstrate their knowledge by choosing different types of projects to complete and present to the class and the learning environment could be changed often to
accommodate small and large group instruction as well as groups or pairs of students working on projects. If the teacher groups students by interest, it is very possible that students will have the opportunity to work with others who share the same interests. This could lead to shared positive experiences while creating the project and positive interactions with one another. It is possible that sharing interests, experiences and positive interactions can develop friendships among students with and without disabilities. In order for students with disabilities to be meaningfully included in their educational program, they must have social inclusion along with academic inclusion. It appears that differentiated instruction may be able to facilitate social and academic inclusion for students with disabilities.

**Changing the Culture in Jewish Supplementary Schools**

There are many steps that Jewish supplementary schools can take to change the school culture from benign neglect of students with disabilities to embracing the diversity of the community and creating programs and classrooms that celebrate and include all students. Miller-Jacobs (2008) has many suggestions for accomplishing a culture change within religious schools. She notes that Jewish supplementary schools need to become more accepting and responsive to the unique learning needs of students (Miller-Jacobs, 2008). Schools need to provide more learning opportunities; not only for educators but also for directors, parents and lay leaders (Miller-Jacobs, 2008). Directors and educators need to understand that inclusion does not diminish the educational opportunities of the students without disabilities in the class but may actually enhance their learning (Miller-Jacobs, 2008). Parents and lay leaders also need to know this information so they can accept and encourage inclusive classrooms. Educators need to learn how to make
accommodations and create differentiated lessons (Miller-Jacobs, 2008).

Accommodations and lesson plans that utilize differentiated instruction and universal design are more effective methods of teaching all students, not just those with disabilities. Lay leaders need to become spokespeople for the importance of providing special education for all students who need it (Miller-Jacobs, 2008) to understand the material presented in class and on field trips. Parents need to feel welcomed and included at their child’s Jewish supplementary school (Miller-Jacobs, 2008). Miller-Jacobs also argues that “developing and maintaining partnerships between schools and parents will provide the optimal experience for students with special needs” (2008, p. 131). Jewish supplementary school should not just be about acquiring knowledge and learning rituals. Building social ties is also important; students of all abilities need to create friendships, be a member of the community, and develop a strong Jewish identity within the community. “While we generally identify education as the acquisition of knowledge, skills, and attitudes, in fact our most influential educational memories are often about people. This is not surprising given the powerful human urge to be connected to others, to be part of a group, a community” (Woocher, 2012, p. 202-203).

**Discussion**

Jewish supplementary schools have an advantage over public schools when it comes to inclusion because there are no state standards or high-stakes testing. This means that the standards, which are determined by the director in accordance with the congregation, can vary depending on the ability of each student. However, that does not mean there are no standards for students with disabilities. All students, including those with disabilities, should have access to a challenging curriculum and should be held to
high expectations (Wehmeyer et al., 2003). Jewish supplementary schools should practice full inclusion whenever possible to enable students of all abilities to learn information and skills pertaining to Judaism, to have a sense of Jewish community, connection, and friendship, and to develop their Jewish identity.

For this study, it is important to know what type of evidence-based approaches for effective teaching and learning for inclusive classrooms would be feasible for Jewish supplementary schools to use to ensure that students with disabilities are meaningfully participating both academically and socially in their religious education program. It is also important to understand which programs could be successful and feasible in Jewish supplementary schools.

While there are many programs that encourage effective inclusion that are available, Jewish supplementary schools have some limiting characteristics: they only operate between three and six hours per week, and only throughout the academic school year; they do not always have educators trained in pedagogy, Judaic content, or who have experience working with students who have disabilities; they often do not have large budgets to pay for extra staff or training; and they often do not have anyone on staff who can design inclusive programming for all students. Most Jewish supplementary schools would probably be looking for a program that would be inexpensive to design and implement throughout the school year.

For students who need a substantial amount of support in the classroom, peer support strategies would be appropriate. Students in the class could volunteer to be peer supports. There could be an adult, either an educator, the director, a clergy member, or a congregation member who would be a mentor/supervisor for the peer supports. They
could have fun training sessions throughout the school year on Sundays where they could eat pizza after class ends and talk about some of the experiences and challenges they have had with their buddies and how they resolved the challenges. They could role play different situations that may arise and discuss with the mentor how to handle those situations. The student volunteers would also receive training on how to adapt lessons and activities for their peer buddies. There would always be an educator they could speak with at religious school should they have any questions while they are paired with their peer buddy and they would receive appropriate and timely feedback from the educator(s) in the classroom. Since being a peer support increases classroom engagement with students who are at risk for failure in the classroom, peer supports do not have to be the best students in the class; it might be beneficial to have students who are not engaged become peer supports if they are willing to accept the responsibility. This program is inexpensive and does not require extensive staff training. The religious school would not have to hire more teachers or specialists. Teachers would not have to continually take data on students to see if they need to move from tier to tier.

For students needing less support, there are more choices. UDL and differentiated instruction could be appropriate programs to use. They should not be too cost prohibitive to initiate if educators design the lessons after they have had an in-depth in-service with an expert who would be available to go over lesson plans and do follow-up consultation on an as-needed basis. Curriculum could be written and designed such that all students can show progress. This can be accomplished if instructional methods, and curricular materials are designed to challenge and be interesting for all students (Wehmeyer et al., 2003). Assignments could be presented in multiple ways, and modified. All educational
products could be presented in multiple ways so students have the opportunity to demonstrate their learning. Educational programs and materials should take into consideration both the general curriculum as well as the distinct learning needs of each student through task modification (Wehmeyer et al., 2003).

For those students who are learning Hebrew, peer-assisted learning strategies might be very effective. It would give students a great deal of practice reading with immediate feedback to correct their mistakes. Schools might even choose to expand the Hebrew program such that not only would students learn to read, they would work on vocabulary and text comprehension. If schools decide to only work on reading, it could still be effective. Peer-assisted learning strategies is not an expensive program. Teachers would only have to copy pages of paragraphs at the correct reading level for each pair of students. Peer-assisted learning could be taught as hevruta, tying an old custom to a new and exciting way to learn Hebrew reading.

Response to intervention, and multi-tiered systems of supports could also be used to teach Hebrew but may be more expensive to initiate and use. All the staff who teach Hebrew would need extensive training on how to use the system. Because of the tiered system and the fact that tiers 2 and 3 may require more staff members who are familiar with special education methods and Hebrew for teaching concepts, it may be cost prohibitive for a supplementary school. Teachers would also spend a great deal of their time taking data which would be used to make decisions on whether students need to stay in the same tier or move up or down tiers. Although these are excellent programs for teaching reading and math, they seem too rigorous for teaching the basic Hebrew that is used for reading prayers during Sabbath services, holidays, and the student’s bar or bat
mitzvah training. However, it is possible that an educator could adapt the programs for use in a Jewish supplementary school.

School-wide positive behavioral supports could be an effective way to create a positive environment at a religious school. However, it is also an expensive undertaking because of the training that all staff members would need especially for a school that only meets from three to six hours per week during the academic school year. Like response to intervention and multi-tiered systems of supports, it seems too complicated for a school that does not have students for more than six hours per week. It is possible that an educator could modify school-wide positive behavioral supports to make it more appropriate for a religious school.

While most of this discussion has centered on teaching methods, it is important for Jewish supplementary schools to design programs to encourage students to practice acceptance and create friendships among all the students in the class. Some of the teaching and learning methods also support interaction and possible friendships. Peer support arrangements definitely supports interaction and friendships. By having students volunteer to be peer supports, they are already primed to want to interact with peers who have significant support needs. UDL and differentiated instruction can also create friendships when students work together on projects. Opportunities to spend time together doing fun activities builds positive memories and encourages reciprocal friendships; where both friends are equal partners rather than having a helper-helpee relationship. While the information and skills needed for Jewish adulthood are important, it is possible that having friends, feeling connected to each other and becoming a community are the most important functions of Jewish supplementary schools. Like the
acquisition of information and skills, these goals also need lesson plans; they do not just happen in fully inclusive classrooms. Teachers need to design lessons that will create friendships among the students in the class so everyone can feel connected to each other and create a community.

There seems to be an increased awareness of diversity among learners within the Jewish community and it is recognized as an area where there are few training programs for future teachers and administrators. The Jewish Theological Seminary (JTS), one of the universities that trains rabbis, cantors, and Jewish educators in the Conservative branch of Judaism started a new master level program called the Disabilities Inclusion and Advocacy concentration in the fall of 2018 (Jewish Theological Seminary, 2018). “In addition to the training offered in the master’s in Jewish Education program, students in the Disabilities Inclusion and Advocacy concentration will also develop the educational, organizational, and curricular competencies needed to create inclusive learning communities” (Jewish Theological Society, 2018, p. 1). The program will prepare future Jewish leaders who are trained to accommodate a wide range of learners and educational needs with programs that are open, welcoming, and inclusive.

Hebrew College also has a Jewish Special Education Program (JSEP) where students can earn a certificate in Jewish special education or a concentration in Jewish special education as part of their master degree in Jewish education. The college program will enable “professionals working in diverse Jewish educational environments to acquire the theoretical education and practical skills necessary to develop strengths-based, inclusive learning environments for learners with a wide range of abilities and
serve as advocates for neurodiversity inclusion within the Jewish community” (Hebrew College, n.d.).

Creating teacher training programs for working with students with disabilities is definitely an important step towards creating effective inclusive classrooms and programs, as studies have suggested that teachers believe they lack the training and necessary skills for creating inclusive classrooms (Martin et al., 2003). It may also alleviate some of the negative attitudes that teachers who do not have experience teaching students with disabilities have about the advantages of inclusive programs. Teachers who do not have training in working with students with disabilities see few advantages of inclusion for students with disabilities while teachers who are trained to work with students with disabilities see many positive outcomes resulting from inclusive classrooms (Martin et al., 2003).

Fully inclusive Jewish supplementary schools staffed with educators who are knowledgeable and skilled in working with students of all abilities would create the type of educational opportunities that all parents would want their children to have. Unlike public schools, Jewish supplementary schools teach children Jewish morals, ethics, and values. It is important that Jewish educators teach by example the values to which they aspire. “Fundamental to Judaism is the recognition that all people are created in the image of God, and therefore, all are to be valued, respected, and educated, regardless of their differences” (Miller-Jacobs & Koren, 2003, p. 1)

**Summary**

Jewish supplementary schools have the opportunity to create fully inclusive educational experiences for students of all abilities. When this is accomplished, all students will have
the opportunity to learn information about the Jewish religion and its rituals, create friendships, be part of the classroom community and form a positive Jewish identity. However, to achieve a fully inclusive religious school, some Jewish supplementary schools may need to change their culture.

Religious school directors and educators may need to change how they view students with disabilities such that they view students of all abilities in the same way, have high expectations for students with disabilities, and avoid passing negative attitudes and beliefs on to the other children in the classroom. Once any negative attitudes and beliefs have changed, true inclusion is possible.

Jewish parents want their children with disabilities to be included in religious school but only if the education the children receive is meaningful for the child. Segregated education is not beneficial to students with and without disabilities as both groups can benefit academically and socially from inclusive classrooms and programs in religious school. There are evidence-based methods of teaching knowledge and skills which have been established in public schools that could work well in religious schools. Depending on the academic emphasis of their religious school, directors could evaluate the methods outlined in this chapter, and may choose one or two that might work with their population of students and faculty. Then experts can develop and present professional development that has been created for the needs of the teachers and directors to help them learn the new evidence-based method of teaching and classroom management for their classrooms. Professional development can increase an educator’s feelings of self-efficacy and confidence working with students of all abilities. It is
important to remember that increasing the experiences educators have working with students of all abilities positively impacts their feelings of self-efficacy.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

Most Jewish children receive their religious education from Jewish supplementary schools (Kraus, 2008; Wertheimer, 2008). Although there are no known published research studies on students with disabilities attending Jewish supplementary schools, informal studies and articles suggest that at least some children with disabilities attend congregational religious schools (Christensen, et al., 2009; Kopelowitz, 2013). Currently, it is unknown how many students with disabilities attend Jewish supplementary school and whether they are educated in inclusive or segregated settings. Many students with disabilities are educated in inclusive settings in their secular schools and are accustomed to attending class with peers of all abilities. Studies indicate that when students of all abilities attend class together all students benefit academically and socially from the diversity (Ryndak, Jackson, & White, 2013; Shogren, et al., 2015). For students with disabilities to have an appropriate Jewish education in their religious school where they will learn about Judaism and its history, learn how to read Hebrew, practice Jewish rituals, create friendships, be part of the Jewish community, and develop a strong Jewish identity, they should be participating in meaningful inclusion. Meaningful inclusion enables students with disabilities to hear, participate in, and learn from the rich curriculum discussions and interactions among students and their instructors that occur in the classroom. Because children with disabilities are attending Jewish supplementary schools, it is important to understand how Jewish supplementary schools define and
create inclusive classrooms to ensure that students with disabilities are meaningfully participating in their religious education programs. The purpose of this basic qualitative research study was to understand how Jewish supplementary school directors and educators define meaningful inclusion, how students with disabilities are meaningfully included in Jewish supplementary schools with their same-age peers, what educational, organizational, personnel, and congregational components contribute to inclusion, and what barriers impede inclusion in Jewish supplementary schools.

The research questions for this study were as follows:

1. How do Jewish supplementary school directors and educators define meaningful inclusion and in what ways do they perceive they have provided meaningful inclusion to their students with disabilities?
   a. In what ways do Jewish supplementary school directors and educators define meaningful *academic inclusion* and how do they perceive they have provided (meaningful) *academic inclusion* for their students with disabilities in their programs with same-age peers?
   b. In what ways do Jewish supplementary school directors and educators define meaningful *social inclusion* and how do they perceive they have provided (meaningful) *social inclusion* for their students with disabilities in their programs with same-age peers?

2. What educational, organizational, personnel, and congregational components do Jewish supplementary school directors and educators perceive as contributing to the meaningful inclusion of students with disabilities?
a. What educational components (e.g., teaching methods, activities, curricula, instructional materials, and field trips) do Jewish supplementary school directors and educators perceive as beneficial for including students with disabilities academically and socially with their same-age peers in Jewish supplementary schools?

b. What organizational components (e.g., the decisions directors make that impact teachers and instruction, directors’ leadership style, and building accessibility) do Jewish supplementary directors and educators perceive as supporting inclusion for students with disabilities in Jewish supplementary school programs with their same-age peers?

c. How do Jewish supplementary school directors and educators perceive the experiences of their personnel (e.g., beliefs, attitudes, training, teaching experience, experiences with school inclusion, and experiences with people who have disabilities not in a school setting) in supporting inclusion for students with disabilities in their programs with same-age peers?

d. What supports do Jewish supplementary school directors and educators perceive the congregation provides to the school for including students with disabilities in their programs with same-age peers?

3. What barriers do Jewish supplementary school directors and educators perceive as impeding the meaningful inclusion of students with disabilities in religious school programs?
This methodology chapter describes the design of the study, the sample selection process, data collection process, data analysis process, how reliability and validity were controlled, the limitations of the study, safeguards for ethical treatment, and confidentiality.

**Design**

**Broad Research Approach**

Creswell (2014) argues that the broad research approach is comprised of “the intersection of philosophy, research designs, and specific methods” (p. 5).

**Philosophical World View**

A researcher’s philosophy is called a philosophical worldview and is defined as “a basic belief that guides action” (Guba, 1990, p. 17). Creswell defines it more explicitly in stating that worldviews are “a general philosophical orientation about the world and the nature of research that a researcher brings to a study” (Creswell, 2014, p. 6). This study about meaningful inclusion of students with disabilities in Jewish supplementary schools is based on a constructivist world view. Constructivism posits that reality is different for every person; there is “no single, observable reality” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 9). Instead, there are multiple realities or interpretations of any single event with each person constructing his or her own meaning of the event (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Because people seek to understand the world in which they live and work, they create subjective meanings from their experiences (Creswell, 2014). In constructivism, the goal of the research is to “rely as much as possible on the participants’ views of the situation being studied” (Creswell, 2014, p. 8). In constructivism, researchers do not discover knowledge, rather they construct knowledge (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Rather than
starting with a theory, researchers “inductively develop a theory or pattern of meaning” (Creswell, 2014, p. 8). This study seeks to understand the ways that Jewish supplementary school directors and educators made meaning of their experiences and interactions when working with students with disabilities in inclusive classrooms.

**Qualitative Research Design**

“A research design is a framework that has been created to find answers to research questions” (Wikipedia, 2019, p.1). For this research study, the research design was a qualitative research design. According to Merriam (2002):

The key to understanding qualitative research lies with the idea that meaning is socially constructed by individuals in interaction with their world. The world, or reality, is not… [a] fixed, single, agreed upon, or measurable phenomenon. … Instead, there are multiple constructions and interpretations of reality that are in flux and that change over time. Qualitative researchers are interested in understanding what those interpretations are at a particular point in time.

(pp. 3-4)

There are key characteristics that are found in all qualitative research designs (Merriam, 2002). The first characteristic is that researchers attempt to “understand the meaning that people have constructed about their world and their experiences; that is, how do people make sense of their experience?” (Merriam, 2002, p. 5-6). Merriam (2002) cites Patton (1985), stating:

Qualitative research is an effort to understand situations in their uniqueness as part of a particular context and the interactions there. This understanding is an end in itself, so that it is not attempting to predict what may happen in the future
necessarily, but to understand the nature of that setting—what it means for participants to be in that setting, what their lives are like, what’s going on for them, what their meanings are, what the world looks like in that particular setting. …The analysis strives for depth of understanding. (Merriam, 2002, p. 5, citing Patton, 1985, p. 1).

The second characteristic is that “the researcher is the primary instrument for data collection and data analysis” (Merriam, 2002, p. 5). Merriam notes that since understanding is the goal of qualitative research, human beings, unlike computer programs, have the ability to be responsive and adaptive to people and situations and so are the perfect tool for collecting and analyzing data from participants. She also states that researchers can observe and interpret nonverbal and verbal communication, process information, make large amounts of information concise and summarize information, check with participants to assure accuracy of the researcher’s interpretation, and explore uncommon or unexpected replies (Merriam, 2002). Merriam also notes that there can be limitations and biases when human beings are collecting and analyzing data which could impact the study. Because biases and subjectivities are difficult to eliminate, she suggests identifying them and then monitoring how they could affect the collection and analysis of the data. On the other hand, Peshkin (1988) argues that a researcher’s biases and subjectivities may contribute to the research by combining with the data to give a unique insight to the subject.

The third characteristic is that the process is inductive rather than deductive (Merriam, 2002). Researchers gather data to build concepts, hypotheses, or theories rather than creating hypotheses to be tested on participants (Merriam, 2002). Usually,
findings that result from the inductive process of analyzing data in a qualitative study “are in the form of themes, categories, typologies, concepts, tentative hypotheses, and even substantive theory” (Merriam, 2002, p. 5)

The fourth characteristic of all qualitative studies is that the product of the qualitative study is richly descriptive. Rather than using numbers to describe the results of the study, qualitative research uses words and pictures to demonstrate what the researcher has learned about the phenomenon (Merriam, 2002). There are usually descriptions of the context, the participants, and the activities of interest (Merriam, 2002).

**Characteristics of Basic Qualitative Research**

The research design for this study was a basic, or generic, qualitative study. According to Merriam (2009) a basic qualitative research design is considered a legitimate research design. With a basic qualitative study, researchers simply describe their study without declaring it a particular type of study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). A basic qualitative study is qualitative research that “is not guided by an explicit or established set of philosophic assumptions in the form of one of the known qualitative methodologies” (Caelli, Ray, & Mill, 2003). Qualitative researchers utilizing a basic qualitative study are interested in “how people interpret their experiences, how they construct their worlds, and what meaning they attribute to their experiences. The overall purpose is to understand how people make sense of their lives and their experiences” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Basic qualitative studies are probably the most common form of research in the field of education (Caelli, Ray, & Mill, 2003; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Basic qualitative research can use any type of sampling technique, but most often uses maximum variation sampling to obtain a wide range of insights of the phenomenon.
described in the study (Kahlke, 2014; Neergaard, Olesen, Andersen, & Sondergaard, 2009). Data is collected from interviews, documents, or observation analysis (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) but most often, data is collected through semi-structured interviews or focus groups, though other sources of data such as documents can be utilized (Kahlke, 2014; Neergaard, et al., 2009). In basic qualitative studies, the “core focus is external and real-world, as opposed to internal and psychological” (Percy, Kostere, & Kostere, 2015). Basic qualitative studies aspire to create a rich description of the phenomenon under investigation (Kahlke, 2014). Inductive analysis for basic qualitative studies is data driven and “does not attempt to fit the data into any preexisting categories. The researcher sets aside all pre-understandings” (Percy, Kostere, & Kostere, 2015). “Data is commonly analyzed concurrently- while data are still being collected- using content analysis as an analytic strategy” (Kahlke, 2014, p. 13). Data from each participant are analyzed individually (Percy, Kostere, & Kostere, 2015). “In an effort to remain close to the data researchers using the … [basic] qualitative approach most often use codes generated from the data, including in vivo codes- codes that use language drawn directly from the data” (Kahlke, 2014, p. 13). The analysis of the data is comprised of “identifying recurring patterns that characterize the data. Findings are these recurring patterns or themes supported by the data from which they were derived. The overall interpretation will be the researcher’s understanding of the participants’ understanding of the phenomenon of interest” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 5). Findings are presented in the vernacular of the culture (Kahlke, 2014).
Rationale for Using this Design

Merriam (2009) stated that a basic qualitative research study developed theoretically from constructionism, phenomenology, and symbolic interaction. It is used by researchers who are interested in“(1) how people interpret their experiences, (2) how they construct their worlds, and (3) what meaning they attribute to their experiences. The overall purpose is to understand how people make sense of their lives and experiences” (Merriam, 2009, p. 23). According to Worthington (n.d.), a basic qualitative research design will not focus only on “beliefs, opinions, attitudes, or ideas about things” (p. 3), however those areas may emerge as part of the research findings (Worthington, n.d.). This research study’s goals were to: (1) find out how Jewish supplementary school directors and educators interpreted their experiences of providing meaningful academic and social inclusion for students with disabilities, (2) understand how they constructed inclusive classrooms and programs, (3) what meanings they attributed to their experiences of what promoted and inhibited inclusion, and (4) what meanings they attributed to their experiences with inclusion of students with disabilities with their same-age peers in religious school classes. A basic qualitative research study was able to answer these questions, and so was an appropriate choice for the study.

Sampling

Qualitative studies typically focus “in depth on relatively small samples, even single cases (N=1), selected purposefully” (Patton. 2002, p. 230). This study utilized purposeful sampling. Purposeful sampling is powerful because it selects information rich participants to study in depth (Patton, 2003). Information rich participants are those participants who have a great deal of information about the phenomenon that is under
investigation (Patton, 2002). “Studying information-rich cases yields insights and in-depth understanding rather than empirical generalizations” (Patton, 2002, p. 230). In purposeful sampling, researchers purposely select participants who can give rich descriptions and information when they answer the study questions (Patton, 2002).

**Sampling Method**

For this study, the sampling method was maximum variation (heterogeneity) sampling. This purposeful sampling strategy aspires to capture and describe “the central themes that cut across a great deal of variation” (Patton, 2002, p. 235). For small samples, Patton (2002) states that heterogeneity can be a problem since each case may be extremely different from each other. However, maximum variation sampling turns that perceived flaw into a strength with the following logic: “any common patterns that emerge from great variation are of particular interest and value in capturing the core experiences and central, shared dimensions of a setting or phenomenon” (p. 235).

In order to maximize variation in a small sample, the researcher needs to identify diverse characteristics or criteria for gathering the participants (Patton, 2002). For this study, the criterion were as follows:

1. Diversity in career length: looking for Jewish religious school directors and educators who are at the beginning of their career, the middle of their career, and the end of their career to find the widest range of information.

2. Diversity in Jewish congregations: looking for congregations that are small, medium size, and large to find the widest range of information.

3. Diversity in location: looking for congregations throughout the United States to find the widest range of information.
Population and Sample

The population for this study is comprised of all Jewish supplementary school directors and educators working with children who have disabilities enrolled in their schools throughout the United States. The sample/participants were a subset of the directors and educators of Jewish supplementary schools working with children who have disabilities attending their schools in the United States.

Sample Size

According to Patton (2002) there are no rules for sample size in qualitative studies. “Sample size depends on what you want to know, the purpose of the inquiry, what’s at stake, what will be useful, what will have credibility, and what can be done with available time and resources” (Patton, 2002, p. 244). There were 13 participants in this study.

Recruitment Procedures

I used multiple methods to identify and contact Jewish supplementary school directors and educators. I sent out emails to religious school directors in care of their congregations. The emails sent to religious school directors is found in Appendix C. I also made cold calls to many directors of education at their congregations throughout the United States. The script for the cold calls was the same as the email found in Appendix C. However, because of Covid-19, most employees were working from home. I knew two religious school directors and asked if they would participate. One participant posted a notice with information about the research project and my contact information on a message board of a national organization for religious school directors and educators. I used snowball sampling by asking every participant if they had any friends or
acquaintances who they thought might be willing to participate in the study. The email used for religious school directors referred to me is found in Appendix D.

Complications of Recruitment Because of the Covid-19 Pandemic

There were complications in finding participants during the Covid-19 Pandemic. This research study was approved on March 5, 2020. By that time, states were beginning to respond to the threat of a Covid-19 pandemic. Washington state was the first to declare a state of emergency on February 29, 2020 and California was the first state to issue a stay at home order on March 19, 2020 (Wikipedia, 2021). On March 16, 2020, 24 states, two territories, and the District of Columbia closed their public schools because of the threat of coronavirus. Most of the remaining states followed within a few days (Education Week, 2020). Like their public school counterparts, Jewish supplementary schools also closed. I believe this made recruiting participants more challenging as directors and educators were working hard to change their format of instruction from in person learning to a virtual learning application and may not have had time to participate in a research project. As the Coronavirus threat continued, directors and educators spent the summer and fall planning how to create virtual religious experiences for their students during the fall and winter holidays (Rosh HaShanah, Yom Kippur, Sukkot, Shemini Azeret, Simchat Torah, and Hanukkah) as well as creating a virtual curriculum for the fall semester of religious school. By the end of the year, the interview portion of the study had concluded.

Inclusion Criteria

There were three criteria for participants in this study. The first criteria was that each participant was either a director of a Jewish supplementary school or a classroom
teacher at a Jewish supplementary school. The second criteria was that each participant was actively directing or teaching during the 2019-2020 academic school year. The third criteria was that the Jewish supplementary school where the participants worked had accepted and taught students with disabilities.

Participants

There were 13 participants in this study; eight directors and five educators. While the goal was to have two participants from each religious school, one director and one educator, to acquire a more thorough description about inclusion of students with disabilities in each school, that was not always possible. For this study, there were five schools, or 62.5%, which were represented by both a director and an educator and three schools, or 37.5%, that were only represented by directors. Of the 13 participants, 12, or 92.3%, were female and one, or 7.69%, was male. Using information from the Census Regions and Divisions of the United States Map (n.d.), participants lived and worked in three, or 75%, of the four regions of the United States: the South, the Midwest and the West regions of the country. I was unable to acquire participants from the Northeast region, or 25%. This study was comprised of congregations identifying with the Reform and Conservative movements of Judaism; neither the Orthodox branch of Judaism nor the Reconstructionist branch of Judaism were represented in this study. Orthodox congregations seldom have congregational supplementary schools as most Orthodox families send their children to Jewish day schools [parochial schools]. The Reconstructionist movement is small and their congregations are scattered throughout the United States. Currently in the United States, there are more Jews who identify as belonging to the Reform Movement of Judaism than the Conservative Movement. The
Jewish Virtual Library (2021) cites the American Jewish Committee’s 2018 survey of American Jewish households which noted that 29% of American Jewish households identified as Reform Jews and 14% identified as Conservative Jews. While the percentages of Jews who identify with the Reform and Conservative movements have decreased in recent years, the ratios appear to be fairly stable as the Pew Research Center found in 2016 that 35% of American Jews identified as belonging to the Reform Movement and 18% identified as belonging to the Conservative Movement giving a ratio of approximately two Reform Jews for every Conservative Jew in the United States.

Most of the participants in this study identified as Reform Jews; with 10, or 76.92%, affiliated with the Reform Movement of Judaism and three, or 23.07%, affiliated with the Conservative Movement.

Figure 1

*Participants’ Congregational Branch of Judaism*
For this study, I divided congregations into small, medium and large congregations by deliberately creating the parameters for each category; a small congregation would have up to 299 family units, a medium congregation would have between 300 and 749 family units and a large congregation would have 750 family units or more. Using these categories, three participants, 23.07%, worked in small congregations, one participant, 7.92%, worked in a medium size congregation, and nine participants, 69.23%, worked in large congregations.

Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Congregation Size in Family Units</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Small Congregation</td>
<td>Up to 299 family units</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medium Congregation</td>
<td>From 300 to 750 family units</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Large Congregation</td>
<td>Above 750 family units</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 2

**Congregational Size in Family Units**
The participants were in different stages of their careers in Jewish education. While many directors have been Jewish supplementary school educators before becoming directors, this study only counted the years that directors had directed a supplementary school. I created three career stages to describe the participants’ years of directing or teaching which were named Early Career, Mid-Career, and Mature Career. For this study, the Early Career stage of a career in Jewish education included years one through five; the Mid-Career stage encompassed years six through 10, and the Mature Career stage included years 11 and beyond. Four of the participants, 30.76%, were in the Early Career stage, three, 23.07%, were in the Mid-career stage, and six, 46.15%, were in the Mature Career stage.

Table 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Career Stage</th>
<th>Years Included in this Career Stage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Early Career</td>
<td>Years 1 through 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mid-Career</td>
<td>Years 6 through 10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mature Career</td>
<td>11 years and beyond</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The range of the number of years that the participants worked in Jewish education was 27 with the lowest number being two years and the highest number being 29 years. The mean score for the amount of years that the participants worked in their positions was 13.5 years. The median score was 10 years and the mode was also 10 years. For this study, the mean was the most useful piece of data as the data was not categorical and there were no extreme scores (Salkind, 2014).

The participants had various educational backgrounds that were beneficial for directing or teaching in a Jewish supplementary school. All of the participants had graduated from a post-secondary educational institution with many having more than one certificate or degree and more than one credential. Their degrees included certifications from a community college through bachelor, master, doctorate, and rabbinical degrees.
Six of the participants had credentials in (secular) education, four had credentials in Jewish education, six had credentials in Jewish studies, two had credentials in religious studies, and two had credentials in religious education. Because most participants had multiple degrees and credentials, the percentages were not appropriate for this section.

Table 3

*Participant Profiles*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant’s Alias Name</th>
<th>Role in the Jewish Supplementary School</th>
<th>Number of Years in That Position</th>
<th>Educational Background: Applicable Certificates and Diplomas</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Miriam</td>
<td>Director</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Jewish Education &amp; Jewish Studies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tamar</td>
<td>Director</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>Education &amp; Jewish Studies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deborah</td>
<td>Educator</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abigail</td>
<td>Director</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>Jewish Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hannah</td>
<td>Director</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Jewish Education &amp; Jewish Studies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sarah</td>
<td>Director</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Education &amp; Jewish Studies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eve</td>
<td>Educator</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>Jewish Studies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Judith</td>
<td>Educator</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Religious Studies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caleb</td>
<td>Educator</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Naomi</td>
<td>Director</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Jewish Education, Jewish Studies, Religious Studies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yael</td>
<td>Director</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Religious Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Orli</td>
<td>Director</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>Education &amp; Religious Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Penina</td>
<td>Educator</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>Education</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Inclusion Committees and Inclusion Coordinators

Of the 13 participants, three of them, 23.07%, stated that their school had an inclusion committee and one of those three stated that inclusion was incorporated in the education committee, seven participants, 53.85%, stated their school did not have an inclusion committee, and three participants, 23.07%, did not know if there was an inclusion committee.

Figure 4

*Does the Participant’s Congregation have an Inclusion Committee?*
Six of the participants, 46.15%, stated their school had an inclusion coordinator, one participant, 7.69%, did not know if there was an inclusion coordinator, and six, 46.15%, stated there was no inclusion coordinator at their school however the director often helped include students with disabilities.

Figure 5

*Does the Jewish Supplementary School have an Inclusion Coordinator?*
The Jewish Supplementary Schools in this Study

All of the schools used in this study practice full inclusion, and students with disabilities are fully included with their same-age peers in their classes. None of the Jewish supplementary schools in the study have a formal criteria for acceptance of students with disabilities. Some directors accept students with disabilities on an individualized basis. One director spends time with the student before the student is accepted. Some of the directors stated that they have accepted every child with a disability who wanted to attend their religious school. The rest of the directors noted that there have only been one or two children who could not attend their religious school. They continued by saying that of those children who had to stop attending religious school the directors initially accepted them but had to have them stop for a period of time or terminate their attendance mostly for safety reasons. Many directors prefer that the parents let them know about any disabilities or other special needs such as food allergies. While parents are not required to share their child’s IEP or 504 plan as a condition of religious school acceptance, most directors prefer to see that information or talk with the parents about their child’s strengths and needs. Most religious schools have questions related to disability or special needs such as food allergies or allergies to bee stings on their enrollment forms. Abigail stated:

I don’t look at it as an acceptance process. I think anybody who is a part of the congregation and wants to send their kids, they just send their kids. But then I ask … them to let me know what their issues are; … what the disabilities are, and we will talk about them and decide … what would work best. (Abigail, Lines 155)
None of the schools have resource rooms. Most of the participants mentioned that they utilize teen classroom assistants as extra hands in the classroom. Some utilize teen classroom assistants as ‘buddies’ for students with disabilities. A few participants made references to a child having a shadow in the classroom. Half of the directors noted that their religious schools utilize differentiated instruction in the classrooms, but none of the educators mentioned it when asked the question, “Tell me how you present information to all of your students.” Some of the directors and educators stated that while they work with students of all abilities on academic subjects, including Hebrew, they believe that the most important aspect of religious school is building a Jewish community, feeling accepted by their peers, having friends in religious school, and helping students construct their Jewish identity.

The Students and Families that Attended the Jewish Supplementary Schools in this Study

The students and their families that populated the Jewish supplementary schools represented in this study were very diverse. Some families lived close to their congregation, within three miles, while others drove many miles to attend their religious school. The students came from families that spanned the socio-economic spectrum and most congregations had all economic levels. Some families lived in areas where there was a Jewish presence and attended secular school with other Jewish students while other families lived in areas where they may have been one of the few Jewish families in their area and/or secular school. The students attended public and private schools for their secular education. Many of the religious schools had multiple family models; some students lived in a two parent household and some in a one parent household. Most
students who lived in two parents households had a mother and a father, but there were gay and lesbian couples represented in some of the Jewish supplementary schools. Most of the congregations had some interfaith families but there was usually one parent who was Jewish. The exception occurred when the students had Jewish grandparents or when the family was in the process of converting to Judaism. In some cases the non-Jewish spouse converted to Judaism. A fair amount of the schools had Jews of color: mostly interracial and African American families. One supplementary school stated they had Asian and Latin American students.

Some of the participants believed that parents of students with disabilities really want their students to have a bar or bat mitzvah and their congregations have provided many types of accommodations for the students. Instead of having a bar or bat mitzvah on a Saturday morning where the student would read the Torah in front of a large group of people, congregations have had bar or bat mitzvah ceremonies on Mondays, Thursdays, and holidays when the Torah is normally read. One congregation had the ceremony in the rabbi’s study before the service and then the family provided the Kiddush [celebratory meal] after the service. Other accommodations are: students read less, or use transliteration [using English letters to phonetically spell out the Hebrew words] do special music at their service, sing a duet with the cantor, or memorize the Hebrew instead of reading it. Those ceremonies are very meaningful for the students, their parents, the staff and the clergy. Miriam stated:

But those kids [students who have modified bar or bat mitzvah services], like something else is unlocked in them. They tend to be very spiritual and take it very seriously and so they and their families really have a meaningful experience.
And for us as the staff and the clergy, it’s very meaningful for us as well. So we’re happy to modify it. (Miriam, Lines 271-274)

All the Jewish supplementary schools represented in this study have included and educated students with many types of disabilities within their classrooms.

**Interviews and Interview Procedure**

Interviews are a way to gather data which provides the interviewer an opportunity to understand the participant’s thoughts, feelings, and intentions (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Researchers collect data by interviewing participants who are involved with the phenomenon that is studied (Creswell, 2013). For this research study, the interviews took between 90 and 120 minutes, with some taking more time. Each of the interviews for this research project consisted of two parts.

In the first part of the interview, I asked the participants questions from a demographic checklist that I created. The questions for the demographic checklist were highly structured and elicited specific information about the participants and the religious schools where they worked. The main use of highly structured interviews are to gather sociodemographic data from participants. Examples of the questions in the demographic checklist included: how many years they had been teaching, their educational background, and whether their religious school had an inclusion committee or an inclusion coordinator. The demographic checklist is found in Appendix B.

The second part of the interview was a semi-structured interview that utilized semi-structured or open-ended researcher-created interview questions. The collection of questions is called an interview protocol and is found in Appendix A. Semi-structured interview questions are the most often used method of data collection in basic qualitative
designs (Kahlke, 2014; Neergaard, et al., 2009). The interview took the form of a conversation comprised of open-ended, or semi-structured, questions and follow-up questions or probes for clarification or to extend the information from the participant. Semi-structured interviews were used because participants’ “viewpoints are more likely to be expressed in an openly designed interview situation” (Flick, 2014, p. 207). Semi-structured interviews enable the interviewer to have flexibility in the order and wording of questions (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). This allows the interview to be more like a conversation where both the interviewer and interviewee can discuss the information in greater depth. A holistic view of the phenomena was developed by gathering the different perspectives of the participants. By using the rich, descriptive information from participants, I created an overall interpretation of the participants’ understanding of inclusion of students with disabilities in their religious school.

**Data Collection Procedure**

Basic qualitative studies utilize data that are collected from interviews, observations, or document analysis (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). This basic qualitative research study utilized interviews as the method of data collection. Normally, qualitative researchers would collect data in the natural setting (Creswell, 2013) by talking in person with the participants who are intimately involved in the phenomena being studied. Unfortunately, the Covid-19 pandemic made that impossible. All the interviews were conducted through the Skype computer application. The interviews were recorded and I transcribed all interviews. There were a few times, usually during the transcribing, when I realized that I needed some clarification of the information gathered from some
participants. In order to acquire the information, I contacted the participants through email.

**Instrumentation**

The interviews were conducted using an interview protocol comprised of semi-structured questions to make sure that all participants had the opportunity to answer the same questions. If the same questions were not asked of every participant or if the interview is unstructured, it would be difficult to find patterns and trends. If the participants were not asked the same questions, the answers could not be compared using the constant comparative method of grounded theory analysis to find patterns and trends. If the interviews were unstructured, the participants would probably talk about very different topics which would prohibit comparing their answers and finding patterns and trends. The interview protocol is found in Appendix A and the demographic checklist is found in Appendix B.

**Members’ Opportunity to Change Information that did not Represent their Views**

To make sure that the information from the interviews were accurate, I emailed each participant a copy of their interview once it was transcribed. I told the participants if there were any parts where the interview did not reflect their views or opinions, please tell me the line numbers, what information they wanted me to delete, and what they would like for me to place in the transcript instead. None of the participants requested any changes.
Data Analysis

Data Set

The data consisted of transcribed interviews, memos, and the researcher’s perceptions of any significant nonverbal communication from the participant which was recorded directly after the interview ended. Memos are defined as “the researcher’s record of analysis, thoughts, interpretations, questions, and directions for further data collection” (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 110).

Tape Transcription

I transcribed all the recordings as soon as possible after the interview occurred to keep the information fresh in my mind. Hearing the information twice, both during the interview and during the transcription, within a short period of time, helped crystalize the material for me.

Familiarity with the Participants’ Data

Besides using the constant comparison method of grounded theory, to become familiar with the participants’ data, I read the transcripts from beginning to end multiple times and often read them as I was listening to their recorded interviews.

When Data Analysis Begins

The data analysis was conducted simultaneously with data collection. Data analysis began as soon as the first interview was transcribed.

Analysis Using Descriptive Statistics

Some of the data from the demographic checklist was analyzed using descriptive statistics. Descriptive statistics are “used to organize and describe the characteristics of a collection of data” (Salkind, 2014, p. 8). Descriptive statistics provide basic summaries
about the participants in the sample. Descriptive statistics can illuminate patterns among the participants in a sample (de Vaus, 2014). There are multiple ways to utilize descriptive statistics with data which include “frequencies or frequency distributions (numbers and percentages), measures of central tendency (the mean, median and mode), and measures of variation (range and standard deviation)” (Fink, 2017, p. 137). This research project utilized frequencies or frequency distribution, measures of central tendency, and some measures of variation (range) to analyze the demographic data. Because this study was small, the researcher was unable to use statistical analysis. The goal of the study was to elicit information about how directors and educators define inclusion, what methods of inclusion are used in Jewish supplementary schools, and what components promote and hinder inclusion. Since the goal was not to generalize the findings to other supplementary schools, inferential statistics, which are important for generalization, were not used.

**Grounded Theory Description**

The interviews were transcribed and analyzed using the grounded theory method of analysis. Grounded theory is a method of collecting and analyzing data that enables the researcher to develop theories about the phenomenon being studied (Charmaz, 2012). “The aim is ultimately to build a theoretical explanation by specifying phenomena in terms of conditions that give rise to them, how they are expressed through action/interaction, the consequences that result from them and variations of these qualifiers. The aim is not to generalize findings to a broader population per se” (Corbin & Strauss, 1990, p. 10). By reporting all the different perspectives of the participants, a comprehensive account of the phenomena can be developed (Creswell, 2013). This
comprehensive account detects the complexity in the relationships among all the components. The grounded theory method of analysis can be used even if the intent is not to develop a theory about a phenomenon because it is a thorough method of analysis.

**Grounded Theory Analysis**

Qualitative research, including grounded theory, utilizes an inductive, or bottom up, method to “build patterns, categories, and themes” (Creswell, 2013, p. 45). In addition, qualitative research, including grounded theory, also utilizes a deductive, or top down, method to find relationships among categories.

Grounded theory uses the constant comparative method of data analysis which involves comparing one piece of data (a piece of data could be a word or a much larger section of data) to another piece of data to ascertain the similarities and differences (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Using the constant comparative method compares data to data, data to codes, codes to codes, codes with categories, categories to categories, and findings with the literature (Charmaz, 2012). The goal of grounded theory analysis is to identify patterns from the data and the patterns are “arranged in relationships to each other…” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 32).

**Open coding.** The analysis began with open coding. In open coding, data is opened up to the unlimited possibilities that it could contain (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Data was opened up by asking analytical questions which could reveal: what the data suggests, the point of view, and the consequences (Charmaz, 2012).

**Coding the transcript.** To begin the process, I went line by line through each transcript assigning codes to the meaning units (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). Meaning units are defined as words, phrases, or sections of the interview transcript (Charmaz, 2012).
The codes were created using the Track Changes in Microsoft Word along the side of the transcription. According to Charmaz, (2012), codes are short labels assigned to the meaning unit using gerunds that best describe the researcher’s interpretation of the meaning unit. Charmaz (2012) suggests assigning codes using gerunds so that the researcher can ‘see’ both actions and thought processes that would be unobservable. Using gerunds I coded the data “for actions and meanings” (Charmaz, 2012, p. 5). During the coding process I used analytic memos to record my thinking processes, questions, and initial ideas of the full meaning to use at later levels of the analysis.

**Codes to concepts.** The codes led to concepts. Once the transcript was coded, the codes were constantly compared looking for similarities and differences. Codes that were similar or related were grouped together and became concepts. During open coding, the ideas are tentative; when the names of the groups are more definite the groups are called concepts. Concepts are defined as “an event, object, or action/interaction that a researcher identifies as being significant in the data” (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 103).

**Concepts to categories.** Concepts led to categories. “Categories are higher in level and more abstract than the concepts they represent” (Corbin & Strauss, 1990, p. 7). By comparing concepts together, the categories were formed by finding similarities, differences, relationships and patterns. Similar and related concepts merged to form categories. Category labels reflected the content and context of the information in them (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). For this research study, each research question has its own set of categories that help answer the question.

**Axial coding.** Up to this point, the data has been fractured from the open coding process. The purpose of axial coding, the second phase of data analysis, is to begin the
process of reassembling data that were fractured. Strauss and Corbin (1998) note that they chose the name axial because “coding occurs around the axis of a category, linking categories at the level of properties and dimensions” (p. 123). Axial coding allows all other information to be arranged around and linked to the category, offering support. In the axial coding phase, the researcher looks at the categories and finds additional data to add to the category. During axial coding, researchers use deductive thinking rather than inductive thinking.

**Subcategories.** The categories are further explained through subcategories, properties and dimensions. Once the data is in identifiable categories the researcher creates subcategories which do not stand for the phenomenon itself, rather they answer questions about the phenomenon (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Subcategories “specify a category further by denoting information such as when, where, why, and how a phenomenon is likely to occur. Subcategories, like categories, also have properties and dimensions” (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 119).

**Properties.** Subcategories are given more depth by properties and dimensions. As the researcher analyzes the data further, the researcher should ask questions about the relations between the concepts in the category as well as the category itself (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Once the researcher identifies the relationships, the researcher can then begin to identify properties of the categories. “We want to give a category specificity through definition of its particular characteristics” (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 116). These characteristics are the properties of the subcategories.

**Dimensions.** Properties are distributed along a continuum. The researcher now identifies the range of the property by first defining the category label and then asking
why, how long, when, and how questions that concern the property label in the context of the category. As the researcher answers the questions, the variation within each property is discovered (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). The variations are the property dimensions.

It needs to be noted that even though the purpose of axial coding is different than the purpose of open coding, they are not necessarily sequential analytical steps (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). In order to begin axial coding the researcher needs to have some categories, but often a sense of how categories relate to each other begins to appear during open coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

Creswell (2013) notes that qualitative research is considered an emergent design which means that “the initial plan for research cannot be tightly prescribed, and some or all phases of the process may change or shift after the researcher enters the field and begins to collect data” (p. 186).

Validity and Reliability

Validity

Qualitative validity, often referred to as trustworthiness, encompasses whether the reader believes the researcher is credible and the data analysis can be trusted as being accurate (Roberts, 2010). Researchers can use techniques such as thick, rich description, triangulation and member checks to validate their findings in qualitative studies (Creswell, 2014; Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014; Roberts, 2010).

In qualitative research, validity means that:

The researcher checks for the accuracy of the findings by employing certain procedures…validity is one of the strengths of qualitative research and is based on
determining whether the findings are accurate from the standpoint of the researcher, the participant or the readers of an account. (Creswell, 2014, p. 201).

In qualitative research, validity is often called other terms such as trustworthiness, authenticity, or credibility (Creswell, 2014). There are strategies that can check for validity and this study employed multiple strategies to assess the accuracy of the findings. Creswell (2014) recommends utilizing one or more strategies to help insure validity in a qualitative study. These were the strategies that were employed in this study to assess the validity of the findings:

- Use thick, rich description to describe the findings such that readers of the study can imagine themselves in the setting which may help the readers ‘share’ in the experience during the discussion (Creswell, 2014).

  I made sure to include thick rich description of the results of the study so readers could imagine themselves in the setting and ‘share’ in the experience during the discussion.

- The account makes sense and seems plausible to the reader (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014).

- Triangulation among different data sources of information or participant perspectives usually produces converging themes or conclusions (Creswell, 2014; Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014). If they do not produce converging themes or conclusions, the researcher will explain the procedure for reconciling the differences and their results (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014).
I found that some of the participants voiced similar themes when answering the research questions. While they all had different experiences, the themes are similar.

- Competing explanations are actively considered to strengthen the explanation offered by the researcher (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014).

For some of the questions, one or two participants would have a very different experience. I made sure to include those different experiences in the results.

**External Validity**

External validity refers to the ability to generalize the findings to “new settings, people or samples” (Creswell, 2014, p. 201). In a qualitative study, generalizability is not accomplished in the statistical sense (Merriam, 2009). In qualitative research a small, nonrandom purposeful sample is chosen because the researcher wants to understand a particular case or small group of people rather than what is true for everyone (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggest the term transferability should be used rather than generalizability. Readers of the study will need to use the thick, rich, description to see if their population is similar to the population found in the study. The researcher has an obligation to provide “sufficient descriptive data to make the transferability possible” (Meriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 254 citing Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 298).

There are some strategies which are used to enhance the possibility that the results of a qualitative study can transfer to another setting or a different group of people.
(Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). These are the strategies that were employed in this study to enhance the possibility of transferring the results to other situations:

- Using rich, thick description which is a very detailed description of the setting, the participants and the findings of the study. It also includes many quotes from participant interviews, field notes and documents (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Potential users of the results need to be able to know that the context in the study is very similar to the context of the potential user (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

  I made sure to include a great deal of information about the participants, the Jewish supplementary schools where they worked, and the families that their religious schools served so readers could see the settings, participants, and the families that attended the religious schools in their mind’s eyes. I also made sure to include many quotes to help the reader hear some of the information that I heard during the interviews and left their grammar and words intact as much as possible so readers could hear the flavor of their speech.

- Maximum variation sampling in the site or interview allows for the possibility of a greater range of application of the results of the study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Maximum variation allows for a wide variety of diversity by identifying and interviewing those participants who represent the broadest possible range of characteristics that the study seeks to explore (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). It also aids in identifying important common patterns that are found within the wide range of diversity (Patton, 2015).
By interviewing people from different areas of the country, different branches of Judaism, different size congregations, different ages, in different career stages, I tried to increase my variation of participants.

It is possible that there could be some Jewish supplementary schools that might be able to use some of the results from the study, but it is also possible that the results may not transfer to another religious school because of its population or setting.

**Reliability**

Technically, reliability in research is defined as the extent to which research results can be replicated (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). However, “reliability in a research design is based on the assumption that there is a single reality and that studying it repeatedly will yield the same results” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 250). In the social sciences, using that definition of reliability is challenging because human behavior never stays the same and everyone has different life experiences (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). A better way to look at reliability is “whether the results are consistent with the data collected” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Merriam & Tisdell state,

…rather than demanding that outsiders get the same results, a researcher wishes outsiders to concur that, given the data collected, the results make sense- they are consistent and dependable. The question then is not whether findings will be found again but whether the results are consistent with the data collected. (p. 251)

If the study results are consistent with the data presented, the study can be considered dependable. There are some strategies which are used to enhance the possibility that the results of a qualitative study is dependable (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Here is the strategy that was employed in this study to enhance consistency and dependability:
Triangulation among different data sources of information or participant perspectives usually produces converging themes or conclusions (Creswell, 2014; Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014). If they do not produce converging themes or conclusions, the researcher will explain the procedure for reconciling the differences and their results (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014).

I found that many of the participants had similar answers to the interview protocol questions. Often both directors and educators from different religious schools gave very similar answers.

**Ethics and Human Relations**

Although this was a qualitative study that could reveal some personal information, most of the material revealed by participants would not pertain to them; rather the information would pertain to the programs provided for students with disabilities at the Jewish supplementary school where the participant was employed. To increase confidentiality, names were changed, the location of the congregation was not mentioned, and any identifying information with regards to the participant or the city where the congregation resides was taken out of the quotes. This research study was a very low risk research project with regards to any discomfort to the participants.

While there were no immediate benefits for the participants from contributing to this research study, it could increase the knowledge in the field about the inclusion of students with disabilities attending Jewish supplementary schools. Currently there are no known peer-reviewed studies in academic journals pertaining to this topic.
Confidentiality

The confidentiality of all participants was respected and protected. To protect the privacy of the participants, the following measures ensured that no one would learn participants’ identity or any information that a participant revealed during the interview.

No names were used when writing up the study. Any identifying names were fictional, and the fictional names did not share the first letter with the participant’s real name. Any information that could be used to identify a participant such as the city in which the participant resided and worked, the participant’s age, or the names of the programs that the participants created for their religious school was not linked to the alias name of the participants.

The audio recordings were only reviewed in my home and in the office of my dissertation advisor and I transcribed all the recordings. The audio recordings and notes were kept in a locked safe in my home; there is only one key which I have. The information that is on my computer is protected by a password and any external hard drive or zip drive that was used to back up the computer information also remained locked in the safe except when they are being used. The audio recordings and notes will be destroyed after the dissertation is finished and the report of this research has been accepted for publication. (Sieber, 1992, p. 52).

Summary

This basic qualitative research study was designed to describe how Jewish supplementary school directors and educators defined inclusion, included students with disabilities in their religious education programs, identified different components of the
school that benefit inclusion, and identified barriers that impeded inclusion. It utilized semi-structured interviews and a brief checklist for demographic information. This chapter described the design of the study, the sample selection process, the data collection process, the data analysis process, how validity and reliability were controlled, safeguards for ethical treatment and confidentiality.

**CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS**

As stated in Chapter 1, this study examined how Jewish supplementary school directors and educators defined meaningful inclusion, how they perceived they had provided meaningful inclusion for students with disabilities in their schools, which educational, organizational, personnel, and congregational components they perceived contributed to inclusion of students with disabilities with their same-age peers, and what they perceived to be barriers to inclusion of students with disabilities. This study utilized information from two methods; a demographic checklist and an interview. Every participant took part in both methods. The demographic checklist results listed in this chapter cover six of the questions that were on the checklist. Some of the checklist questions reported in this chapter concern information about the directors and educators. This information was provided to help the reader form a thick, rich description of the participants. The rest of the checklist questions in this section report about some aspect of inclusion in the participants’ religious schools to help the reader understand more about the schools and their culture of inclusion. The first part of the chapter presents the data. The demographic data is presented using descriptive statistics. The data from the interviews are organized by the question or sub-question they answer and are presented as themes. The second part of the chapter is a discussion about the data. In both parts of
the chapter, the demographic checklist results are presented first and are followed by the interview results.

**Demographic Checklist Results**

At the beginning of each interview, I asked all the participants the questions from the demographic checklist in Appendix B. The questions consisted of yes/no questions, multiple choice questions and short answer questions without probes or follow up questions. These questions were to elicit more factual and objective information about the congregations and participants rather than the more subjective information that would come from the interview protocol. Much of the information obtained in the demographic checklist is listed in the Methods chapter under the Participants section as it provides a rich description of the participants, their congregations, and the families that attend their supplementary school. The rest of the information is discussed here in the Results chapter as the information obtained required more explanation than what would be appropriate in the Methods chapter.

In the original version of this study, the demographic checklist would have been filled out by the participant before the interview began. However, since all interviews were conducted through the Skype computer application because of Covid-19, I asked the participants the demographic checklist questions before we began the interview protocol. It is possible that because there was an interaction between the participant and me to complete the demographic checklist questions, as some of the participants elaborated on or explained their answers allowing me to collect more significant information than what would have been possible from a paper and pencil checklist. This expanded and
explanatory information would have been absent if the participants just filled out the demographic checklist on their own.

**Years Working as a Director or Educator at a Jewish Supplementary School**

The participants had a wide range of years that they had worked in Jewish supplementary schools, however, many of the educators had worked in their positions longer than the directors. In this research project, the directors of Jewish supplementary schools included participants in all three stages of their careers; four of the eight directors, or 50%, were in the Early Career stage, one director, or 12.50%, was in the Mid-career stage, and three directors, or 37.50%, were in the Mature Career stage. In this study, half of the Jewish supplementary school directors were in the Early Career Stage. The mean number of years that the directors had directed a supplementary school was 10.37, but the median number of years was lower at 7 years. The range of the eight scores was 23 and encompassed directors who were just beginning their career and those who had worked for many years in their positions. While the number of years that the directors had directed Jewish supplementary schools was probably best described using the mean score because there were no extreme cases or outliers, the median score better reflected the fact that half of the participants were in the Early Career stage than the mean score.

This was in direct contrast to the educators, where there were no educators, 0%, in the Early Career stage, two educators, or 40%, were in the Mid-career stage and three educators, or 60%, were in the Mature Career stage. In this study, the majority of the educators were in the Mature Career stage. The mean number of years that the educators had worked in a supplementary school was 18.60 and the median number was close to
that number at 17. The mode was 10. The range of the five scores was 19. In this research project, many of the educators had been teaching in a Jewish supplementary school for a longer period of time than the directors had worked as directors of a Jewish supplementary school. However, at least two directors stated that they were religious school educators before and during their training to become directors. It is very possible that many of the directors taught religious school before they became directors. This study only counted the years that the directors were in a director position in a Jewish supplementary school.

Table 4

Career Stage

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of Career Stage</th>
<th>Years Included in this Career Stage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Early Career</td>
<td>Years 1 through 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mid-Career</td>
<td>Years 6 through 10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mature Career</td>
<td>11 years and beyond</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The next two graphs illustrate the years that each respective group, directors and educators, have worked in their current position of a director or educator in a Jewish supplementary school.
Figure 7

*Years as a Director at a Jewish Supplementary School*

![Graph showing years as a director at a Jewish Supplementary School.](image)

Figure 8

*Years as an Educator at a Jewish Supplementary School*

![Graph showing years as an educator at a Jewish Supplementary School.](image)
Professional Development on Inclusion of Students with Disabilities

Most of the participants in this study believed they received in-service training on how to include students with disabilities in their classes and programs. Ten of the 13 participants, 76.92%, believed they received professional development on inclusion either from their supplementary school or the Jewish community. For the majority of the participants of this study, either the supplementary school, the Jewish community or both entities provide professional development on how to include students with disabilities in their classrooms or programs.

Figure 9

Do Directors and Educators Believe They Receive Professional Development on Inclusion of Students with Disabilities?
Reciprocal Friendships Between Students With and Without Disabilities

Representing the eight schools that were included in this study, all 13 participants, or 100% of the participants, noted they have observed reciprocal friendships between students with and without disabilities where both students were equal partners in the relationship and the relationship was beneficial to both of the students. However, a few of the participants noted that not all students with disabilities will be able to create reciprocal friendships with students who do not have disabilities.

Comfort Level with Creating Curriculum for and/or Teaching in an Inclusive Classroom

Most of the participants felt some degree of comfort with creating a curriculum for and/or teaching students with disabilities in their class or school, although some educators and directors stated they did not have much experience working with students of all abilities or were not formally trained and had not gone through an academic program to learn how to work with students with disabilities. This study utilized a six point scale where the participants chose the phrase that was most aligned with their feelings about creating a curricula for and/or teaching in an inclusive school or classroom. Their choices were: Very Comfortable; Fairly Comfortable; Comfortable; Somewhat Comfortable; Not Comfortable; and Don’t Know/Not Sure.

Seven of the 13 participants, or 53.84%, were Very Comfortable with creating a curricula for and/or teaching in an inclusive school or classroom. Three of the participants, or 23.07%, were Fairly Comfortable with creating a curricula for and/or teaching in an inclusive school or classroom. One of the participants, or 7.69%, was Comfortable with creating a curricula for and/or teaching in an inclusive school or
classroom. Two of the participants, or 15.38%, were Somewhat Comfortable with creating a curricula for and/or teaching in an inclusive school or classroom. None of the participants were Not Comfortable creating a curricula for and/or teaching in an inclusive school or classroom and none of the participants’ thoughts aligned with Don’t Know/Not Sure. The three categories of Very Comfortable, Fairly Comfortable, and Comfortable, which were the positive categories, were chosen by 11 of the 13 participants, or 84.61% of the participants.

Because this data was categorical, the mode was the most appropriate measure of central tendency. In this study, the mode was the term Very Comfortable, and seven of the 13 participants, or 53.84%, responded that this category most aligned with their level of comfort in creating a curricula for and/or teaching in an inclusive school or classroom.

Figure 10

*Comfort Level with Creating a Curricula and/or Teaching in an Inclusive School or Classroom*
Ability for Inclusion and Planning for Students with Disabilities

All the Jewish supplementary schools represented in this study have included students with disabilities in their classrooms and programs. As stated previously in the Participant section of Chapter 3, three of the 13 participants, or 23.07%, worked at supplementary schools where the congregation had an inclusion committee and six of the 13 participants, 46.15%, worked at a religious school that had an inclusion coordinator. Of note, all of the congregations and supplementary schools that had an inclusion committee and/or an inclusion coordinator were large congregations who had more than 750 family units. It is possible that the added expense of an inclusion coordinator may make this position unaffordable for small and medium size congregations.

Inclusion of Students with Different Types of Disabilities

In one section of the checklist, the participants were asked if they believed their school could include students with different types of disabilities; not just whether they have already included a student with each type of disability. The disabilities chosen for this study were those used in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act which qualify students for Individual Education Plans in secular school. Of note, for these questions, occasionally when the participant did not believe the hypothetical child could be included, it was because specific staffing or technical resources were lacking and/or very expensive for the school to supply. An example would be a staff member who is fluent in sign language. Also, there were times when the participants were not sure if a student could be included in their supplementary school.

All 13 participants, or 100%, stated their supplementary school could include students with specific learning disabilities. Eleven of the 13 participants, or 84.61%,
believed their supplementary school could include students with a visual impairment which could include blindness, one participant stated the school could not, and one participant did not believe the school could include a hypothetical student who was visually impaired. Nine participants, or 69.23%, believed their school could include a student with a hearing loss/hearing impairment which could include deafness, one participant stated maybe the school could include this student, one participant was not sure, one participant did not know, and one participant did not believe the school could include this hypothetical student.

All 13 participants, or 100% believed their school could include a student who was on the Autism spectrum. Eleven participants, or 84.61%, believed their school could include a student with physical disabilities/orthopedic impairments which could include using a wheelchair, one stated there were accessibility issues with the building and it would be hard, and one participant stated that the building was not accessible for a person who uses a wheelchair so they would not be able to include a hypothetical student with a physical disability.

Twelve participants, or 92.30%, believed their schools could include a student with an intellectual disability and one participant stated it would depend on how the disability manifests itself as to whether or not they could include this hypothetical student with an intellectual disability. All 13 participants, or 100%, believed their schools could include a student with a communication disorder/speech or language impairment, however one participant who said the school could take this hypothetical student also stated the school needed to make additional purchases or the family needed to provide the technology required for the student. Nine participants, or 69.23%, believed their schools
could include students with emotional or behavioral disabilities, two stated that it would depend on the student’s disability and how it manifests, and two stated that they cannot include students who become violent or are a flight risk; they needed to protect the safety of the student, the other members of the class, and their staff.

Nine participants, or 69.23%, believed they could include students who have had a traumatic brain injury, two participants did not know if they could include this student, one participant stated that if the school can, it will include this student, and one participant did not believe the school could include a hypothetical student with a traumatic brain injury. Nine participants, or 69.23%, believed their school would be able to include a student with a mental illness, one participant was not sure but thought maybe they could, one participant would try to include this student, one participant stated it would depend on the diagnosis, and one participant stated it would be on a case-by-case basis depending on the student.

Eight participants, or 61.53%, stated their schools would be able to include a student who was both deaf and blind with two of the eight participants noting it could occur under certain conditions; one participant stated the student would need a shadow and another participant stated the student would need accommodations, two participants stated they did not know if it was possible to include this student, one participant stated maybe they could include this student, and two participants stated the school could not include this student with one elaborating that they do not have a staff member trained to be a one-on-one assistant for this hypothetical student who was deaf and blind. Nine participants, or 69.23%, stated their school could include a student with multiple disabilities with one participant stating the student would need accommodations, one
participant did not know, one participant would try to include the student, and two participants stated it would depend on the disabilities as to whether or not their schools could include a hypothetical student with multiple disabilities.

All 13 participants, or 100%, stated their school could include students with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder. Eleven participants, or 84.61%, stated their schools could include students with other health impairments and two participants stated that it would depend on the disability as to whether their school could include this hypothetical student.

When looking at the measure of central tendency for participants believing their school could accept a student with each of the different disability categories I only considered the answers yes and no, with yes being all the answers that stated the directors and educators could include this hypothetical student and all the other answers were considered as no, that they could not include a student with these particular disabilities. The mean for including hypothetical students with the 14 disabilities used for this study into religious schools and classrooms is 10.71, the median is 11, and the mode is 9. For this section, the median is the most appropriate measure of central tendency as the data is categorical and there are no extreme scores in the data set (Salkind, 2014).
Figure 11

*Hypothetical Disabilities the Jewish Supplementary Schools Could Include Part 1*
Figure 12

Hypothetical Disabilities the Jewish Supplementary Schools Could Include Part 2

Interview Results

The interview results explain the answers to the three research questions. Two of the three research questions have sub-questions which will be answered individually.

Question 1

How do Jewish supplementary school directors and educators define meaningful inclusion and in what ways do they perceive they have provided meaningful inclusion to their students with disabilities?
a. In what ways do Jewish supplementary school directors and educators define meaningful academic inclusion and how do they perceive they have provided (meaningful) academic inclusion for their students with disabilities in their programs with same-age peers?

b. In what ways do Jewish supplementary school directors and educators define meaningful social inclusion and how do they perceive they have provided (meaningful) social inclusion for their students with disabilities in their programs with same-age peers?

**Question 1a Part 1: In what ways do Jewish supplementary school directors and educators define meaningful academic inclusion?**

The first part of question 1a seeks to understand how Jewish supplementary school directors and educators define meaningful academic inclusion for students with disabilities. By using grounded theory analysis, three categories emerged from the data. The first category, academics, focuses on how directors and educators perceive students of all abilities working together in the classroom. The second category, connections, addresses how educators and students create a Jewish community in their classroom through their connections to each other and how the students connect to their Jewish identity. The third category, experiences, demonstrates how positive Jewish experiences creates meaningful inclusion.
Table 5

*How Directors and Educators Define Meaningful Academic Inclusion*

These are the components directors and educators believe are needed to have meaningful academic inclusion.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Subcategory</th>
<th>Property</th>
<th>Dimension</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Academics</td>
<td>Students of all abilities working together in the classroom.</td>
<td>Students are engaged and challenged</td>
<td>Students are engaged and challenged to students are not engaged and challenged</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Learning the way that works best for each student</td>
<td>Learning in the way that works best for each student to not learning in the way that works best for each student</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Students are all working on the same topic in the classroom</td>
<td>Students are all working on the same topic in the classroom to students are all working on different topics in the classroom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Accepting classmates who are different from themselves</td>
<td>Accepting classmates who are different from themselves to not accepting classmates who are different from themselves.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connections</td>
<td>Jewish Connections</td>
<td>Creating a Jewish Community through their connections to each other</td>
<td>Creating a Jewish community through their connections to each other to not creating a Jewish community through their connections to each other</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Academics

Many of the religious schools have an academic portion of their curriculum which often includes teaching students to read Hebrew and the prayers that are used in the Shabbat [Sabbath] and holiday services. Some of the Jewish supplementary schools use experiential education and others use a more traditional curriculum that could include additional academics. The subcategory for academics is students of all abilities working together in the classroom.

**Students of all abilities working together in the classroom.** The subcategory of academics is students of all abilities working together in the classroom. The first property of students of all abilities working together in the classroom is students are engaged and challenged. The dimension is students are engaged and challenged to students are not engaged and challenged. Three of the participants believed that creating ways for students to be engaged and challenged in the classroom is an important component for the definition of meaningful academic inclusion. Having students appropriately engaged and challenged in classroom academics is important for meaningful inclusion; material that is so difficult that students do not try to complete it or

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Experiences</th>
<th>Jewish Experiences</th>
<th>Positive Jewish Experiences in religious school</th>
<th>Having positive Jewish experiences in religious school to not having positive Jewish experiences in religious school.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

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1. **Connecting to their Jewish identity**
2. **Connecting to their Jewish identity to not connecting to their Jewish identity**
so easy that they are bored does not advance inclusion. Orli believed meaningful inclusion involved having students working on material that “is challenging, but not impossible” (Orli, Line 400). Penina noted that students should have “rigorous instruction that … engages every student equally, or engages everybody and challenges everybody” (Penina, Lines 279-280). Deborah stated students who are meaningfully included are engaged in the classroom activities, but she noted that “sometimes you have to just … adjust it [the level of engagement] to the actual person” (Deborah, Lines 469-470) because some children, depending on their disabilities, may not be “totally engaged in it [the activity or material]” (Deborah, Line 471-472).

The second property of the subcategory students of all abilities working together in the classroom is learning in the way that works best for each student. The dimension is learning in the way that works best for each student to not learning in the way that works best for each student. Three of the participants believed that learning in the way that works best for each student was an important component of the definition of meaningful academic inclusion. Students of all abilities should be able to learn in the way that works best for them. Students learn in different ways; some learn best through visual instruction, some through auditory instruction and some through kinesthetic instruction. Orli noted that “meaningful academic inclusion “means that we give every student the opportunity to learn in the way that they learn best and that they have … a meaningful experience” (Orli, Lines 397-399). Hannah extended the definition by stating that meaningful academic inclusion means:

…everybody being able to learn in a way that works for them and that allows them to internalize the informa[tion]…and to find their own personal connection
to what is being presented to them; that it meets their needs and also allows them
to find their own personal connection to it. (Hannah, Lines 561-564)

Sarah believed that the definition of meaningful academic inclusion should also
incorporate the notion that differentiation is important. She stated it was important to
have “teachers teach and students learn in a way that is best accommodating for them no
matter what … needs to be differentiated and that there’s no differentiation … that’s too
big or too small for a student” (Sarah, Lines 220-223).

The third property of students of all abilities working together in the classroom is
students are all working on the same topic in the classroom. The dimension is students
are all working on the same topic in the classroom to students are all working on different
topics in the classroom. Judith was the only participant who stated that having everyone
working on the same topic was an important component of the definition of meaningful
inclusion. She noted that she had not had a student with a significant physical disability
in her classroom yet, but has had students with disabilities that are not visible such as
learning disabilities. She believed that since her students’ disabilities were not clearly
visible to the other students in the class, it made it easier to have everyone learning the
same thing.

…everyone’s in the same classroom, everyone’s learning the same thing; maybe
not at the same pace or in the same way. But there aren’t any specific special
accommodations. And that’s to me what it is … I mean that’s what my
madrichim [teen classroom assistants] are for. Or if I need … extra help, but we
do it in a way so that they don’t feel any different, right? They’re part of the
class; everybody’s doing the same things. Their’s [sic] isn’t any different than anybody else. (Judith, Lines 343-348)

The fourth property of the subcategory students of all abilities working together in the classroom is accepting classmates who are different from themselves. The dimension is accepting classmates who are different from themselves to not accepting classmates who are different from themselves. Eve was the only one who believed that accepting classmates who are different from themselves was an important component for the definition of meaningful academic inclusion. She has noticed that in her religious school, students accept all of their classmates.

I think I notice that our school particularly, it’s very different than it used to be. Kids just accept the fact that other students may not be exactly like them, but they don’t … point it out the way that they used to. … But I think for the most part, that’s a way that I know that’s working [inclusion]; is that everyone is pretty accepting and just goes with the flow and it’s not a big deal. Um, they don’t feel like every student has to be treated exactly the same. … I think even when … someone comes to give extra help to a child, or they have a shadow. When you just say at the beginning like, ‘This is so-and-so and she’s going to be here … as so-and-so’s friend’ they just are okay with that. … creating that kind of environment where everybody understands the situation and then just goes about learning and being kids. (Eve, Lines 265-277)

Jewish supplementary school directors and educators believe part of the definition of meaningful academic inclusion incorporates having students of all abilities working together in the classroom by using engaging and challenging tasks, learning in the way
that works best for each student, working on the same topic in the classroom, and accepting classmates who are different from themselves.

**Connections**

The second category is connections. For this study, connections are the positive relationships that students and staff have with each other in their Jewish supplementary school. The subcategory for connections is Jewish connections.

**Jewish connections.** The subcategory for connections is Jewish connections. The first property of Jewish connections is creating a Jewish community through their connections to each other. The dimension is creating a Jewish community through their connections to each other to not creating a Jewish community through their connections to each other. About half of the participants believed that creating a Jewish community through their connections to each other was an important component of the definition of meaningful academic inclusion. Because all of the community building is done within a Jewish supplementary school and utilizing Jewish curriculum, Judaism is infused throughout the process of building a community. Deborah believed that being part of the community was the most important aspect of inclusion of students with disabilities in classes with their same-age peers. “…I think the community is the most important [part of inclusion]” (Deborah, Line 502). Miriam noted that she and her staff work hard to create a community within the religious school. Her school uses experiential learning and she stated that “with experiential learning, community building is really a core piece” (Miriam, Lines 253-254). Caleb believed that a sense of community is very helpful for learning. He stated the environment or community must be comfortable in order for
students to explore and learn. When asked to define meaningful academic inclusion, he stated:

    It will be an environment that its [sic] comfortable for everyone to explore and feel comfortable around, others. So I believe that if the student is not comfortable, the student is not comfortable to explore. So in order for the student to explore it [the student] has to be comfortable with the surrounding[s]. So that means that if there is either a learning disability or [a] physical disability, the community of the classroom needs to understand that we are all one unit; we all move as one. (Caleb, Lines 206-210)

Deborah also believed that the community is important for learning. She stated that when students feel safe, they can receive information better and take risks by stating their thoughts and opinions.

    I think that first of all, that’s [community] what makes the most impact on people in general; that human connection. And then that also opens people up to content and learning because then you feel safe, and it’s like a safe place to learn and debate and be interested in something. Like I think you need that human connection to spark interest and take risks .... (Deborah, Lines 507-511)

Yael stated that meaningful academic inclusion fosters a sense of well-being and acceptance from peers as well as being part of a community where they can learn about their religion.

    …it’s that every child feels welcome and accepted in [religious] school and is able to gain something from the environment. But what I want the students to get is, first of all, a sense of community. A sense that there’s a place they can go to
… learn and practice their Judaism. … there is a sacredness to the space, and there’s a place for them in it. (Yael, Lines 324-335)

Naomi had a slightly different view on community and connections in meaningful academic inclusion. She believed that it is having students who would not necessarily be social friends working on a project together and enjoying the process to the point that they are totally connected and engaged with each other and the project.

I mean, it seems to me that it’s…when I see kids that typically would not be out and finding each other in a social environment on their own connecting and having fun and partnering up, but that are in a classroom and are both like, it’s kind of … I call it butts off the seats. So when they’re leaning up on the table because they’re … excited. But when I see different kids connected and discussing or working on something together, that they’re both invested. And when one is having a harder time with a … part of it, the other … kid is like, ‘Oh, let me do that part; then you do that part’ in that collaboration, because they both are just so invested in the final product that the process works well together. So I would say that would be … the best way for me to see … academic inclusion; they might not understand that it’s meaningful and whatever, but that’s even better. If you just think that’s the way life is because we created a space that we accept everybody for who they are, what they bring to the table, and we don’t focus on what’s not at the table. (Naomi, Lines 399-410)

The second property of the subcategory Jewish connections is connecting to their Jewish identity. The dimension is connecting to their Jewish identity to not connecting to their Jewish identity. Not only do students need to connect to each other and form a
community in religious school, they also need to connect to their Jewish identity. Three of the participants believed that part of creating meaningful academic inclusion involves helping students create a positive Jewish identity. Orli stated that she wants students to “come away [when they graduate religious school], feeling good about being Jewish” (Orli, Line 399). Hannah wanted her students to “feel safe; like this [her temple] is their second home and this is the place that they can be themselves and where they can unlock their Jewish identity and what it means to them” (Hannah, Lines 217-219). Yael stated that while part of her job is to train students for their bar or bat mitzvah, she feels it is imperative that she helps students develop their Jewish identity. “…of course, they need to be ready for their bar or bat mitzvahs or I wouldn’t have a job. They need to have a Jewish identity or I’m not doing my job” (Yael, Lines 336-337).

Participants believed that part of their definition of meaningful academic inclusion involved creating a Jewish community for students through their connections with each other and helping students connect to their Jewish identity.

Experiences

The third category is experiences. Experiences happen all the time; it could be something a person sees, something a person hears, something a person does, or something that happens to a person. Experiences can be positive, negative, or neutral. The subcategory for experiences is Jewish experiences.

Jewish experiences. The subcategory of experiences is Jewish experiences. The property for Jewish experiences is positive Jewish experiences in religious school. The dimension is having positive Jewish experiences in religious school to not having positive Jewish experiences in religious school. One participant stated that all Jewish religious
school education should be comprised of positive Jewish experiences and believed that meaningful academic inclusion is also comprised of positive Jewish experiences. It is important to her that students of all abilities are able to have positive Jewish experiences and make memories from those experiences.

So, meaningful academic inclusion goes back to what I think Jewish education should be; which I think is positive Jewish experiences. I think it is much more about feeling good, walking away with a positive experience, and making sure that memories are made. Students of all ages, all academic abilities will always have a way to learn the answer. We live in a world today, where learning the answer can be googled or asked in other ways; you can always find out the answer to your question. You can never recreate the feeling of what it was like to learn that, or to experience it, or to be in that setting. And our students that have different learning needs, I am much more concerned about how it feels to be a student for them and having positive experiences for them, than [I am of] making sure that we have achieved other IEP goals. (Lines 373-381)

This participant believed that one of the pieces of meaningful academic inclusion is defined by having positive Jewish experiences in religious school and creating positive memories from those experiences.

There was one participant who voiced a very different view of academics in Jewish supplementary school. Abigail noted that not all students will be able to master the academics in religious school and she wanted to make sure those students were still full participants in their Jewish community and not marginalized.
And again, I want to get away from the academic piece of it, you know, when you say education, I might reword it and say all Jewish children are entitled to be included in their Jewish community. And one of those ways is through education. Because if they can’t learn to read Hebrew or they can’t do the academics, so then we don’t worry … so much about the education piece. We find ways of just including them in music or in other ways. (Abigail, Lines 536-540)

Abigail believed being part of their Jewish community is more important for students than learning academics.

The participants stated that their definition of meaningful academic inclusion incorporates academics, connections and experiences. Of note is that participants believed having connections to each other was an integral part of the definition of academic inclusion. This goes along with Abigail’s philosophy that being a member of the community is more important than learning academics.

**Question 1a Part 2: How do Jewish supplementary school directors and educators perceive they have provided (meaningful) academic inclusion for their students with disabilities in their programs with same-age peers?**

The second part of question 1a seeks to understand how Jewish supplementary school directors and educators perceive they have provided meaningful academic inclusion for their students with disabilities in their programs and classes with same-age peers. Using grounded theory analysis, two categories were revealed from the data. The first category, planning for students with disabilities in religious school, describes the process of creating goals, objectives and benchmarks for students with disabilities, using the student’s IEP to find what is working for the student at secular school, and
customizing attendance to fit the needs of the student. The second category, academic accommodations, encompasses accommodations for students learning to read Hebrew, accommodations for the bar or bat mitzvah ceremony, accommodations for specific disabilities, and accommodations that are good teaching strategies for all students.

Table 6

*The Ways Directors and Educators Believe They have Provided Meaningful Academic Inclusion to their Students with Disabilities*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Subcategory</th>
<th>Property</th>
<th>Dimension</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Planning for students with disabilities in religious school</td>
<td>Creating a plan for each student with a disability</td>
<td>Creating goals and objectives with benchmarks for each student with a disability</td>
<td>Creating goals and objectives with benchmarks for students with disabilities to not creating goals and objectives with benchmarks for students with disabilities</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Using the student’s IEP from secular school</td>
<td>Using the student’s IEP from secular school to not using the student’s IEP from secular school</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Having student participation consistent with student needs</td>
<td>Having student participation consistent with student needs to not having student participation consistent to student needs</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Working with parents to create an appropriate plan for their student</td>
<td>Working with parents to create an appropriate plan for their student to not working with parents to create an appropriate plan for their student</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic accommodations</td>
<td>Hebrew accommodations</td>
<td>Learning to read Hebrew</td>
<td>Learning to read Hebrew to not learning to read Hebrew</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bar or Bat mitzvah ceremony accommodations</td>
<td>Having bar or bat mitzvah accommodations</td>
<td>Having academic accommodations for specific disabilities to not having academic accommodations for specific disabilities</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic accommodations in the classroom</td>
<td>Accommodations for specific disabilities</td>
<td>Having academic accommodations for specific disabilities to not having academic accommodations for specific disabilities</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Accommodations that are good teaching strategies for all students</td>
<td>Having accommodations that are good teaching strategies for all students</td>
<td>Having accommodations that are good teaching strategies for all students to not having accommodations that are good teaching strategies for all students</td>
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**Planning for Students with Disabilities in Religious School**

The first category of planning for students with disabilities in religious school describes how directors and educators create the infrastructure to help students with disabilities thrive academically in their Jewish supplementary schools. The subcategory for planning for students with disabilities in religious school is creating a plan for each student with a disability.

**Creating a plan for each student with a disability.** The first subcategory of planning for students with disabilities in religious school is creating a plan for each
student with a disability. The first property of creating a plan for each student with a
disability is creating goals and objectives with benchmarks for each student with a
disability. The dimension is creating goals and objectives with benchmarks for students
with disabilities to not creating goals and objectives with benchmarks for students with
disabilities. One participant, Tamar, believed it is important to create an individualized
plan for each student with a disability that includes goals and objectives with achievable
benchmarks.

So, the academic piece goes back to having true goals and objectives and
obtainable benchmarks for our students with special needs. … [this becomes] an
issue when it comes to our Hebrew learning … and much of our learning for that
is done in small groups or one-on-one, to begin with. So everyone is assessed at
the beginning of the year, and plans are created for each child, and the goals and
objectives for each child are relational to what their needs are. … we tend not to
do benchmarks that are more than one or two, because we never want a student to
feel like they cannot achieve, or parents cannot achieve. So we work hard on that.
(Tamar, Lines 284-294)

The second property of the subcategory creating a plan for each student with a
disability is using the student’s IEP from secular school. The dimension is using the
student’s IEP from secular school to not using the student’s IEP from secular school.
Sarah was the only one who stated that it is very helpful to use the student’s IEP from
secular school to understand what type of supports the student needs. “We typically look
at their IEP’s and see what they’re getting at school. … I look at the IEP’s to see what
will best fit them” (Sarah, Lines 177-178).
The third property of the subcategory creating a plan for each student with a disability is having student participation consistent with student needs. The dimension is having student participation consistent with student needs to not having student participation consistent to student needs. Tamar was the only one who spoke about having attendance and participation in religious school contingent on the needs of the student. Her religious school program occurs on two different days; Sunday and a weekday afternoon. Each day has a different curriculum and learning environment. Because of the different curriculum and learning environments that occur on Sundays and the weekday afternoons, there are a few students who attend one day and not the other. She also noted that on Sundays some students leave a half hour early because the last half hour of religious school has an activity that does not work well for them.

[Some students with disabilities have] challenges being in a classroom setting. Coming on [the weekday afternoon] works very well [as the curriculum and setting are not in a classroom]. … whereas some other students very much need the structure of a Sunday [being in a classroom] plus their Monday through Friday afternoons are filled with different therapists and learning challenges. … And the last part of our Sunday some grades have a … [large group experience], so for some students that’s great and for some students getting picked up [a half hour early] works better for that. So … I always say there’s rules and then there’s the exceptions. And we have a lot of exceptions, and we still have to have the rules. So you always have to see the exceptions. (Tamar, Lines 889-901)

The fourth property of the subcategory creating a plan for each student with a disability is working with parents to create an appropriate plan for their student. The
dimension is working with parents to create an appropriate plan for their student to not working with parents to create an appropriate plan for their student. Almost all of the directors and educators noted that their registration forms for religious school include very specific questions about the student’s learning style. Some of the questions could be whether the student has an IEP or 504 Plan, if the student utilizes accommodations or modifications in secular school, and any disabilities the child might have. If the parents check the boxes or write down information that their child has disabilities, almost all directors stated that they and/or their inclusion coordinator and sometimes the classroom teacher reach out to the parents to discuss how to create a positive learning environment for the student. Abigail noted “the classroom teacher, the parents and my inclusion coordinator, they have meetings and they talk about what works, what doesn’t work. And then go from there” (Abigail, Lines 169 – 170). However, almost all directors also stated that there are some parents who do not let the religious school director know that their child has disabilities or may give incomplete information about their child where they discuss some of their child’s disabilities but do not disclose other disabilities the child may have. The directors and educators find out about the disability after religious school has started for the year. After their discovery that the child is struggling in religious school, directors then phone the parents to discuss how they can create a positive religious school experience for the student. Abigail stated, “And I’d say each year, there’s maybe one or two new families who don’t tell us and don’t … check that there’s any issue and we discover early on that there are, and then we need to make a call” (Abigail, Lines 162 – 165). Hannah noted that it would be very helpful if all parents
would disclose their child’s disabilities because if she knew the child had a disability, she could have created a more appropriate environment for the student.

…it if families choose not to share certain things with us or make decisions about their child’s health and well-being … [and] then don’t tell us … it impacts their religious school experience. … There are a lot of things I learned, … after the fact, or they come up three or four months in, and I’m like, ‘Oh my gosh, that makes so much sense. If you had just told me … I could have helped early, I could have made this better.’ (Hannah, Lines 1028 – 1033)

Most of the participants believed that one of the ways they provide meaningful academic inclusion is by planning for students with disabilities in religious school. Directors and/or inclusion coordinators, and sometimes the classroom teacher like to meet with parents of students who have disabilities to discuss how they can create a positive learning environment for the students. A few of the directors stated that their planning involves creating goals and objectives with benchmarks for each student with a disability, using the student’s IEP from secular school as a guide for accommodations, and having the student participate in the religious school program in a manner that is consistent with the student’s needs.

**Academic Accommodations**

The second category, academic accommodations, are the accommodations that are used for teaching academic subjects in Jewish supplementary schools and the accommodations used for the bar or bat mitzvah ceremony of a student with a disability. The subcategories for academic accommodations are Hebrew accommodations and academic accommodations in the classroom.
**Hebrew accommodations.** The first subcategory of academic accommodations is Hebrew accommodations, which are accommodations that religious schools use to help their students learn to read Hebrew and accommodations that are used during the bar or bat mitzvah ceremony. The first property of the subcategory Hebrew accommodations is learning to read Hebrew. The dimension is learning to read Hebrew to not learning to read Hebrew. Not all students will be able to learn how to read Hebrew and Jewish supplementary schools have different ways to work with those students. About half of the participants spoke about how they have created accommodations for learning Hebrew in their religious school. Naomi stated that she changed her Hebrew instruction program and it has been successful for her religious school. “As far as a learning challenge, and like the main thing you hear usually with the learning challenges is when it comes to Hebrew instruction, and we’ve changed our program. I was implementing it last year, and now we’re fully into it…” (Naomi, Lines 218-220). Miriam believed that even though her religious school is experiential and not a very academic setting, learning disabilities are sometimes more noticeable when students learn Hebrew. She stated “But there’s lots of good resources out there for that now” (Miriam, Lines 155-156). Orli noted that in her religious school, they adjust the expectations for students depending on the student’s abilities.

I mean, we just adjust it. Our expectations are … if there is a child who has learning disabilities, and they’re clearly not able to read Hebrew, then … we look at like, ‘Okay, so can they memorize the tune? Can they…are there ways?’ And we adjust. (Orli, Lines 317-320)
Yael’s school uses tutors to help students learn to read Hebrew. For students who have learning disabilities that require more support, she has adult tutors who are experienced working with students with disabilities.

With Hebrew, we probably would provide grade level instruction until about fifth grade. If the student wants to have a bar or bat mitzvah, that’s about the time, because I don’t want students to feel stressed out about Hebrew. That’s not a win for anyone. And everyone knows right away, who’s better and who’s not as good [at reading Hebrew]. So it starts early. Starting in about fifth grade, we would do some individual tutoring. Depending on the needs of [the] student, I would probably start with a teen, so it would be less pressure; … more sort of role modeling. And then as necessary, I do have several adult tutors who have experience working with different kinds of disabilities…we’ve been able to make matches where they’re needed. (Yael, Lines 252-260)

Tamar noted that she has a few students who will not grasp how to read Hebrew. Her religious school provides transliteration [Hebrew words written out phonetically in English] and auditory learning.

So we have students who will never read Hebrew and that is okay and nobody else will know that they’re never reading Hebrew because when they’re in the classroom, we provide … a way for them to have transliteration or things like that with them; when they’re working one-on-one. We would work with them in terms of an auditory learning style as opposed to ever reading, but you wouldn’t know that until you literally sit down with that child. (Tamar, Lines 295-300)
The second property of the subcategory Hebrew accommodations is bar or bat mitzvah ceremony accommodations. Part of teaching Hebrew is preparing many of the students for a bar or bat mitzvah. The successful accommodations that were used during Hebrew instruction are often used during the bar or bat mitzvah ceremony. The dimension for bar or bat mitzvah ceremony accommodations is having bar or bat mitzvah accommodations to not having any bar or bat mitzvah accommodations. While the bar or bat mitzvah ceremony was not within the scope of this paper, anecdotally this information was revealed and gives a window into how a few types of accommodations could be created for a bar or bat mitzvah ceremony. Almost all of the participants utilize bar or bat mitzvah accommodations for their students with disabilities. Orli noted that her religious school adjusts the ceremony for each student.

And for things like bar and bat mitzvah, if we can get them to read like a line of Torah as opposed to four aliyot [portions]. … We just adjust and we do what we can. … [we use transliteration] … only if that’s what they need. …and even that, we like to try to teach them a couple of words so that it’ll be the transliteration but that they can actually say … they read … some Hebrew. But yeah, there’s always a few, not even a few. There’s … one or two every year that we do end up doing transliteration and a lot of just oral learning, as opposed to actually reading Hebrew. (Orli, Lines 320-329)

Participants noted that Hebrew instruction is often where some learning disabilities are most noticeable. However many of the religious schools have created accommodations for students with learning disabilities to help them learn to read Hebrew, participate with their classmates using transliteration, and/or have a meaningful bar or bat mitzvah
ceremony. Some of the Hebrew learning programs that participants have found successful are: Hebrew Through Movement, Onward Hebrew, Hebrew and Harmony, and Shalom Learning.

**Academic accommodations in the classroom.** The second subcategory of academic accommodations is academic accommodations in the classroom. The first property of academic accommodations in the classroom is accommodations for specific disabilities. The dimension is having academic accommodations for specific disabilities to not having academic accommodations for specific disabilities. Four of the participants mentioned that they use specific accommodations for students who have specific types of disabilities. Caleb stated that some students need to move around the classroom or have trouble grasping the concepts of the lesson.

…if the student has a needs [sic] to move around, I will let them move around. If the student has difficult[y] with understanding materials, we will break down into little groups, and I will work one-on-one with them, if it’s possible. It all depends on the student needs. (Caleb, Lines 152-154)

Sarah uses the student’s IEP to help her create the accommodations for students with disabilities in her religious school.

So if they read books with bigger print, I’ll try to copy a book they’re going to read and blow it up a little more so they can see it. Or if they take breaks during the day, I’ll have a timer for them. … Typically what I’ve done is just … [use a] quiet timer so it’s not disrupting the whole class and not just single [the] student out, but that they’ll learn for 10 minutes and then take a break and get to go walk around or do what they need to do, to then come back and learn again. … [As for
technology during virtual classes during Covid-19] I thought maybe that the online learning when, when all of this [Covid-19 pandemic] started happening, we did online learning and I thought that would be great for a lot of these … students. But our students, especially with special needs, … it was not great for them, but having their own computer … at school … they enjoyed. (Sarah, Lines 177-191)

Eve noted that she had worked with students with hearing and visual losses and modified the material to make sure the students with disabilities were able to have the same curriculum, as close as possible, to the other students in the class. She stated:

For example, when I had a student with hearing loss, we were making sure that they were sitting in the front row. And I was making sure that, for example, if I was going to turn and write something on the chalkboard, that I wouldn’t continue talking. I would make sure that I just turned around to write what I was going to write, and then turned back around for the talking. The student with visual impairments was also in the front. But we were preparing packets sometimes ahead of time. If we couldn’t find a larger print book … if we were using a worksheet, we would make it larger. We had a prayer book that was in the larger print. Even when she had her bat mitzvah, her speeches were blown up in a very large font, so they were, it was a lot of that happening. (Eve, Lines 202-210)

Naomi stated that her Jewish supplementary school was “willing to kind of do whatever works as long as it feels, … [appropriate for the student and the religious school]” (Naomi, Line 330).

When it comes to learning challenges, it’s more about, ‘Okay, so-and-so has a problem like dyslexia or whatever.’ And so asking second graders [where the
student with a disability was a member of the class] to do a read around in the classroom would be really putting him on the spot or whatever. So then it’s a matter of, ‘Okay, we know this about this child. So let’s go and tell the teacher we’re not going to do read arounds in the classroom this way. You know, you can give them … the information in a different way. And you know, some kids can volunteer to read, and then maybe this kid can volunteer [to do another job] or whatever they want to do; find something for each of them. But … [reading aloud is] not mandatory for him.’ So … we just kind of adjust where we can. (Naomi, Lines 210-218)

Naomi also noted that she tries to provide students with disabilities tools so they can have a more inclusive experience in her religious school. She provides some tools for all the students in the classroom so students with disabilities are not singled out.

I mean, basically, it’s like if I’m told that … this student would work better on a laptop or that student would work better if they had this type of pencil or that type of pencil. … every now and then we have [a walk through the school]. I have an assistant director and another [person and] … we walk through [the school] and kind of look at things and we come back and well … we might ask a parent who’s an OT [occupational therapist], ‘Oh, you know, we noticed… Can you recommend blah, blah, blah?’ … I find … [out from] other people that say, ‘Oh, there’s these bands you can put up around the chair … the legs of a chair and the kids can push on that.’ So then we just put them in the whole class so that it doesn’t look like one kid needs it, but they all have it. (Naomi, Lines 309-317)
The second property of the subcategory academic accommodations in the classroom is accommodations that are good teaching strategies for all students. The dimension is having accommodations that are good teaching strategies for all students to not having accommodations that are good teaching strategies for all students. Most of the participants noted that they use some teaching strategies which may have developed from the discipline of special education but are just good strategies for teaching students of all abilities. Miriam noted that her curriculum is a more experiential learning experience for her students. “There’s not a lot of writing, not a lot of reading. So that kind of eliminates a lot of that to begin with” (Miriam, Lines 205-206). However, there are some academic aspects that arise. Miriam stated:

When something does come up, we, we never force a child to read out loud. If they do some writing, typically it is in groups; if they do some reflection, we’ll give them a choice between writing or talking over with a partner or with the teacher. That’s kind of naturally built in for all students, not just those with disabilities. (Miriam, Lines 208-211)

Judith stated that she uses her madrichim [teen classroom assistants] to help students of all abilities in the classroom and also has an alternative activity for any student where the assignment is not a good fit for the student.

There isn’t too much extra, but that’s where the madrichim really come in handy; if there’s a student who … maybe needs a little extra help, or wants to talk through something, because … they don’t all learn the same way. Even students without disabilities don’t all learn the same way. And so it could be someone,
one of my students with a disability; it could be just one of my students, any of them, if they need extra help, or they need to do something different from what we’re doing. I always have something else … there’s always an alternative. If what we’re doing doesn’t work for anybody in the classroom … there’s always the option if … whatever is going on in the classroom is too much for some students because sometimes it can get loud … And I have some students … with disabilities where … they cannot handle that. That’s always an option to go out in the quiet hallway with one of the madrichim just to … learn one-on-one with them. So I … kind of do different things depending on what’s happening.

Some of the participants’ religious schools have teacher expectations that are helpful for learners of all abilities. Eve talked about methods that all educators at her Jewish supplementary school should do to help all students learn.

I think in general, we try to have … some rules of teaching that could benefit everybody. Like you know, if you’re going to do an activity, think about how long it is. And try to, you know, if it’s a longer activity, maybe do one part of it, go to something else, and then come back to it. You know, trying to mix sitting down activities with getting up, and trying to appeal to the different learning styles that all kids have; that some do more with watching, and some more with listening, and some more with touching. I know there’s fancy words for that: auditory, visual, kinesthetic. (Eve, Lines 213-220)

Many of the participants stated that they utilize multiple modalities for teaching all students in their Jewish supplementary school. Tamar used multiple ways to teach all students and students had the opportunity to use whichever format worked best.
My teachers are required to present information in four formats. So there must be … an activity associated with the information, they must have an auditory [piece], they must have a visual [piece], they must have a sensory [piece] of some sort. And they must also have a way for the children to choose what works best for them and to go down that road more, so it can [be] really important. Something is not just taught by writing on a wall in front of them. It’s not just taught by handing it to them, it’s taught in all different ways. (Tamar, Lines 302-307)

Almost all of the participants have incorporated at least one of these accommodations: differentiated instruction; working in groups; teaching in little bits of information; repeating information; using a schedule so students know what is coming next; using drama and role playing; creating games for the students; using flexible seating; and utilizing discussions with all students. Penina stated this was the first year she used flexible seating for her class. Reflecting on the experience of teaching with flexible seating, Penina believed it was interesting and a positive experience. “…we had a good [experience]; that was fun. … they felt special and they felt, you know …it just kind of made it [a] more relaxing kind of thing, and less school-like for them” (Penina, Lines 215-219). Yael stated that she used project based learning for all students which involves group work. “I try to incorporate as much project based learning as possible; hands on whether it’s preparing food or doing a service project” (Yael, Lines 281-283). Penina stated that she used little bits of information that are interesting for the students. I do it [teaching] in different ways; as may start with a video clip, or a scenario, or with a background or an interesting fact about something. Just very small, digestible bites; what we call little bits information. With like a check-in … this
year I’ve been doing … a lot of discussion; a lot of Turn and Talk with each other about it. Yeah, it’s a lot of movement away from, you know, ‘Here’s a book, read; this is a worksheet…’ I’ve done that and I’ve moved away from that.

(Penina, Lines 238-243)

Hannah encouraged her educators to use small groups and break activities into shorter chunks of time. She noted “Some of those strategies are better for everybody. They come from the world of inclusion, but it’s just … a better way to learn than you get, even if you’re more of a mainstream student” (Hannah, Lines 405-407). Abigail challenged her educators to present information in multiple modalities and repeat the information. She stated, “things need to be repeated. And sometimes they start doing it because of a certain individual in the class. And then they realize that it’s actually better for everybody” (Abigail, Lines 227-228). Caleb used a visual schedule to help his students know “what’s coming up and what will be next” (Caleb, Line 157). Judith used drama or role playing with stories she was teaching her young students. Eve created games so students could pair up in teams or work as a group. Hannah believed technology needed to be incorporated into teaching methods for religious schools. She stated:

I think that’s just the way a lot of kids learn these days; that they’re engaged and it helps them learn differently, and they’re paying attention in a different way. … But I do think that it’s a powerful educational tool and can be an inclusive tool.

(Hannah, Lines 435-443)

Orli said her school utilized more differentiated instruction using the madrichim to lead some groups so the teacher could work with students who needed more instruction. She
also stated “…more of it is experiential than in years past. And we’re finding that that
not only works well with those who have special needs, but also the typical kid too”
(Orli, Lines 337-339).

Almost all of the participants believed that utilizing academic accommodations in the
classroom is part of how they create meaningful academic inclusion for students with
disabilities. Some of them noted that some of the accommodations that began as ways to
help students with disabilities understand material actually helped students of all abilities
in their classroom.

**Question 1b:** In what ways do Jewish supplementary school directors and
educators define meaningful social inclusion and how do they perceive they have
provided (meaningful) social inclusion for their students with disabilities in their
programs with same-age peers?

**Question 1b Part 1:** in what ways do Jewish supplementary school directors and
educators define meaningful social inclusion?

This question seeks to understand how Jewish supplementary school directors
define meaningful social inclusion for their students with disabilities. Using grounded
theory analysis two categories emerged from the data. The first category of interactions
focuses on the different types of reciprocal interactions students of all abilities should
have to create meaningful social inclusion. The second category of culture addresses
creating a welcoming culture for all students and designing an inclusive culture which
directors and educators believed are important for meaningful social inclusion.
### Table 7

*How Directors and Educators Define Meaningful Social Inclusion*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Subcategory</th>
<th>Property</th>
<th>Dimension</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Interactions</td>
<td>Reciprocal Interactions</td>
<td>Interacting respectfully with others</td>
<td>Interacting respectfully with others to not interacting respectfully with others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Connecting to another person</td>
<td>Connecting to another person to not connecting to another person</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Enjoying one another</td>
<td>Enjoying one another to not enjoying one another</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Having friends</td>
<td>Having friends to not having friends</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Culture</td>
<td>Creating a welcoming culture</td>
<td>A comfortable environment encourages students to interact</td>
<td>A comfortable environment encourages students to interact to a comfortable environment does not encourage students to interact</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Making amends when you do something wrong</td>
<td>Making amends when you do something wrong to not making amends when you do something wrong</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Having a sense of belonging</td>
<td>Having a sense of belonging to not having a sense of belonging</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Creating an inclusive Culture</td>
<td>Staff creating conditions for inclusion to occur covertly</td>
<td>Staff creating conditions for inclusion to occur covertly to staff not creating conditions for inclusion to occur covertly.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The school community is invested in inclusion</td>
<td>The school community is not invested in inclusion</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>---</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No one is by themselves</td>
<td>No one is by themselves to everyone is by themselves</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Designing classroom norms and culture with students</td>
<td>Designing classroom norms and culture with students to not designing classroom norms and culture with students</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

### Interactions

Interactions are one of the ways humans can connect with each other. Jewish supplementary school directors and educators believed that interactions are a necessary part of their definition of meaningful social inclusion. The subcategory of interactions is reciprocal interactions.

**Reciprocal interactions**. The subcategory of interactions is reciprocal interactions.

Reciprocal interactions can occur when students of all abilities view and treat each other as equals. The first property of reciprocal interactions is interacting respectfully with others. The dimension is interacting respectfully with others to not interacting respectfully with others. Three of the participants believed meaningful social inclusion is based on respectful interactions with others. Judith stated that she expects her students to interact with their peers and treat everyone in the classroom respectfully.
…for me, meaningful social inclusion is them … talking to each other. They don’t have to be friends, but just interacting with each other and with everybody... You’re not just friends and talking to ‘X’ person … everyone is talking to each other. And in a respectful way; I’m very clear about that. That with them, that I don’t tolerate any disrespectful words or anything to each other or to me; to anybody. (Judith, Lines 398-402)

Penina believed students should be attuned to each other. She stated, “I think it’s … based on respect, empathy…and inclusion … that’s not always the case. But yeah, … it’s when … kids can really interact and listen to each other, and feel safe” (Penina, Lines 314-316).

The second property of reciprocal interactions is connecting to another person. The dimension is connecting to another person to not connecting to another person. Three of the participants mentioned making connections with others as part of their definition of social inclusion. Sarah noted that for her, meaningful social inclusion involves not only respect, but also the ability to find a way to relate to a peer by finding something that appeals to both participants. “I think it’s when either naturally or with help, that people, students especially, come together and are respectful and friendly, and can find common interests and common ground, when they might not have thought there was a commonality before” (Sarah, Lines 253-255). Yael believed it is important that everyone in the classroom has a chance to interact with someone in a meaningful way.

I would define that [social inclusion] as providing an activity or an environment where everyone has an opportunity to connect with at least one other person. Some of the activities are going to be more communal based. And some of them,
like for example, if we have a game day, two kids over here, two kids over here, it
doesn’t have to be … Kumbaya group bonding, but everyone needs an
opportunity to connect. (Yael, Lines 381-385)

Hannah implied that meaningful social inclusion does not happen by accident.
According to her, it is something that people must want to create by making an effort to
construct social connections. She also noted that even though her religious school
community tries to design meaningful social inclusion, it doesn’t always succeed.

But I would say, to me, it [social inclusion] looks like having a community of
learners that know that when they come to our programs, that there are learning
programs. That they’re going to be looked out for, and that there’s going to be a
connect. It looks like people making an effort to create those social connections.
So that social inclusion, that there are people reaching out to one another. There
are, that everyone’s kind of on the same page; that this is what we want to create.
And some days we might get it right and some days we might not. (Hannah,
Lines 696-702)

The third property of reciprocal interactions is enjoying one another. The
dimension is enjoying one another to not enjoying one another. Two of the participants
stated that enjoying each other was part of their definition of social inclusion. Orli
believed that both participants should have a positive experience during the interaction.
She stated:

I think that it [social inclusion] is that both parties feel that … they enjoyed
spending time with the other. And I think that both walk away feeling valued,
both walk away feeling part of something, and both walk away feeling that …
they had a friendly interaction. But we can’t make them be friends, but we can teach kids how to be friendly and kind and inclusive and welcoming. (Orli, Lines 487-491)

Deborah stated that students should experience “enjoyment of one another but with making sure you’re … learning and then respecting boundaries” (Deborah, Lines 575-576).

The fourth property of reciprocal interactions is having friends. The dimension is having friends to not having friends. Miriam was the only participant to include having friends as part of her definition of social inclusion. She believed that students who are socially included perceive that they have friends. She stated:

Meaningful social inclusion to me would be just that they feel like they have friends. … If you ask me how to measure it, I would say, … ‘Who are your friends at [name of temple]?’ And if they can name people, I’m good. (Miriam, Lines 318-322)

Some of the participants believed that part of their definition of meaningful social inclusion is to have student interactions. Participants noted that students need to interact respectfully with others, to connect to another person, to enjoy being with each other and to have friends.

Culture

The second category is culture. The culture of a Jewish supplementary school describes the norms, customs and values that are created and maintained at the school by the staff, students, and their families. The subcategories of culture are creating a welcoming culture and creating an inclusive culture.
Creating a welcoming culture. The first subcategory of culture is creating a welcoming culture. The first property of creating a welcoming culture is a comfortable environment encourages students to interact. The dimension is a comfortable environment encourages students to interact to a comfortable environment does not encourage students to interact. Two of the participants believed that a comfortable environment was part of their definition of social inclusion. Caleb believed that students who feel relaxed in their religious school classroom are able to interact with one another. He stated, “I will say that social inclusion will be created in a comfortable atmosphere for the students to interact with one another” (Caleb, Lines 240-241). Eve noted that she tries to prevent cliques from forming in her classroom. Her implied reason is that when cliques are allowed to thrive in the classroom, some students are excluded from the cliques and do not perceive the classroom as a comfortable environment.

The second property of creating a welcoming culture is making amends when you do something wrong. The dimension is making amends when you do something wrong to not making amends when you do something wrong. Deborah was the only one who talked about having students make amends when they have upset or mistreated a peer. This is probably because she was the only participant who worked with very young children. She believed that one way to create a welcoming culture with her very young students is to have them understand when they have upset or mistreated a peer and to know how use their words to apologize.

And if you make a mistake, you know making amends ... We talked about making amends, like, ‘Oh well, you … made a mistake; you’ve completely ruined
“that person’s whatever…castle. … what do you say to that person to make amends [to] them?” (Deborah, Lines 576-579)

The third property of creating a welcoming culture is having a sense of belonging. The dimension is having a sense of belonging to not having a sense of belonging. Two of the participants believed that students of all abilities need to feel they are accepted and valued by their peers. Miriam stated that students need to feel “that they can be themselves at [name of temple]; like a sense of comfort, a sense of belonging” (Miriam, Lines 318-319). Abigail defined meaningful social inclusion as “I guess it would be when the kids who have … special needs don’t know…or just do feel completely part of the group, and as well [liked] and as invited to share as anybody else” (Abigail, Lines 316-317).

The participants spoke of many ways to create a welcoming culture within their Jewish supplementary schools. While all of them were a little different, they all involve feeling comfortable at religious school and that they are part of the group within their classroom and school because the students know how to treat each other.

Creating an inclusive culture. The second subcategory of the category culture, is creating an inclusive culture. An inclusive culture is a culture “that accepts, values, and views as strength the difference we all bring to the table” (Harvard University Faculty of Arts and Sciences, 2021, p. 1). The first property for creating an inclusive culture is staff creating conditions for inclusion to occur covertly. The dimension is staff creating conditions for inclusion to occur covertly to staff not creating conditions for inclusion to occur covertly. Tamar was the only participant who talked in depth about how staff members can covertly create the conditions for inclusion to occur. Creating an
inclusive culture takes a great deal of planning by the staff; there are many supports that
need to be in place for inclusion to occur seamlessly. Here is how Tamar described the
process:

So in a perfect world, meaningful social inclusion isn’t something you define
because it’s just … social life is happening. But meaningful social inclusion to
me basically means that neither the person that we are making sure is being
included socially nor anybody else around them realizes that there’s something
different going on; that nothing is … explicit and [it] all just kind of happens in a
way that’s unseen, … no matter what the fact that… we know that lots happened
to make that happen; that nobody in the room is really in on that pre-work.

(Tamar, Lines 455-460)

The second property of the subcategory creating an inclusive culture is the school
community is invested in inclusion. The dimension is the school community is invested
in inclusion to the school community is not invested in inclusion. Hannah was the only
one who noted that to create an inclusive culture within the religious school requires the
entire school community to have inclusion as a goal of the school. She believed that the
madrichim were especially helpful with social inclusion.

…the teachers are a part of it [creating an inclusive culture] too. And that the
whole community is invested in it. … The teachers are looking out for that; the
madrichim, our teens in our classrooms, are actually some of the best at it. Like
… they’re the ones who really help facilitate that meaningful inclusion socially,
because … that’s what they’re looking for. And I think teens are especially very
sensitive to that. So having them be leaders in that area [of inclusion] in our
school, I think allows us to create, … our own definition of meaningful inclusion; that everyone has somebody looking out for them, and everybody is invested in creating that. (Hannah, Lines 702-709)

The third property of the subcategory creating an inclusive culture is no one is by themselves. The dimension is no one is by themselves to everyone is by themselves. Naomi was the only participant who noted that for her, meaningful social inclusion means that everyone in her religious school had someone to spend time with.

So if you see kids that, … to me the best thing is when you see a kid out on the playground, or someone helping another child figure out like, how to shoot the ball, or how to play the game, or let me hold that for you. Like, … how great when you have a kid that’s having a hard time figuring out how to hold their lunch and another kid sees that and comes over and helps them, … and then they sit down together and have lunch. I think success! It used to be that they had lunch here every weekend and the hardest part is when you saw kids sitting by themselves. You know, … So, the best thing I would see is that there would be kids, that would always make sure no one’s by themselves. (Naomi, Lines 493-501)

The fourth property of creating an inclusive culture is designing classroom norms and culture with students. The dimension is designing classroom norms and culture with students to not designing classroom norms and culture with students. Hannah was the only participant who stated that social inclusion could be created by having the students in each classroom construct and be accountable to their own norms and culture that they use to guide their behavior. She stated:
So we encourage the teachers to create their classroom norms and their culture with the kids [who] buy-in [to the norms and culture]. And to actually ask them, like, ‘You know, what do you think is fair in our classroom?’ Like, ‘What are the expectations we have of each other?’ And keep them accountable to that throughout the year. (Hannah, Lines 451-454)

Some participants believed that part of the definition of meaningful social inclusion is creating an inclusive culture for students of all abilities. They noted that sometimes staff needs to help create the conditions for inclusion to occur and sometimes it is done by students when they design their own inclusive culture and norms. They also believed that for a school to be inclusive, no one should be alone and the community needs to be invested in inclusion.

**Question 1b Part 2:** How do Jewish supplementary school directors and educators perceive they have provided (meaningful) social inclusion for their students with disabilities in their programs with same-age peers?

This question seeks to understand how Jewish supplementary school directors and educators perceive they have provided meaningful social inclusion for their students. Using grounded theory analysis, five categories emerged from the data. The first category, community, encompasses how directors and educators perceive they create a sense of belonging for their students with disabilities, create time for students to get to know each other and intentionally group students into cohesive classrooms. The second category, inclusive programming, addresses how directors and educators create programs where all students can participate. The third category, designing opportunities for students to connect with one another, focuses on using placement in the classroom,
having students working together, facilitating inclusion for very young children, creating an environment conducive to inclusion, enlisting the help of other students or madrichim, and building relationships between students of all abilities. The fourth category, controlling for exclusion describes how group composition is important for inclusion and avoiding cliques in the classroom. The fifth category, supporting an inclusive community, uncovers the importance of preserving the culture of inclusion within the Jewish supplementary school. Of note, Hannah stated that she believed it is more challenging to provide students with disabilities social inclusion than academic inclusion.

Table 8

The Ways Directors and Educators Perceive they have Provided Meaningful Social inclusion to their Students with Disabilities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Subcategory</th>
<th>Property</th>
<th>Dimension</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Community</td>
<td>Having a sense of belonging</td>
<td>Creating a community produces a sense of belonging</td>
<td>Creating a community produces a sense of belonging to creating a community does not produce a sense of belonging</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Keeping students with disabilities in their community of same-age peers</td>
<td>Keeping students with disabilities in their community of same-age peers to not keeping students with disabilities in their community of same-age peers</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Preparing a class for a new student with disabilities</td>
<td>Preparing the class for a new student with disabilities to not preparing a class for a new student</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Meaningful Inclusion</strong></td>
<td><strong>Creating time to get to know each other</strong></td>
<td><strong>Dedicating time to create and maintain a community</strong></td>
<td><strong>Dedicating time to create and maintain a community to not dedicating time to create and maintain a community</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------</td>
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<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Intentional grouping for classrooms</strong></td>
<td><strong>Creating cohesive classrooms</strong></td>
<td><strong>Creating cohesive classrooms to not creating cohesive classrooms</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Inclusive programming</strong></td>
<td><strong>Creating programs where students of all abilities can participate</strong></td>
<td><strong>Using all-school programs to help with social inclusion</strong></td>
<td><strong>Using all-school programs to help with social inclusion to not using all-school programs to help with social inclusion</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Designing opportunities for students to connect with one another</strong></td>
<td><strong>Placement in the classroom</strong></td>
<td><strong>Using classroom seating as a way to provide social inclusion</strong></td>
<td><strong>Using classroom seating as a way to provide social inclusion to not using classroom seating as a way to provide social inclusion</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students working together</td>
<td>Having opportunities to work with everyone</td>
<td>Having opportunities to work with everyone to not having opportunities to work with everyone</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>--------------------------</td>
<td>------------------------------------------</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Providing opportunities for inclusion</td>
<td>Providing opportunities for inclusion to not providing opportunities for inclusion</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facilitating inclusion for very young children</td>
<td>Inviting peers to join a student</td>
<td>Inviting peers to join a student to not inviting peers to join a student</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaching students how to talk to each other</td>
<td>Teaching students how to talk to each other to not teaching students how to talk to each other</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creating an environment conducive to inclusion of students with disabilities</td>
<td>Creating the atmosphere for students to see potential</td>
<td>Creating the atmosphere for students to see potential in peers to not creating the atmosphere for students to see potential in peers</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enlisting the help of other students or madrichim to help students connect</td>
<td>Creating a buddy</td>
<td>Creating a buddy to not creating a buddy</td>
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<tr>
<td>Teen assistants make sure no one sits alone</td>
<td>Teen assistants make sure no one sits alone to teen assistants do not make sure no one sits alone</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Building relationships</td>
<td>Creating friendships by pairing students together</td>
<td>Creating friendships by pairing students together to not creating friendships</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supporting an inclusive school community</td>
<td>Preserving the culture of inclusion</td>
<td>Intentionally maintaining inclusion to not intentionally maintaining inclusion</td>
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<tr>
<td>----------------------------------------</td>
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<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive interactions between the students</td>
<td>Positive interactions between students to not having positive interactions between students</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Controlling for exclusion</td>
<td>Group composition</td>
<td>Controlling group membership to reduce the chance of cliques in the classroom, to not controlling group membership to reduce the chance of cliques in the classroom.</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being in class together for years creates relationships</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Grouping students by interest</td>
<td>Grouping students by interest to not grouping students by interests</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Allowing relationships to happen naturally</td>
<td>Allowing relationships to happen naturally to not allowing relationships to happen naturally</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being in class together for years creates relationships</td>
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Community

A community is a group of people with similar interests and/or a shared identity. Many of the directors and educators believed having a community in their religious school was one way to facilitate social inclusion of students with disabilities with their same-age peers. The subcategories of community are: Having a sense of belonging, creating time to get to know each other, and intentional grouping for the classrooms.

Having a sense of belonging. The first subcategory of community is having a sense of belonging. The first property is creating a community produces a sense of belonging. The dimension is creating a community produces a sense of belonging to creating a community does not produce a sense of belonging. Four of the participants mentioned that having a sense of belonging is important to providing social inclusion. Hannah believed the way to create social inclusion is to have all students believe that they belong in their classroom community and their school community.

I’m not sure exactly what it looks like, but one of the ways that I would hope that we’re creating that social inclusion, that meaningful piece, is to really focus on community building, and to create a lot of opportunities for the students to feel connected to one another. … and I really don’t believe that every child in every class … needs to be best friends, or … to even particularly like each other. But I think that’s different than having a sense of community. And to me, community is really about belonging. … a basic human need is to have a sense of belonging. And I think that, that’s when we are successful with students who have different needs and disabilities; that they feel like they belong and that they matter. And that … to me is the core of inclusion; it doesn’t mean that they have a million
friends, … I would say, it’s not even particularly easy for them, unfortunately.

But it can be really hard and it can push them. (Hannah, Lines 571-582)

Hannah also stated that she believes that having that sense of belonging gives students an internal sense of security which allows them to make friends.

I can’t make them be friends with each other. But I think as long as they feel like they count, and they belong, and they’re seen and heard for who they are, they’ll find one [a friend]. If you have that sense of security internally, it allows you to open up; to find those connections and relationships. If you don’t have that [sense of internal security], … It’s a non-starter. … [For students without that sense of internal security] we really need to start from the individual and build them up, and to make sure they feel valued. And, … we know that they matter and … that they have worth inherently. And … to build their confidence and then allow them; … to provide a lot of opportunities for them to find those relationships and those friends who also validate that vision. (Hannah, Lines 584-588)

Naomi has created a sense of belonging with her students of all abilities. Each grade level is a clan with its own clan name and parent’s social media group.

…so each grade level is basically considered a clan. You enter your [clan] in first grade, you keep it through 12th grade, and then that [clan] name goes down to the beginning again. … So we have [clan] [social media] groups for the parents. And we really try to encourage that the parents are doing things also socially on their own or with other families from the very beginning. So that I find really does help. (Naomi, Lines 439-447)
The second property of having a sense of belonging is keeping students with disabilities in their community of same-age peers. The dimension is keeping students with disabilities in their community of same-age peers to not keeping students with disabilities in their community of same-age peers. Tamar was the only participant who talked about the importance of keeping students with disabilities connected to their community of peers as they matriculate their way through religious school. She stated that for a student who was unable to keep up academically with peers, the student participated in all social aspects with peers, but instead of attending the academic piece of her program, she was a teen helper in a kindergarten classroom and could socialize with other teen helpers in the classroom.

[A teen-age student] who really could not keep up … academically [but could keep up socially with her peers], she has joined … [her same-age peers] for activities that they do. But to keep her in the community, we’ve also have [sic] her as a madricha [female teen classroom helper]… So she is a madricha having the social experiences with all the other madrichim. … [and] she happens to be a madricha in a kindergarten classroom. So she is around her peers who are also the madrichim in the classroom, but the academic piece is within the kindergarten curriculum. (Tamar, Lines 396-401)

The third property of having a sense of belonging is preparing a class for a new student with disabilities. The dimension is preparing the class for a new student with disabilities to not preparing a class for a new student with disabilities. Orli was the only participant who believed it is important to help a class welcome a new student with
disabilities that requires a fair amount of support into the classroom community by talking to the class members about the student before the student attends the class.

So, social inclusion… sometimes means that if we have a student who is starting [the program] I will say [to the parent], ‘Can we have them come in the second week, so that we can get everything kind of settled, because the first week is really crazy. And then let’s bring your student in the second week.’ And before that student comes, … I will visit the class and say ‘So we’re going to have a student…’ And this is only for students who have more severe disabilities, right? I mean if they’re, if they’re garden variety on the spectrum, that sort of thing, … that’s different. But if the child has multiple disabilities, or they’re not verbal, … or they’re going to be in a wheelchair, so I will go to the classroom and I will say to those students, ‘So I want to let you know, we have a student who’s coming next week. Does anyone know someone who uses a wheelchair to help them get around? What are the things that they might need help with? What are the things they might be able to do on their own? … so [we] talk about kind of what to expect; what the needs are. … And then we talked about, ‘What are some things that maybe you can’t do as well as someone else?’ … [and then we talk about] We all have things we’re really good at.’ And as … I always try to find out like [the student’s strengths and likes], ‘As it turns out … this … student … that we’re having come to join our class. He’s really … loves Legos. Who else loves Legos?’ So try to find like the commonalities and the ways to kind of see beyond the … devices, right? … and for the … other kid, you know, if it is ADHD, those sort of things, … we integrate them into the class. (Orli, Lines 405-331)
Creating time to get to know each other. The second subcategory for community is creating time to get to know each other. The property is dedicating time to create and maintain a community. The dimension is dedicating time to create and maintain a community to not dedicating time to create and maintain a community. Five of the participants set aside part of their classroom time to get to know each other so they can develop and maintain a community in their classroom where all students have a sense of belonging. Naomi uses an educational strategy called Morning Meeting to begin classes in her religious school.

I think the main piece in the school part is the morning meeting; that everybody has a chance to go through all of the steps of sharing and doing an activity and a greeting. And the idea is that everyone belongs in this room, and everyone has a purpose and something they’re bringing to it. And when you’re gone, you’re missed. Like, we know that you’re part of the group and part of the group is gone. And that if we were a chain link, you know, circle, if a chain has gone, it doesn’t matter which link is gone, the chain is no longer complete and whole. So I think that piece helps and that’s why we brought that in. … but in the classroom, the morning meeting is, I think, the main focus of how we try to break down those barriers. (Naomi, Lines 413-426)

Abigail’s Jewish supplementary school also dedicates time to having the students and staff get to know each other. Starting in middle school each grade has time set aside for eating a meal together and socializing.

A lot of… especially in the beginning of the year… a lot of getting to know you activities, a lot of games. Almost all classes, you know, even into the older and
middle school grades open with sharing time and with games like two truths and a lie or just talking about what happened, you know, something good that happened to them that week, or sharing… but we always dedicate time to that. In our older, starting in middle school, and up, every grade has a half hour of their time set aside for a meal and socializing. …social is a very high priority.

Eve also values having the students get to know each other better. She commented on the fact that her students already know each other before they enter her classroom at the beginning of the school year from previous years. However, she still uses the first few weeks to have students play games or do projects so she and the rest of the class can learn more about their class members.

…I’ve been really lucky in the fact that they already know each other there. And they’ve been in class together [before]. … Usually the first Sunday back, everyone’s spending that time catching up on what they did because they already know [each other]. So I’m lucky in that aspect that it’s not brand new, [and] nobody knows each other and we have to form that kind of social bonding. But I try and do the first like two-ish or so weeks depending, are always like games and I don’t like the term icebreaker, but they’re kind of those icebreaker-y type games or doing a project or something that tells me and everybody else about themselves. (Eve, Lines 369-375)

**Intentional grouping for classrooms.** The third subcategory of community is intentional grouping for classrooms. The property is creating cohesive classrooms. The dimension is creating cohesive classrooms to not creating cohesive classrooms. One way to create social inclusion and community is by creating classrooms that match students
with an educator who will understand the students and dividing students into classrooms by how well they will function together as a group. Two participants noted they spend time choosing the students for each classroom. Hannah spends quite a bit of time balancing out the students in her classrooms and matching students and educators.

So we have a very long, … very difficult process of creating classrooms. But once I’ve gotten to know the kids and gotten to know the community now that I have been there for [X amount of] years, I have a much better process where I feel like I have more agency in creating intentional groupings; of like balancing some of the personalities, Balancing; matching them with the right teachers …who I think will be a right fit and who will get the kid … That they’ll just get that kid and click with them and find a way to accommodate them. And we switch things around like for the first month, …if we realize that it’s not working or … some of the issues we were concerned about are bubbling up, we’ll make changes to accommodate a better, a positive environment for the kids. And we try to create diversity within the classroom and try to place them with … just sort of integrating all the different personalities. Like if there is a child [who] has a specific need that maybe is very disruptive to the class or might be something that actualizes itself with … verbal calling out or a lot of movement, then I want to think about… okay, who are the kids that I know, either won’t be bothered by this or who will like, maybe this kid has been with them for three years and that’s worked really well. They know how to support him … so tracking that along the years too, and figuring out maybe this grouping worked really well or this one did
not work well and we don’t want to put that … dynamic together again. We track all of that. (Hannah, Lines 621-639)

According to the participants of this study, creating and maintaining a school and classroom community where all the students feel they belong is an important piece of social inclusion.

**Inclusive Programming**

The second category is inclusive programming. Inclusive programming is religious school programming that is designed to be accessible to everyone. It can be comprised of academic material, activities, and/or social programs and it can be created for all the members of the school or can be class or grade specific. The subcategory is creating programs where students of all abilities can participate.

**Creating programs where students of all abilities can participate.** Creating programs where students of all abilities can participate is the subcategory of inclusive programming. The first property is using all-school programs to help with social inclusion. The dimension is using all-school programs to help with social inclusion to not using all-school programs to help with social inclusion. Yael was the only participant who mentioned all-school programming as a way to create social inclusion in Jewish supplementary schools. When asked how her school provides social inclusion to students with disabilities, Yael stated that they use holidays to create all-school educational activities where students can learn and celebrate with all the other students in the school.

We have, throughout the religious school year, a number of all-school programs that are based on holidays: Hanukah, Simchat Torah, Purim, Pesach, but really are just more about the celebration element. For example, we’ve had a Shushan
Showdown for Purim, which was like a big all-school game show. … So we try to build a social element into the school. (Yael, Lines 344-351)

The second property of inclusive programming is teens creating a community program for the school. The dimension is teens creating a community program for the school to not having teens creating a community program for the school. Miriam was the only participant who used teens to create inclusive programming. She stated that in her religious school teens are tasked with creating some all-school programs for the religious school. [It should be mentioned here that Hanukah is often celebrated by eating things that have been made with oil such as donuts and potato latkas [pancakes] to commemorate the miracle of a cruse of oil that should only have lit the candelabra in the temple for one night but burned for eight nights until more could be made.]

So there’s a few times a year when the teens plan an activity for a Sunday morning; a community event. So for Hanukah, they did a donut crawl, we got on a party bus, and it was like a pub crawl where you go to a bunch of different bars, but we did it with donut shops. It was so cute. And they planned some games on the bus to teach about Hanukah. The kids really learned about Hanukah, and they were able to make these fun Jewish memories and get to know each other in a different way. So, and everyone is included in those. (Miriam, Lines 305-312)

The third property of inclusive programming is using modality-based learning where all students can participate. The dimension is using modality-based learning where all students can participate to not using modality-based learning where all students can participate. Tamar was the only one who mentioned using modality-based
programming. She believed that by using modality-based learning for Judaic curriculum, all students could participate with their same-age peers.

So, for the most part, it [social inclusion] is not a challenge because we have not really had any students who cannot be part of a classroom setting, … their Judaic curriculum … is completely taught through chuggim [activities]: art, music, drama, newspaper, you know, all these different modality-based learning. So once you put students in modality based learning, really anyone can participate with peers. (Tamar, Lines 387-394).

A few of the participants reported that one of the ways they provided social inclusion was by having inclusive programming where students of all abilities were able to participate.

**Designing Opportunities for Students to Connect with One Another**

The third category is designing opportunities for students to connect with one another. The subcategories for designing opportunities for students to connect with one another are: placement in the classroom; students working together; facilitating inclusion for very young children; creating an environment conducive to inclusion, enlisting the help of the other students or madrichim; and building relationships.

**Placement in the classroom.** The first subcategory of designing opportunities for students to connect with one another is placement in the classroom. The property of placement in the classroom is using classroom seating as a way to provide social inclusion. The dimension is using classroom seating as a way to provide social inclusion to not using classroom seating as a way to provide social inclusion. Three participants use classroom seating to help students connect in the classroom. Eve strategically thinks
out where she wants all of her students to sit to help her achieve social inclusion of students with disabilities with their same-age peers.

I don’t do a seating chart, but I usually seat them very specifically. So they have their name on their book. And I just put the books out ahead of time. … It’s never the same. I will tend to seat them, sometimes boy, girl, boy, girl. I’ll put certain kids in certain spots if I think that they do better in a certain part of the room. Um, sometimes I put a helper friend by someone if I think that they might be a good buddy for that person. But, by the same token, there are people that I keep away from each other, if they are going to be a distraction. So I think placement in the room is one way. (Eve, Lines 299-305)

Naomi also uses seating to get students to interact and connect with each other; she has students sit and work in pods. She stated, “…everything is kind of social. Like the way they [sit] …we teach, and the kids have pods in setting up the tables together” (Naomi, Lines 431-432). Penina groups students together by considering how they will work together and relate to each other.

I don’t pressure them; I don’t put them on the spot. I say, ‘I’d like you guys to group together…’ I would try to find the most empathetic students to put them with… So, after you get to know your kids, and you get to know, ‘Okay, if she sits over here with these girls, they’ll be fine, or these, this group of boys is just gonna…’ (Penina, Lines 298-308)

**Students working together.** The second subcategory of designing opportunities for students to connect with one another is students working together. The first property
of students working together is having opportunities to work with everyone. The dimension is having opportunities to work with everyone to not having opportunities to work with everyone. Two of the participants stated that they have students work with all of their peers. Tamar noted that she changes who the peers work with often so that all students work with everyone in the classroom.

We do a lot of peer to peer work. Lots of changing around of who the peers are working together; so no one ever really feels responsible or stuck with a particular student that they may or may not work well with. But everyone has the opportunity [to work together]. (Tamar, Lines 406-412)

One religious school completely changed its program to make it more conducive for students to attend religious school rather than be privately tutored for Hebrew many years ago. This gave students the opportunity to have a more inclusive religious school education. Eve stated, “...there’s a lot of effort made to have the kids come to school and interact and not get privately tutored [for Hebrew]. And that goes back many, many, many, years. Probably 15 or so years ago…” (Eve, Lines 639-640).

The second property for students working together is providing opportunities for inclusion. The dimension is providing opportunities for inclusion to not providing opportunities for inclusion. Two participants stated they provide opportunities for inclusion. Eve provides students with many opportunities to socialize with everyone in the classroom throughout the religious school day.

Well, I mean, they have some free time before class starts. And then we have different activities. If there’s a review sheet or on a fun sheet, it might be allowed to … work on it with their neighbor. If there’s a game they might be able to move
to the floor with a certain number of kids. We go to certain activities, and, at that point, I usually let people sit with their friends. Unless it’s a distraction. So sometimes the whole grade might get together for music and the kids will mix among themselves. (Eve, Lines 318-323)

Caleb provides playtime, breaks, and movement in the classroom so students can have positive interactions with each other that promote inclusion.

We do have playtime. We have … breaks, and we do a lot of movement[s] in the classroom, that are direct[ed] by me or by my co-teacher or by our helpers. But they are mainly focused on social interaction. Like, we will come up and we will say our prayers by like either jumping together, connecting together, or we will either hold certain kind of social games. In order to make everybody comfortable. (Caleb, Lines 219-223)

Facilitating inclusion for very young children. The third subcategory of designing opportunities for students to connect with one another is facilitating inclusion for very young children. The first property for facilitating inclusion for very young children is inviting peers to join a student. The dimension is inviting peers to join a student to not inviting peers to join a student. Since Deborah is the only participant who worked with young children, she was the only one who used this method. For the youngest children who attend religious school, Deborah models how students with and without disabilities can begin playing with other students.

…we usually have … I would say 20 minutes, free play time. And so for that, I’ll sit down at … building blocks with the child who might have special needs and then pull another child over. ‘Hey, look, we’re building this. We.. you go get
some animals so we can make this into an animal house.’ … so then you know, kind of seamless. (Deborah, Lines 517-521)

The second property of facilitating inclusion for very young children is teaching students how to talk to each other. The dimension is teaching students how to talk to each other to not teaching students how to talk to each other. Deborah was the only participant who taught students how to talk to each other. It is also important to teach young students how to carry on conversations with their peers. Because few students are multiples [twins or triplets] most children do not have same-age peers in their family and it is a skill that they often do not learn as well at home.

And then, also during circle time, a lot of it is about learning to take turns and respect someone else when they’re talking. And then also we have snack time too, where we … have juice and challah, and that is like about how to be civilized and talk to people while you’re eating. ‘So, what’s going on?’ Where you’re trying to model people conversation... (Deborah, Lines 525-530)

**Creating an environment conducive to inclusion of students with disabilities.**

The fourth subcategory of designing opportunities for students to connect with one another is creating an environment conducive to inclusion of students with disabilities. The first property of creating an environment conducive to inclusion of students with disabilities is creating the atmosphere for students to see potential in peers. The dimension is creating the atmosphere for students to see potential in peers to not creating the atmosphere for students to see potential in peers. Caleb was the only participant who likes to create an atmosphere in his classroom where students can see similarities between themselves and others; things that they have in common or similar interests. He
stated, “I will never force a student to like [an]other student. But I will try to create the atmosphere and the situation, in order for the other students to see the potential of the other student” (Caleb, Lines 228-229).

**Enlisting the help of other students or madrichim to help students connect.**

The fifth subcategory of designing opportunities for students to connect with one another is enlisting the help of other students or madrichim to help students connect. The first property of enlisting the help of other students or madrichim to help students connect is creating a buddy. The dimension for creating a buddy is creating a buddy to not creating a buddy. Students with disabilities often have difficulty initiating, maintaining and ending conversations with peers and so may spend time alone at religious school. Orli was the only participant who stated she finds a way to create a buddy for students who are spending time alone. Orli stated:

> Um, socially, so some … kids have trouble … knowing how to make friends. And I always look for that, you know, sweet little kid who you can always count on to… And will say, ‘Hey, you know, it looks like … Mateo [a fictitious child’s name] … is feeling a little sad. I’m wondering if maybe he might need someone to kind of sit with him during tefilla [prayer time]?’ (Orli, Lines 449-453)

The second property of enlisting the help of other students or madrichim to help students connect is teen assistants make sure no one sits alone. The dimension is teen assistants make sure no one sits alone to teen assistants do not make sure no one sits alone. Orli was the only participant who trains the teen assistants at her religious school to observe the students and spend time with students who are not engaged with peers. She noted:
…we have the rule with our madrichim; no one sits alone. So when we go to tefilla [prayer time]… The classes, the younger kids sit with [their] classes. The older ones, they have the opportunity to sit where they like ... And so, the madrichim are trained to look to see if there’s a kid sitting by themselves. (Orli, Lines 453-456)

**Building relationships.** The sixth subcategory of designing opportunities for students to connect with one another is building relationships. There are many ways to build social relationships. Some involve: spending time together, communicating effectively with each other, having similar interests or hobbies, and creating positive memories together. The first property of building relationships is creating friendships by pairing students together. The dimension is creating friendships by pairing students together to not creating friendships by pairing students together. Sarah was the only participant who paired some students together and created friendships. She spoke about two students she encouraged to spend time together:

So this year I actually, I don’t know if it was right or wrong…but I would pinpoint a few students that I thought would be great … to be a buddy with a student with a disability. … [Describing one of the pairs she put together.] And this boy [without a disability] has lots of friends in the school and it actually worked. They are now on a [sports team outside of religious school] together. And you know … it was interesting to see that I just had to pinpoint those few students that I knew would really work well with … including others and especially like in the younger grades; it helps [when they are younger]. (Sarah, Lines 229-240)
The second property of building relationships is allowing relationships to happen naturally. Sometimes relationships can happen on their own by giving students the opportunity to interact with their peers. Sarah was the only participant who stated that she likes to give students those types of opportunities.

We do a lot of breaks. And so I encourage my teachers to teach for 10, 15 minutes and take a break and let the kids go get water or go on the playground for five minutes. And to not be hovering over them and allowing the students to interact with each other. Obviously, like keeping an eye on them; making sure that they’re not bullying or being disrespectful. But allowing those relationships to kind of just happen naturally. (Sarah, Lines 247-251)

The third property of the subcategory building relationships is grouping students by interest. The dimension is grouping students by interest to not grouping students by interest. Having similar interests and hobbies can be the foundation for a friendship. Hannah was the only participant who groups students for their Judaic learning by their interests. She stated sometimes students are not always happy that they are not with their friends during Judaic learning.

I’ve modified … their electives. For their Judaic learning, [they] are all based on choice; … it’s a signup thing. So that’s one way that we build that [social inclusion] in, is that they get to decide what kind of group. And that tends to break down some of the clique-y-ness. Like I really say … ‘Okay, you put art as your first choice.’ And … they’ll come to me and be like, ‘Oh, but I wanted to be with this person.’ And I’m like, ‘Well, but you seem like you’re really excited about art. So let’s just try it and maybe your friend will join you, but you want to
be in art, so I’m putting you in art.’ So we do try to do some things based on their interest in that sense. And I’ve worked incredibly hard to try to break down some of the … clique-y groupings. And that, just in general, allows the kids to meet other kids in their grade and to build relationships with them. (Hannah, Lines 611-621)

The fourth property of the subcategory building relationships is being in class together for years creates relationships. The dimension is being in class together for years creates relationships to being in class together for years does not create relationships. Two of the participants believed that being in class together helps build relationships. Penina believed that students who attend class together for many years create relationships with each other.

…most of them have been together for years now. So they’ve straightened a lot of that out themselves. …and unless you get a brand new kid to the situation, by [middle school] they’ve already accepted each other. (Penina, Lines 308-311)

Judith believed that students who are in class together often make friends with each other and do not socially exclude classmates. She stated:

I guess I really don’t do anything specific. They…[the] kids are really kind of great. They … do it themselves. … I haven’t had an instance where anyone has been like socially excluded from the class. I think it helps that … this isn’t their first year together in a Sunday school, so they already know each other. They’re already friends. … I haven’t had an issue with that. So I haven’t had to specifically address it or think of how to … make sure everyone is socially included. (Judith, Lines 351-356)
The participants in the study created many different types of opportunities for students to connect with each other in their Jewish supplementary school. Some of the methods created friendships between students with and without disabilities.

**Controlling for Exclusion**

The fourth category is controlling for exclusion. Some participants noted that they work very hard to break up the cliques among students who attend their religious school. Cliques are groups of people who spend time together and often do not allow others to join them. This can cause problems for directors and educators whose goal is to provide social inclusion for students with disabilities with their same-age peers, because having cliques in a class by definition means that some students will be excluded from creating relationships with everyone in the classroom. The subcategory of controlling for exclusion is group composition.

**Group composition.** The subcategory of controlling for exclusion is group composition. The property for group composition is controlling group membership to reduce the chance of cliques in the classroom. The dimension is controlling group membership to reduce the chance of cliques in the classroom to not controlling group membership to reduce the chance of cliques in the classroom. Eve was the only participant who stated she tries to control for cliques in the classroom. She noted that she does not allow the students to form their own groups for activities because she does not want the groups to be comprised of cliques.

And if we do certain activities in groups, I tend not to let the kids pick their own groups because I don’t want the cliques. So I have all their names each year on a
popsicle stick. So a lot of times when, when we’re doing certain activities I’ll draw [names to create the groups]. … So we do that a lot. (Eve, Lines 305-311)

Eve works hard on controlling the exclusion of students in her classrooms. Having students excluded from spending time with their peers does not promote social inclusion.

**Supporting an Inclusive School Community**

The fifth category is supporting an inclusive school community. An inclusive school community is a community that welcomes everyone into the community. An inclusive community “does everything that it can to respect all its citizens, gives them full access to all resources, and promotes equal treatment and opportunity. It also works to eliminate all forms of discrimination” (Center for Community Health and Development at the University of Kansas, 2021, p. 1). The subcategory for supporting an inclusive school community is preserving the culture of inclusion.

**Preserving the culture of inclusion.** The subcategory of supporting an inclusive school community is preserving the culture of inclusion. The first property of preserving the culture of inclusion is intentionally maintaining inclusion. The dimension is intentionally maintaining inclusion to not intentionally maintaining inclusion. Miriam was the only participant who spoke about intentionally maintaining inclusion. She believed that the culture of inclusion was developed at her religious school before she became the director and she deliberately works to maintain it.

I think it’s understood that they’re [the students are] part of the family and this is what we do. I think the kids…we don’t have to formally teach it right? The kids just kind of naturally do it, and you know if they see [a child with a disability] sitting off on the side during recess, somebody’s going to go over there and invite
him to play. Like I … don’t have to think about it. The teachers are kind of watching out for it. But that’s just kind of what happens as you know … a lot of our kids are fun and quirky and they just feel comfortable here. And I’m not quite sure how that culture developed, but it is developed and [is] intentionally maintained. (Miriam, Lines 289-295)

The second property of the subcategory preserving the culture of inclusion is positive interactions between the students. The dimension is positive interactions between students to not having positive interactions between students. Tamar was the only participant who mentioned watching the positive interactions among the students at her religious school. When asked about successful interactions that happen among all of her students, Tamar noted that she has observed gestures of inclusion and acceptance between the students. Implicit in her answer is the desire to see those gestures maintained.

I would say the most successful interactions are happening outside of the classroom; are happening between classrooms… [I am watching them when I am] standing in the hallway when they’re moving between two different places, those really are my favorite experiences, not just for the reactions I get to have with them [the students], but what I see happening between our students. And the holding of the hands, or the encouraging, or the making sure that somebody is okay, or the student who goes to the back of the line to make, to sit, stand with somebody else and those kind of pieces. (Tamar, Lines 429-437)
Some of the participants observed a culture of inclusion within their Jewish supplementary schools that they want to maintain and preserve.

While it is not within the scope of this research paper, many of the directors and educators mentioned that their congregations offer youth group and summer day camp opportunities that they believed were very helpful towards meaningful social inclusion for students with disabilities with their same-age peers. Eve talked about summer camp.

There’s a very large camp at our synagogue. … I think it also helps with the socialization that you were asking about because these kids, if they have special needs, they’re going to camp too. So the kids get to know each other year round instead of just during the school year. (Eve, Lines 587-599)

Orli believed youth group is another good way to promote inclusion of students with disabilities with their same-age peers.

… youth group, I think is really a great way [to create inclusion] because there’s always adults who can facilitate the social [aspects], and who can kind of set up those experiences; especially for our kids, you know, … the ones that were formerly called … Asperger’s, right? Who, you know … they want to be there, but they don’t quite know how to inject themselves into that social environment. So, it’s really kind of helping and modeling it, or like being the one to say, ‘Hey, you know, Jake and Kate, why don’t you guys come over here? So we’re gonna work on this here. … why don’t you come over?’ And then you kind of gradually phase back and let those experiences happen. (Orli, Lines 456-464)
Youth group and camp staff can help students with disabilities create positive interactions and memories with their peers which could lead to positive relationships and possibly friendships.

The participants offered many different techniques and methods that they use to provide meaningful social inclusion for students with disabilities. Many of the participants also stated that day camps and youth groups that are run by their congregations also help students of all abilities spend time together, construct positive memories, and possibly create friendships.

**Question 2**

What educational, organizational, personnel, and congregational components do Jewish supplementary school directors and educators perceive as contributing to the meaningful inclusion of students with disabilities?

a. What educational components (e.g., teaching methods, activities, curricula, instructional materials, and field trips) do Jewish supplementary school directors and educators perceive as beneficial for including students with disabilities academically and socially with their same-age peers in Jewish supplementary schools?

b. What organizational components (e.g., decisions directors make that impact teachers and instruction, directors’ leadership style, and building accessibility) do Jewish supplementary school directors and educators perceive as supporting inclusion for students with disabilities in Jewish supplementary school programs with their same-age peers?
c. How do Jewish supplementary school directors and educators perceive the experiences of their personnel (e.g., beliefs, attitudes, training, teaching experience, experiences with school inclusion, and experiences with people who have disabilities not in a school setting) in supporting inclusion for students with disabilities in their programs with same-age peers?

d. What supports do Jewish supplementary school directors and educators perceive the congregation provides to the school for including students with disabilities in their programs with same-age peers?

Question 2 Part a: What educational components (e.g., teaching methods, activities, curricula, instructional materials and field trips) do Jewish supplementary school directors and educators perceive as beneficial for including students with disabilities academically and socially with their same-age peers in Jewish supplementary schools?

The first part of question two seeks to discover the educational components that Jewish supplementary school directors and educators perceived as assisting them in including students with disabilities meaningfully in their programs and classrooms. The participants answered this question using their experiences directing and/or teaching religious school as well as other experiences they have had in their lives. Grounded theory analysis which uses the constant comparison method during all levels of analysis (Corbin and Strauss, 1990) revealed four categories from the data. The first category, philosophy of inclusion, addressed some of the participants’ general beliefs about inclusion and practical teaching beliefs about inclusion. The second category, educational process, delineated how the different components used to create an
educational experience can promote inclusion. The third category, building an inclusive environment, focused on how an inclusive environment is created. The fourth category, building relationships, revealed the different types of relationships that promote inclusion in a Jewish supplementary school.

Table 9

_Educational Components Perceived as Beneficial for Including Students with Disabilities Academically and Socially with their Same-Age Peers in Jewish Supplementary Schools_

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### Philosophy of Inclusion

The first category is philosophy of inclusion. Philosophy of inclusion for Jewish supplementary school directors and educators “incorporates basic values and a belief system that promotes the participation, belonging and interaction” (Manitoba Education, n.d., p. 1) of students with disabilities in Jewish supplementary schools. The subcategory of philosophy of inclusion is beliefs about inclusion.

**Beliefs about inclusion.** The subcategory of philosophy of inclusion is beliefs about inclusion. The first property of beliefs about inclusion is general beliefs about inclusion with the dimension having general beliefs about inclusion to not having general beliefs about inclusion.
beliefs about inclusion. When asked what educational components they believed helped facilitate inclusion of students with disabilities with their same-age peers, four of the participants promoted their general philosophy of inclusion. Yael believed that transparency is important for inclusion. She stated:

I think something that helps inclusion is making it as transparent as possible. Which is, like if the child needs an assist, you just don’t make a big deal out of it. It is just something that you provide; you don’t point it out, or you make it available to all the kids. So it’s not one child being treated in a different way.

(Yael, Lines 999-1002)

Orli’s philosophy of inclusion is “a belief that all students can learn” (Orli, Line 879). Caleb believed that all students should be treated the same and seen for who they are. “Just treat everybody as … one unit; no matter their…whatever. … you see them and who they are and not by their physical appearance (Caleb, lines 604-605). Tamar’s philosophy was that inclusion needed to be a way of life for religious school. She stated:

…when inclusion is not a program but a way of practice,…a normative piece of all you do, it does not need to be promoted. It just … IS. How this is done is through truly normalizing it. From training of faculty, to making it part of all we do…pervasive in everything…a constant. This is how it needs to be done. It isn’t something we do…it is who we are. (Tamar, lines 1268-1272)

Some of the participants believed that the best way to facilitate inclusion of students with disabilities is to have a guiding philosophy of inclusion that helps directors and educators visualize an inclusive school and classroom.
The second property of beliefs about inclusion is applied teaching beliefs about inclusion with the dimension having applied teaching beliefs about inclusion to not having applied teaching beliefs about inclusion. When asked what educational components they believed helped facilitate inclusion of students with disabilities with their same-age peers, two of the participants gave examples of applied teaching beliefs of inclusion and how they could work in their schools or classes. Yael spoke about educating students about differences among people as a random occurrence that is one component of a person. She stated:

But on the other side of that spectrum, it is making them [the students] aware that we all have commonalities and we all have differences, and most of it is very random. If you have, like my friend, [she has] [a specific disability]; she didn’t pick that card. And you know, it could be me, it could be you, and so we just need [to] understand that it is just one element of a person’s personality. So doing that, you know, intentional education; not calling the child out, but educating the group. Which hopefully, they will take forward with them. (Yael, Lines 1002-1007)

Naomi talked about erasing judgements of students and finding a way to highlight each student’s strengths in religious school.

I think it’s the fact that you have varied types of activities happening in the classroom. So, whereas this may be really hard for you, … that kid was able to do it much easier. … I like to wipe away the judgments …. What are those preconceived notions of… the idea of … if the teacher is able to, … look at every child and say, ‘Okay, this kid would really excel doing this, that, or the other.’
want to … make sure I figure out how to bring that into the classroom at … some place to showcase every child in there. (Naomi, Lines 963-970)

A few of the participants believed the best way to create an inclusive environment at religious school is to have applied teaching beliefs about inclusion that could be utilized in the programs and classrooms.

**Educational Process**

The second category is educational process. For this study, the term educational process is the way of providing education to students “such that they understand the information, are able to use or apply it, and retain what they have learned” (Kurtus, 2012, p. 1). The four subcategories of educational process are curriculum that promotes inclusion, instructional materials that encourage inclusion, human resources that support inclusion, and teaching methods that enhance inclusion.

**Curriculum that promotes inclusion.** The first subcategory of educational process is curriculum that promotes inclusion. The first property of curriculum that promotes inclusion is flexibility in curriculum design with the dimension of flexibility in curriculum design to no flexibility in curriculum design. Three of the participants stated that flexibility in curriculum design was a way that they could include students with disabilities because when they write the lesson plans, they can tailor it to the students in their class. Miriam stated:

Offering flexibility… A lot of times when I … give a teacher a curriculum, sometimes it’s a set of goals and they could figure out … how they want to get there based on their students. Sometimes … I’ll give them a more formal curriculum, but I’ll say, ‘That this is done as a writing activity, but feel free to do
it as a discussion or a round robin, like small group discussion … turn it into [a] movement activity’ and giving them that freedom. I think it also goes a long way. The teacher and I do it [write the curriculum] together. … sometimes the teacher will come to me with an idea, but they’re not sure how to teach it, and I’ll find some resources, right? And there’s a lot of great Jewish curriculum out there. Or … we’ll kind of develop it together. Um, sometimes the teacher and I will come up with a topic together and they’ll run with it from there, and they’ll write each lesson plan. (Miriam, Lines 368-379)

Caleb noted, “So we’re very fortunate for our director that she actually doesn’t force any curriculum; she’s just giving us what our goals for the … session [are] to be. And we build our own curriculum based on our students” (Caleb, 265-267). Hannah also believed that constructing a curriculum in a way that gives a great deal of freedom to her teachers allows them to enhance inclusion of students with disabilities.

“So one of the ways that … allows me to empower the teachers to create more inclusive classrooms…I have a very strong sense of what is supposed to be going on and what their options are for how they present the material, and how they engage in the … curriculum. Also, I give a lot of freedom to the teachers to create whatever they feel is going to work best for their learners. (Hannah, lines 769-773)

A few of the participants believed that by allowing teachers the flexibility to create their own curriculum based on the director’s objectives and goals, teachers are able to create more inclusive classrooms as they know what will work best for their students.
The second property of curriculum that promotes inclusion is flexibility in curriculum execution. The dimension is flexibility in curriculum execution to no flexibility in curriculum execution. Two of the participants believed that giving the educators the ability to be flexible with how they implement the curriculum contributes to a more inclusive classroom. Tamar noted:

And we have for each curriculum, each grade has a Judaic topic that they are covering for the year. So there is an overall focus for the year as well. So that’s really … important. But how they teach it, and the methodology, and the support systems they use, those are up to the teacher. (Tamar, Lines 561-564)

Hannah brought up the fact that sometimes a curriculum will not work with a class. She believed it is important to allow for mistakes, and in the process the class is creating a culture of failing forward. She stated:

[A] flexible curriculum allows for opportunities to be creative around inclusion because the teachers get to know the kids and they build relationships. So they know [their students]. And allowing there to be mistakes and creating a culture of like failing forward and learning that, ‘Okay, like I really thought that this class was gonna love watching this movie. And they were like, they couldn’t handle it,’ or like ‘Ten minutes in, it broke down,’ right? So allowing…so I do, I just in the language that I use with my teachers and with my students is I always try to say like, “Sometimes we try and things and they don’t work, and we can learn from it. And that’s okay.” (Hannah Lines 780-787)

Two of the participants believed that allowing their educators the freedom to decide how to teach their students enables educators the ability to tailor the teaching methods for the
students in their classes. Hannah also noted that sometimes an activity or lesson plan will not work for the students and that allows teachers to normalize mistakes and create a culture of failing forward.

The third property of curriculum that promotes inclusion is instructional activities that promote inclusion. The dimension is activities that promote inclusion to activities that do not promote inclusion. A few of the participants noted that they have many types of activities that the classes either go to or the activity comes to their classroom that help promote inclusion as every student can get involved in the activity because it is active learning. Although not all religious schools have all these activities, participants have mentioned that the classes can take part in: art, music, [learning about] Israel, cooking, library, drama and gardening in an outdoor garden. Eve believed that the activities “…are all beneficial…our kids get to do a lot of different activities. The idea is that they’re not in the Sunday school classroom all day” (Eve, Lines 420-421). Hannah noted:

But those different things that happen outside the classroom, where the kids get to … do different kinds of learning and get a break from their regular curriculum. Those … opportunities in terms of kinds of instruction are really helpful too, because they’re just different, and they take the kids out of their setting that they’re used to. (Hannah, lines 824-828).

Tamar said that the curriculum for these active learning activities are linked to what the class is learning in the classroom. Tamar stated, “And there is a relationship between what they’re doing in that [the active learning activity] and their overall curriculum,” (Tamar, Lines 604-605).
Participants also mentioned different types of instructional activities which support the curriculum that were beneficial to inclusion of students with disabilities in their classes with same-age peers. Some participants used some form of project based learning where the final product was a project that the students worked on in small groups. Some of the religious schools then present the projects to their peers and families during a ‘showcase’. Penina stated that working in small groups helps to build social interactions and expands students’ ability to work with others. She stated that sometimes she gives specific directions for the small group members.

Sometimes it’s about giving students a role in the groups; assigning roles always helps with that. ‘So this is my expectation from you, this is your expectation.’

And so that helps when the kid knows ‘this is my job.’ (Penina, Lines 341-343)

Having a choice in what they do was also mentioned. “If we’re doing a project and they have the choice to either draw something, write something, sing about something, act something out; that we found the most success with” (Miriam, Lines 366-368). Students could also choose to complete projects or assignments using poster board, Power Point, or create a video. Two participants stated that students liked technology-based projects. Penina noted, “I think that [technology- based projects] brings kids with disabilities in because … we’ve got some kids that are super good with computers and … may not be with the [Hebrew] reading” (Penina, Lines 350-352). Orli stated that having specialty days, like Israel day was an inclusive activity.

Things where you are … putting people on … their teams … where there’s like friendly competition. The … the Aleph-Bet wars [Aleph-Bet is the alphabet] kind
of thing, … but to make sure that there’s something for everyone to be able to do so that no one is sitting on the sidelines. (Orli, Lines 533-537)

Also mentioned were having different stations where the students are moving from station to station to complete the learning. Hannah stated that it is important to construct the school day more intentionally; to not spend more than 30 minutes on an activity, and to break large activities into smaller chunks of time. She noted:

…just how you set up your classroom and how you use the time, all of those things are very connected to the success of your classroom and what your … students feel comfortable with and inclusion. I think … all of those strings are sort of tied together. (Hannah, Lines 763-766)

Some of the participants said they believed using all parts inside the building and the congregation’s grounds helps promote inclusion of students with disabilities with their same-age peers. Hannah stated:

So I really encourage the teachers who feel comfortable to explore that [the different parts of the building] and to use that. So if they notice, like a particular space is very calming for a child or they want to do a really quiet activity or something that’s a little more like spiritual, like, I’ll say, ‘Take them up to the sanctuary or go to our chapel.’ Or…they’re doing some kind of learning where like walking around might be a good way for the kids to internalize the information, I’ll be like, ‘Go outside.’” Like, we’re so lucky have that. (Hannah, Lines 829-835)

All of the participants described many different types of instructional activities that can promote inclusion of students with disabilities in their classes with same-age peers.
Instructional materials that encourage inclusion. The second subcategory for educational process is instructional materials that encourage inclusion. The property is utilizing instructional materials for students of all abilities and preferences. The dimension is using instructional materials matched to students’ abilities and preferences to not using instructional materials matched to students’ abilities and preferences. Instructional materials are resources that the teacher uses to help students learn. Almost every participant had information to offer about what types of instructional materials they found helpful in creating an inclusive classroom. Yael noted that instructional materials are important. She went on to say, “I mean, it would be a beautiful world if we could all be more in a Montessori model and … kind of follow the students’ intellectual queries, but we have limited time. And instructional materials help to frame the experience” (Yael, Lines 412-414). Most of the participants stated that they did not use textbooks or workbooks as their only instructional materials, with many of them only using textbooks and workbooks for reference material. Miriam stated:

We’re not really a textbook, workbook kind of school, and if anything we have, like, I might buy a textbook for the teacher to use as a resource. And the kids never know that it exists. But that is where the content comes from. (Miriam, Lines 382-384).

Although they don’t use textbooks or workbooks, Tamar noted that for students who do best with visual support, the students can use an I-pad, or educators can print out a document, and share websites and videos. Hannah stated that they use hands-on interactive activities.
We do a lot of play and a lot of … interactive activities, so creating board games, or Jeopardy games, trivia, so things that are like kind of hands on and play-based materials. And we have lots of different games and materials that can be applied to different topics or different styles of learning. (Hannah, Lines 804-807)

Miriam explained “I tend to make more kits, so we have like an escape room kit…and Lego kit, and, you know, the teachers can kind of work in whatever theme that they’re doing” (Miriam, Lines 384-388). By using games, board games and kits students can usually find something they enjoy and that matches their ability and learning style. Games or kits that use pairs or teams can also help foster inclusion for students with disabilities by encouraging cooperation, conversation, and team building. For students who enjoy technology, some religious schools have I-pads or laptops that students or educators can check out for the class period. Some students enjoyed writing or drawing their answers on mini white boards. Some of the participants stated that they use a schedule on the board to help everyone know what activity is coming next which is helpful for students of all abilities.

There are many types of instructional materials that directors and educators can use that encourage inclusion of students of all abilities to work together, have conversations, create positive social interactions and fond memories with each other.

**Human resources that support inclusion.** The third subcategory of educational process is human resources that support inclusion. The property of human resources that support inclusion is supplying teachers with appropriate personnel to enhance inclusion. The dimension is having appropriate personnel to enhance inclusion to not having appropriate personnel to enhance inclusion. Three of the participants mentioned that one
of the ways they are able to have successful inclusive classrooms is because they have extra personnel either in the classroom full time or have an inclusion coordinator to talk with about issues that have already appeared or may appear in the future with some of their students. Judith stated:

So, for me, it’s having … enough help in my classroom that even if somebody needs a little extra attention, there’s enough. I don’t say adults. But like, myself, or like the high school madrichim, there are enough of us in there, that it doesn’t look … any different than me going to help any other student in the class. So, if it was just me it would look very different. But having the enough help; that has been the biggest facilitator in allowing classroom activities to be accessible for everybody. (Judith, Lines 670-675)

Tamar also believed that it is important to give educators as much support as they need so that they will be successful creating inclusive classrooms. She said:

… give them as much support as they need; as much information as they can possibly…there are no secrets. Don’t forget to tell them something. Offer them support, offer them a madricha, offer them an inclusion person to walk into… be there with them. All those different things, and then hope that they use that as well. (Tamar, Lines 509-512)

Having enough staff members in every classroom and having someone to talk with about difficult situations that may arise or have already occurred is a way to support inclusion.

**Teaching methods that enhance inclusion.** The fourth subcategory of educational process is teaching methods that enhance inclusion. The property of teaching methods that enhance inclusion is using multiple teaching modalities to enhance
inclusion. The dimension is using multiple modalities for teaching to using one modality for teaching. The participants were asked about which teaching methods they believed were beneficial for including students with disabilities academically and socially with their same-age peers in their supplementary school programs or classes. A few of the participants stated that they try not to use frontal teaching in a group lecture format as their only teaching method. A few never use frontal teaching “I don’t do that” (Penina, line 355). Deborah, who taught very young students stated that she switches teaching methods often from free play and hands-on learning to more structured methods like circle time. “We just switch everything like every 15 minutes, pretty much” (Deborah, Line 333). Abigail’s religious school used circle time, discussions, active learning where all students were engaged in the learning process, and differentiated instruction. Many of the religious schools used differentiated instruction as a teaching method for their students, although directors but not educators commented on differentiated instruction. Differentiated instruction is “instruction that helps students with diverse academic needs and learning styles master the same challenging academic content” (Dixon & Zannu, n.d., p. 3). This is accomplished by “providing interrelated activities that are based on student needs for the purpose of ensuring that all students come to a similar grasp of a skill or idea” (Dixon & Zannu, n.d., p.3). Hannah believed differentiated instruction was important. “I think just overall the general approach of differentiated instruction is really important. And we’ve broken that down for our teachers in their training (Hannah, Lines 739-740). Miriam believed it was essential for her teachers to know “how to individualize while also keeping the community” (Miriam, Lines 352-353). Caleb adjusted his teaching method to the students. “really it is just student based; it’s whatever
the student needs. So if there’s learning disabilities, you work with it. If there’s physical
disability, you work with it” (Caleb, Lines 272-273). Miriam encouraged her teachers to
have a good balance between flexibility and classroom management.

…letting teachers know it’s okay to be more flexible one day if you need
[to]…And sometimes it’s okay to be more rigid and set up the routine that’s going
to serve the class. Kind of helping them develop a sense of when to do which.
(Miriam, Lines 341-343)

Hannah liked to use experiential best practices gathered from Jewish summer camps and
youth group activities.

So, I think that making the learning interactive and hands on and experiential…
and really learning kind of the best practices from … summer camps and youth
groups. And for many of my teachers and for myself, that’s our background. So
we really try to integrate that. (Hannah, Lines 271-274)

Tamar believed it is important for educators to be comfortable with their teaching
methods. “I asked my teachers to teach in a way that is comfortable for them” (Tamar,
Lines 487-488). Because of this philosophy, she believed if there was more than one
teacher per grade, there would be more than one style of teaching occurring in each
grade. “And then you could put the kids with the right teacher that works for them,
right?” (Tamar, Lines 490-491). Sarah believed in using multiple modes of teaching.

I really tried to encourage my teachers to use different modes of education,
different modes of teaching; anything that they want to do. I’m very typically
like, ‘Yeah, try and see what happens’ because if at least one student benefits
from it then it was great” (Sarah, Lines 271-274).
Hannah liked her educators to vary their teaching strategies and options to try to circumvent inappropriate behaviors from students in the classroom.

…they’ll [teachers] come and ask me a question about like, ‘…the kids just aren’t listening to me.’ or ‘They’re so rude’, or … [I] like to think about, … what does that look like? And what is happening in the classroom when those behaviors are coming up? And how can we solve it by, you know, if everybody needs to read a line for a prayer or every child needs to share something they learned about the holiday or something, … Providing different strategies and options; or at least looking at different learning modalities and making sure you’re varying that throughout the day. Those are all things that I expect as … a baseline in our educational setting. And if I don’t see that, I do a lot of feedback to stress that and to implement that in the classroom… (Hannah, Lines 745-753)

Tamar strongly encouraged her educators to teach each lesson in four different modalities.

So I will say that they may not all be happening at the same time, but the same lesson has to include them all. So sometimes they’re all happening at the same time, and sometimes there’s two happening or sometimes we teach the same thing four different ways within a half an hour time period, to make sure they have all those different experiences. (Tamar, Lines 547-552)

Almost all of the participants in the study talked about the teaching methods they use and most of them stated that they try to use more than one teaching method during the course of the religious school day.
Building an Inclusive Environment

The third category is building an inclusive environment. An inclusive environment is “where all students feel supported intellectually and academically, and are extended a sense of belonging in the classroom regardless of identity, learning preference, or education” (Yale University, 2017, p. 1) along with full class participation and access to the curriculum. The subcategories for building an inclusive environment are creating an inclusive climate, staff exhibits inclusion, and students create an inclusive environment.

Creating an inclusive climate. The first subcategory of building an inclusive environment is creating an inclusive climate. The first property of creating an inclusive climate is having a community effort for inclusion. The dimension is having a community effort for inclusion to not having a community effort for inclusion. Orli was the only participant who noted that everyone has a responsibility for creating an inclusive climate in Jewish supplementary schools. Orli stated, “…the overarching is, I think it’s a community effort, right? That … everyone has a responsibility for making it an inclusive environment”. (Orli, Lines 502-504).

The second property for the subcategory creating an inclusive climate is building a culture of inclusion. The dimension is building a culture of inclusion to not building a culture of inclusion. Some of the participants in the study noted that it was important to create a culture of inclusion at Jewish supplementary schools. Eve believed being accepting of everyone is part of creating a culture of inclusion. She was not sure if the culture of inclusion in her supplementary school was created in secular school and then carried over into religious school or if the culture was created within the religious school.
You know, I’m not sure … I think it’s like a chicken and egg thing. I don’t know if … our kids became more accepting because they saw this in regular school, or because we were doing it and then it was. I think it was just a culture that was evolving, in probably both places at the same time. They just, they’re used to it.

(Eve, Lines 951-954)

Hannah stated that her idea of a culture of inclusion in Jewish supplementary school includes a curriculum and teaching methods that enable all students to participate and access the material.

… a teacher might try something that most of the kids are able to do, but not all of them. And that doesn’t really meet our standard of inclusion if every child isn’t engaged in some way or doesn’t have a way to access the material. That’s not it; that’s not an inclusive classroom. So I think that [the] culture that we create, and that approach to curriculum allows us to be as inclusive as we are. I think it’s really important.

(Hannah, Lines 787-792)

Creating a culture of inclusion can be accomplished socially through accepting everyone as they are as well as academically through full class participation and access to curriculum.

**Staff exhibits inclusion.** The second subcategory of building an inclusive environment is staff exhibits inclusion. The first property of the subcategory staff exhibits inclusion is having inclusive staff members. The dimension is having inclusive staff members to not having inclusive staff members. One way to promote inclusion of students with disabilities is to model inclusion by having an inclusive staff. Although
none of the participants noted that there were staff members with disabilities working in their religious schools, Hannah and Orli did say that they had staff members who taught at their schools who were members of other Jewish denominations or were Israeli. Orli described her religious school staff as coming from different Judaic backgrounds.

[I want] to provide the same spirit of inclusivity of our teaching staff, as we do of our kids. So we have teachers that are everything … from Orthodox women who … their practice of Judaism is very different and they cover their hair, to the secular Israeli … who teaches about … Israel in a fun camp counselor sort of way. We have age wise, my oldest teacher, he has since passed, but Mr. [teacher’s name] was 92 years old. And he did Hebrew tutoring. And our youngest is … the freshman in college. So we have the [gamut]. … I think that … while we’re not looking at disabilities, that that demonstrates an inclusion that everyone has a place here. And it’s important for all of our kids to see all the different ways that Jews look and do Jewish. (Orli, lines 607-617)

The second property of the subcategory staff exhibits inclusion is teachers create inclusive classrooms. The dimension is teachers create inclusive classrooms to teachers do not create inclusive classrooms. More than half of the participants spoke about different ways an educator can create an inclusive classroom. Eve stated that when teachers are trained to understand inclusion they will be more tolerant of some of the behaviors students with disabilities may exhibit. “I think because our teachers are trained to understand inclusion things and different behaviors, they’re going to be more tolerant” (Eve, Lines 967-968). Deborah believed that inclusion begins with the teacher. “I think promoting inclusion in any Jewish supplementary school starts with the teacher. It is
really up to the teacher to figure out the best way to include each student, including those with disabilities” (Deborah, Lines 1090-1092). Orli explained that the teacher controls the classroom and so is responsible for inclusion of students with disabilities in their classes. “So the teacher, in the way that he or she runs his or her classroom; in the teaching methods, in the differentiated instruction, in the meeting each child where they’re at. So that would be from the teaching standpoint” (Orli, Lines 504-506). Yael noted that teachers create the classroom community and learning environment and that can be difficult.

I think the instruction that comes from teachers is the baseline for inclusion because it’s the teacher that’s creating each individual’s classroom’s community and learning environment. So you need a teacher that knows his or her students, and is able to listen and connect with them, um, which …it can be challenging. And some of my younger teachers struggle with that or they feel defensive if the student is being rude. I keep telling them it’s not personal. So the environment the teacher creates… (Yael, Lines 404-411).

Sarah believed that it is important to have teachers who are good role models when it comes to including students with disabilities.

I think the leadership and coming from the top and from their teachers; that’s it. I think it’s so important especially … when you get into those fourth, fifth, sixth seventh, grade years; kids are just not as nice. I don’t want to say ‘bratty’ because that’s rude but, you know, they’re … just a little…have a little attitudes. And I think if the teachers… [if the students] see … that they’re being inclusive to the
students, that they’ll do the same. So I think just having good role models is really important for them. (Sarah, lines 696-701)

Teachers have the ability to create an inclusive environment through having an inclusive staff, creating an inclusive community in the classroom, teaching in an inclusive manner, and being a good role model for inclusion.

**Students create inclusive environment.** The third subcategory of building an inclusive environment is students create an inclusive environment. The property for students create an inclusive environment is students create academic and social opportunities. The dimension is students create academic and social opportunities to students do not create academic and social opportunities. Peers can create academic and social opportunities for students with disabilities and can also serve as role models for appropriate behaviors for each of those activities. Orli was the only participant that stated that students should also contribute to inclusive schools and classrooms. “From the students, I think, creating social opportunities, well, creating both academic and social opportunities for them to interact, right? … also with guidance and help in good modeling of social behaviors” (Orli, Lines 506-508).

Everyone can be a part of building an inclusive environment at Jewish supplementary schools.

**Building Relationships**

The fourth category is building relationships. It encompasses all the different ways participants believed that relationships are created in both the religious school classroom as well as within the religious school. The subcategories for building
relationships are positive classroom relationships, non-peer relationships, and using special events to build relationships.

**Positive classroom relationships.** The first subcategory for building relationships is positive classroom relationships. The property for positive classroom relationships is creating a community. The dimension is creating a community to not creating a community. More than half of the participants spoke about different ways to create positive classroom relationships among all the classroom members. Two of the directors stated that they use the Responsive Classroom approach to teaching. Hannah stated:

…one of the biggest teaching methods that I train my teachers in year after year, and I reinforce it until they’re sick of it is Responsive Classroom. … I learned about that in my educational training, and I think it translates particularly well to religious school/supplementary school settings. I think there’s a lot for us to learn from it. And I think it has a number of strategies within it that … facilitate inclusion. Like having a morning meeting every day; having a time when everyone gets to have their voice heard, and to share … to give that kid who maybe needs… Like no one’s going to ask them about their day; or maybe they haven’t been able to share a highlight of their week. Like creating a space consistently in the routine where that exists for them. It’s great. (Hannah, Lines 716-724)

When asked to define Responsive Classroom, Hannah explained:

At least the way that I explain it to people is that, I mean, this isn’t maybe not the technical definition, but I explain it that that the students have buy-in and
opportunities to help shape their classroom experience and that it’s responsive, and that … the students and teachers are all partners in creating the educational experience. (Hannah, Lines 733-736)

Naomi also believed the most important educational component used by her Jewish supplementary school to promote inclusion is the Responsive Classroom approach to teaching. She noted:

But for us, I think it’s still the morning meeting piece of it [Responsive Classroom]. I think … the Responsive Classroom methodology is kind of what I think drives everything that we do. Like even our youth group activities, especially now because we’re online. I’ve asked my assistant director… every youth group activity starts now with a greeting and an activity. And it like, I don’t know if you know this, but … I have her follow the protocol that normally would be in the classroom because I was like, ‘If you can’t, [if] we can’t build that safe space that everyone wants to come and just have fun and not worry about how they’re perceived, it doesn’t work. (Naomi, Lines 524-531)

Naomi continued by stating “I mean, I think it’s really about the sharing and getting to know each other during the morning meeting” (Naomi, Lines 962-963). Penina talked about using some of the time in the classroom to have informal conversations where everyone can get to know each other.

I think that … those kind of informal conversations; is just like … ‘We’re about to have a vacation for a week … where are you going?’, ‘Has anybody ever been [to ____]? I do those, sometimes there’s four corners [a participation game] or … when they’re in the beginning [of the school year], ‘I have four siblings in …
[my family], or I have less than [four siblings in my family]’, or ‘My favorite
subject is … those kind of activities that are more about who’s who [and we] get
to know each other. The one they really like, is the beginning of the year, first
day. … even if my kids [students] really know each other, I’m like, ‘You have to
come up with something that nobody in this room knows about you; something
that you’ve done, something that you like, something that you’ve never told
anybody in the room. And I want [you] to write it on a piece of paper, put your
name on it, crumple it up.’ And every class I pull one or two of these out, and
they’ll be like, ‘… I skydive’ or whatever. And then we all look around and try
to guess who it is. And then … eventually, [we say] ‘Okay, tell us about this;
how did you do that?’ you know. So it’s a fun fact like that. (Penina, Lines
739-752)

Caleb believed that having students form a community for an activity is an educational
component that is beneficial for including students with disabilities. “a lot of common
areas; like when they’re coming to prayer together, or they’re coming to say the morning
blessings, or anything that involves most of the community together. I believe that that
helps a lot” (Caleb, lines 251-253). Deborah teaches very young children and she
encourages her students to interact with each other during free play time, and during
circle time to have every child contribute to the classroom conversation. She stated:

[My] aim is to encourage all kids in my class to interact. During a ‘free play’
time, when that is not happening, I often ask a child who is engaged in an activity
to invite another to join in. During a more structured time [like circle time], I will
make sure I am asking questions that can be answered by all the kids or even ask
questions specifically tailored to each student. The idea is for every child to be able to contribute. Even with a non-verbal child, this is possible. For instance, a few years ago, a student in my class was non-verbal. He had a device that helped him to communicate. And with training from a parent, I was able to better bring him into the group conversation. I also think it is important to vary the activities so that there are many chances for each child to succeed and enjoy. (Deborah, Lines 1097-1105).

Hannah believed it was important for class members to check in with each other and share what was going on in their lives as part of their spiritual education.

Like we really try to use different techniques in the classroom that focus on making sure there’s some downtime; to just check in with each other, and allow people to share what’s going on in their lives, and to create spaces where those conversations happen. Because I think that’s part of Spiritual Education. And … synagogues can do that; a lot of public schools or secular schools can’t do or don’t do, or choose not to do. And I think that’s what makes us different. And that’s part of what we try to do to make it not feel like school for our learners. And that’s really… I think, that that makes a difference for a lot of our kids. (Hannah, Lines 234-241)

Many of the participants in this study believe that building positive relationships in the classroom is a way to promote inclusion of students with disabilities and their same-age peers.

**Non-peer relationships.** The second subcategory of building relationships is non-peer relationships. Non-peer relationships for this study are defined as relationships
between two people in the religious school community who are not same-age peers. The first property of non-peer relationships is positive student-teacher relationships. The dimension for positive student-teacher relationships is having positive student-teacher relationships to not having positive student-teacher relationships. Only Hannah mentioned how her teachers create positive relationships with their students, especially when they are struggling. She talked about what her teachers do when students are struggling from a disability, or needs, or challenges, and how compassion from the teachers, building trust between students and teachers, and creating positive relationships is beneficial for students.

We just always … try to just like take a step back and say; ‘What do you need? What’s going on? How can we help?’ Or ‘Do you just need a break?’ … ‘What can we do?’ … and to provide a lot of compassion and support and build those relationships and build the trust. And I think our students really benefit from that, even though it [attending religious school] might not be their favorite place to go, or they might struggle sometimes. I think they know that we’re going to have their backs and that when they push, we’re not going to push too. (Hannah, Lines. 244-249)

Having a positive relationship with a teacher is beneficial for all students including students with disabilities. Since the educator sets the tone in the classroom, if the educator accepts all students in the classroom, the other students will accept all of their peers too.

The second property of non-peer relationships is positive student-mentor relationships. The dimension is having positive student-mentor relationships to not
having positive student-mentor relationships. Another type of non-peer relationship is a mentor relationship which usually involves an older student as a mentor and a younger student as a mentee. Deborah was the only participant who stated that one year her religious school had a mentor program where older students would come and spend time with younger students. She said it worked out well with the students in her class. Deborah noted, “Let’s have big and little friends, so that there was somebody who was older in the … Sunday school who was kind of like your mentor type of thing. And I thought that was, it was really nice. But we only did it one year” (Deborah, Lines 666-669). Having a mentor at religious school can contribute to inclusion of students with disabilities. When students without disabilities see that a ‘cool older student’ is accepting of a student with a disability the students who do not have disabilities may adopt that same attitude.

**Using special events to build relationships.** The third subcategory of building relationships is using special events to build relationships. For this study, the special events are:

Havdalah overnights [Havdalah is the ceremony that ends the Sabbath on Saturday night; symbolizing the end of the Sabbath and the beginning of the secular week. All holidays begin and end in the evening when three stars are seen in the night sky], Shabbat [Sabbath] overnights, retreats, and field trips where most of the interactions occur either away from the synagogue or if they are at the synagogue, they are not in the religious school classroom, often take place in another area of the building, and occur at a different time than religious school. The property of using special events to build relationships is building relationships outside of religious school. The dimension is building
relationships outside of religious school to not building relationships outside of religious school. Religious school special events are: Havdalah overnights, Shabbatons [Sabbath overnights], retreats, and field trips. During Havdalah overnights, students and educators come for the Havdalah service and dinner on Saturday night, do programming during the night, sleep at the synagogue, wake up on Sunday morning, have breakfast, do a volunteer project in the community, and are picked up around noon. They are for students in middle grade school to middle school. Shabbatons [Sabbath overnights] often occur for students in middle to upper grade school and occur from Friday night to Saturday morning. Students and educators can have dinner at the synagogue, participate in a Friday night prayer service, participate in an evening activity, sleep over, have breakfast, and participate in a Saturday morning prayer activity. They are picked up after services, around noon. Havdalah and Shabbat overnights give peers a chance to interact with each other in a different type of environment; during meals, activities, and prayer services. Retreats can take different forms. Tamar described a retreat this way:

Retreat[s] are an opportunity for religious school students to be a part of a community outside the usual constructs of a religious school program. Often they occur outside of the congregation at a retreat center, though sometimes they remain at the … [congregation]. They often include food, programming, davening [praying], and social activities. Many times they are for a full weekend, though sometimes they occur over Shabbat [Sabbath] or from Havdalah [Saturday evening service] through Sunday morning. (Tamar, Lines 1308-1312)
Three of the participants commented on using special events to build relationships. Eve believed that Shabbat overnights give students another opportunity to make friendships in an environment that is different from religious school. She stated:

Third, fourth, and fifth grade do a Shabbat overnight. So that’s not so much a field trip, but it’s a different way to experience the temple and the kids. Certainly that’s an opportunity for some of them to make friendships they might not have made before. When you’re doing the sleep over and eating popcorn and watching movies and running around the building at night. (Eve, Lines 449-452)

Eve believed Shabbat overnights encourage interactions among students of all abilities. It can be an opportunity for them to create fun memories together and perhaps begin friendships. Orli believed that religious school retreats promote inclusion of students with disabilities with their same-age peers. She noted that retreats may be the first time that students with disabilities have an opportunity to spend the night away from home in a safe and well supervised environment.

…opportunities like … religious school retreats, that oftentimes this is like the first time that many of these kids [students with disabilities] have had the opportunity to do these sorts of things in a very safe environment. And so I think … having not only … enough staff and adults, but the right staff and adults. (Orli, lines 509-512).

Hannah also believed that retreats help students with disabilities create friendships. When talking about a student with disabilities whose parents opted to not send him on the retreat, she said:
…he would have had a great time. And it would have actually helped with his ability to be socially integrated and to find some of those friendships, but he eventually did find kids that he connected with in the class, like friends, but it took so long. And [I] think that if he had gone on our retreat, it would have been very different. Because I think those travel and field trip experiences create a different level of bonding. (Hannah, lines 852-857)

Half of the study participants had varying opinions when asked if they believed field trips promote inclusion of students with disabilities with their same-age peers. Judith and Penina stated that the classes they taught did not take field trips, although Penina noted that the students took field trips as part of their youth group activities. Abigail and Hannah stated that field trips can be an obstacle to inclusion of students with disabilities with their same-age peers. Abigail noted:

I think they have the potential to be obstacles, because sometimes, especially with physical disabilities … doing the traveling and getting in and out of cars. And there are some kids … who don’t need one-on-one assistance in a classroom, but do if you’re traveling somewhere. … So I would actually see a field trip is more of an obstacle to inclusion than a positive. (Abigail, Lines 414-419)

Hannah stated that for the most part field trips do promote inclusion, but sometimes they “ended up being problematic because of the different needs of the kids” (Hannah, Line 845). Hannah said that a field trip environment triggered a strong negative reaction in a student and neither the staff nor the parents could have anticipated that the environment would cause that reaction. Miriam stated that she just tries to “think through what each student might need, right? Sometimes the students with disabilities are the easiest ones
Sarah and Yael stated that field trips promote inclusion of students with disabilities with their same-age peers. Sarah noted:

Something like a field trip might, might help a student feel included and be able to talk about a topic that they might not have been able to if they’re just listening to a teacher talk or doing a project or watching a video. (Sarah, Lines 268-271)

Yael explained why she believed field trips promote inclusion:

But I think field trips are important for inclusion because they also can give students an opportunity to display talents that they wouldn’t show in the classroom. Like, for example, students who are on the spectrum often get fixated on a subject; dinosaurs, air planes. So imagine if we go to the zoo, and there’a student who’s fixated on animals and really can shine. I mean that would be a coincidence as opposed to intentional, but you wouldn’t know unless you provided that opportunity. (Yael, Lines 417-422)

The participants also had different ideas of whether parents of students with disabilities should go on field trips. Abigail has asked parents of students with disabilities to go on field trips. “…last year when I had a kid with some real special needs in there, I asked [the student’s] parents to drive on each of the field trips so that she had a parent with her for those and they did” (Abigail, Lines 404-405). Tamar had a different philosophy about having the parents of students with disabilities drive their children to field trips.

And we work really, really, really, hard not to have parents go on field trips unless it’s a ‘all parents are going’ on field trips. I do not let or support a child with special needs having their parent go because then it’s a ‘Why [did] their parent
go?’ So unless it’s a ‘parents are also going’ we do not bring parents on field trips. (Tamar, lines 624-627)

Orli viewed field trips as an opportunity to create a community by having students and their families interacting during the field trips. It is possible that those interactions may encourage families to get together outside of religious school and create friendships. I think that field trips…any of those sort of things…like field trips are nice because you have the parents that drive right? So you’re getting families to interact. So that’s also really helpful too, because then it’s not just about the typical student and the student with disabilities, but you’re bringing community together. So I think that there’s probably no limit to what are the best ways [to promote inclusion]. I think it’s when you … look at everything through the lens of how can … whatever we’re doing, be more inclusive. (Orli, lines 516-521)

Participants believed there were many ways to build relationships within the religious school community by creating relationships for students with disabilities with same-age peers, teachers, and mentors. They noted that it is also possible to build relationships with the religious school community while participating in special events both at the congregation and in other places. While most participants believed that Havdalah overnights, Shabbat overnights, and retreats offer another way for students of all abilities to develop friendships, there were different opinions as to whether field trips promote or hinder inclusion of students with disabilities and their same-age peers and whether parents should attend field trips. One participant, Orli, suggested that it is also important
to have the students’ families connect to create a community outside of the religious school, and that could happen during field trips.

**Question 2 Part b:** What organizational components (e.g., the decisions directors make that impact teachers and instruction, directors’ leadership style, and building accessibility) do Jewish supplementary school directors and educators perceive as supporting inclusion for students with disabilities in Jewish supplementary school programs with their same-age peers?

This question sought to uncover the organizational components that Jewish supplementary school directors and educators perceived as promoting inclusion of students with disabilities with their same-age peers. Using grounded theory analysis, three categories emerged from the data. The first category, director’s qualities that promote inclusion encompassed the directors’ characteristics, directors’ inclusion standards and interpersonal relationships the directors had with others. The second category, leadership decisions that promote inclusion focused on structural decisions the directors made, classroom decisions that promote inclusion and ancillary support for an inclusive Jewish supplementary school. The third category, physical characteristics of the religious school building revealed that an accessible building promotes inclusion.

**Table 10**

*Organizational Components Perceived as Beneficial for Including Students with Disabilities Academically and Socially with their Same-Age Peers*

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<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Subcategory</th>
<th>Property</th>
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<tr>
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<td>Director’s characteristics</td>
<td>Professional curiosity</td>
<td>Having professional curiosity to not having professional curiosity</td>
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<tr>
<td>Category</td>
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<td>Being flexible to not being flexible</td>
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<td>Involvement with students</td>
<td>Being involved with students to not being involved with students</td>
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<td>Classroom decisions that promote inclusion</td>
<td>General strategies that promote inclusion</td>
<td>Having general strategies that promote inclusion to not having general strategies that promote inclusion</td>
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<td>Programs that enhance inclusion</td>
<td>Having programs to enhance inclusion to not having programs to enhance inclusion</td>
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<tr>
<td>Physical characteristics of the religious school building</td>
<td>Building accessibility</td>
<td>Having an accessible building promotes inclusion to not having an accessible building</td>
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**Director’s Qualities that Promote Inclusion**

The directors involved in this study had many different types of leadership styles which encompass different personal qualities. However, there were some common elements among them. Subcategories for director’s qualities that promote inclusion are directors’ characteristics, directors’ inclusion standards, and interpersonal relationships.

**Director’s characteristics.** The first subcategory of director’s qualities that promote inclusion is director’s characteristics. The first property of director’s characteristics is professional curiosity with the dimension of having professional curiosity to not having professional curiosity. Two of the participants spoke about professional curiosity. Orli, one of the directors, mentioned that she continues to learn new information about teaching. “…being a lifelong learner, continuing to learn what are the best practices … to share that with my staff, and to be the cheerleader that gets them excited about being their best teaching selves” (Orli, lines 605-607). Penina, an educator, stated that her director keeps up with the new research in education and teaching.
“…she’s very up to the new research. She … really is in tune with the new pedagogy and that kind of stuff…” (Penina, lines 467-468). Continuing to keep up with cutting edge research and best practices in education would encompass the topic of inclusion of students with disabilities as it is currently such an important component of education.

The second property of the subcategory director’s characteristics is flexibility with the dimension of being flexible to not being flexible. Two of the participants either described themselves or described their directors as being flexible when it comes to including students with disabilities with their same-age peers. Deborah noted that she believes flexibility is important for including students with disabilities and she believed her director has that quality. “I think you need to be real flexible with students with disabilities and she is, you know” (Deborah, lines 779-780). Miriam, a director, explained how her flexibility helped her include students with disabilities in classes with their same-age peers.

It helps because I don’t have such a strong idea of how program ‘X’ or program ‘Y’ needs to look. I can really shape it as we go. You know, I have a vision for the approach of the school and I know how I want people to feel with the school, but I’m not so married to, you have to look this way or it has to look that way… and I think that helps. It makes room for other voices, and also room for things to go differently, right? Like this is not working for Little Timmy today, well let’s just change it… (Miriam, lines 518-524)

A few of the participants in this study believed that when directors have the characteristics of professional curiosity and flexibility their Jewish supplementary school is more likely to promote inclusion.
**Director’s inclusion standards.** The second subcategory of directors’ qualities that promote inclusion is director’s inclusion standards. The first property of director’s inclusion standards is director’s general standards of inclusion with the dimension of having general standards of inclusion to not having general standards of inclusion. For this study, directors’ general standards of inclusion are the guiding principles that the directors believe about including students with disabilities in classes with their same-age peers. More than half of the participants spoke about having inclusion standards. Tamar believed it is important to make every effort to include all students who wish to attend religious school. Her motto is, “I believe you say yes way before you say no” (Tamar, line 686). Some of the directors and educators spoke about making students with disabilities and their families feel welcome in their programs and classes. Abigail, a director, stated that it is important to her to send a “message of welcoming to all of our families” (Abigail, line 474). She recalled a family who chose not send one of their children to religious school because he had a disability. She talked with the father a few times and wanted to make sure he understood that, “whenever you’re ready … we’ll work with you and we want him included and we want him to be here” (Abigail, lines 477-479). Yael, a director, noted that she believes that “every child is welcome and should be a full participant in the program” (Yael, lines 588-589). Orli, a director, also believed that students with disabilities are welcome and belong in her religious school’s community.

I think that they know from the moment they walk in the door that they are very much part of our community, and that they are … welcome and seen for who they are and not what their ability or disabilities are. (Orli, lines 648-650)
Judith, an educator, stated that inclusion is initiated from the top, or the director, and flows down to the educators and that her religious school’s director has been very resolute about including students with disabilities. “Yeah, because the message really is from the top down; … that is how we will be, and we will do everything we can to make it so” (Judith, lines 485-486). These participants share the opinion that “every Jewish child is entitled to a Jewish education” (Orli, line 600) and they perceive that they “would do everything possible to make that happen” (Orli, line 601). Many of the Jewish supplementary school directors participating in this study believed that it was their calling to do everything possible to have students with disabilities attend their religious schools, be part of their Jewish community, get a Jewish education, and create a Jewish identity.

The second property of the subcategory directors’ inclusion standards is director’s specific standards of inclusion with the dimension having specific standards of inclusion to not having specific standards of inclusion. Although most directors spoke about general inclusion standards, only Tamar gave both a general standard as well as a specific standard of inclusion. When asked how her particular leadership style impacts the inclusion of students with disabilities, Tamar stated:

I make sure that there are people who are smarter and better than me. I’m working with children with different types of needs and make sure that they [people with expertise in different areas of special education] are on the staff, and part of the team. And being able to do what they do better than I do. (Tamar, lines 709-711)

Having inclusion standards, both general and specific promotes inclusion by understanding the obligation that all Jewish children must be welcomed as full
participants in the Jewish community, and Jewish supplementary school is one way to enter the Jewish community with same-age peers.

**Interpersonal relationships.** The third subcategory of directors’ qualities that promote inclusion is interpersonal relationships. The first property of interpersonal relationships is involvement with students with the dimension being involved with students to not being involved with students. Three of the participants in this study stated that it is important that directors develop relationships with the students in their religious school. Sarah enjoys getting to know her students personally. She believed that, “…getting to know the students really on their personal levels and not just like ‘What’s your name, what do you do?’ is so important” (Sarah, lines 338-339). She stated that there are many ways that she begins relationships with her students.

I am always walking around the school. I pop into the classrooms every day. In the mornings I make sure to sit with the different groups of kids and just talk to them. A lot of them I’ve known; they have gone through the preschool at our synagogue and then they come up [to the religious school] so I’ve gotten to know them through that as well. (Sarah, lines 350-353)

Deborah noted that the director at her Jewish supplementary school builds relationships with many of the students and works hard to include students with disabilities in group activities.

Yeah, she’s great with that [inclusion] and also, she views it as her responsibility. … we were doing some group thing and there was a kid who was, … way out over there. And she took it upon herself [to include him in the activity]. … I
think she makes relationships with a lot of the kids; instead of relying on the
teachers to do it and then report to her. (Deborah, lines 785-788)

A few of the participants believed when directors develop relationships with the students in their Jewish supplementary school it contributes to creating an inclusive religious school program.

The second property of the subcategory interpersonal relationships is relationships with parents. The dimension of relationships with parents is having good relationships with parents to not having good relationships with parents. Only Penina mentioned that it was important for the director to have a good relationship with the parents of the students who attend religious school. She stated that the director at her religious school creates good relationships with the parents of all students.

… but I also think well, I think it’s her [style]. I think the parents felt comfortable with her, and … I think she accommodated to what the parents want; … which is fine. I think our temple is very accommodating to our population. You know … that’s an important part to keep the … enrollment high, so they’ll do what they need to do. (Penina, lines 448-451)

Having good relationships with the parents of religious school students could be very beneficial for inclusion. When parents of students of all abilities have a positive relationship with the director, they are more likely to disclose their child’s disability if the parent has a student with a disability and they are more likely to trust the director when she or he says that having students with disabilities will not take away from their child’s Jewish education if they are the parents of a student without a disability.
The third property of the subcategory interpersonal relationships is relationships with educators and staff. The dimension is having good relationships with educators and staff to not having good relationships with educators and staff. Two of the directors stated that they had good relationships with their educators and staff members and take their insights about students into consideration when planning for those students. Abigail noted that her leadership style is collaborative and she works well with the staff members in her religious school.

I have a special needs coordinator, who is really, really great and I empower her a lot to ... work with the teachers and make decisions for what’s going to work for certain kids, and listening to my teachers; what’s working, what’s not working. And also to an extent … I have a couple of really, really great madrichim who are older. And I had just this year, on a [weekday] night when the madricha [female teen classroom assistant] was here for her own class on a [weekday] night. And we were sitting over dinner and talking, and she said, ‘You know, I’m really concerned about so-and-so; here’s what I’m seeing.’ And I said, ‘Oh, that’s really interesting. And let me … call the teacher.’ And I did, and I called the teacher and we made some moves from there at the instigation of the madricha. (Abigail, lines 458-466)

One way to know if educators feel comfortable with their director is if they ask for advice about how to work with specific students. Educators who feel comfortable enough to ask for advice from the director have good relationships with their director. Yael stated that her educators come to her to ask advice about how to work with particular students.
…I have noticed over time that teachers more often come to me now, if they’re having trouble dealing with a child. In the past, it may have just been in the classroom, and maybe they [teachers] didn’t feel like I could help, or that they didn’t want to embarrass themselves. But more and more often I see teachers coming. I mean, it could be as simple as you know, ‘David’s driving me nuts. Could you just … come in for 10 minutes and … see what’s going on?’ (Yael, lines 589-594)

Educators and staff members are more likely to ask advice from their director about educational and/or behavioral issues that come up in their classroom if the director has a positive personal relationship with them. Since these educational and/or behavioral issues may involve students with disabilities, the type of relationships that directors have with their educators and staff members may directly impact the quality of the inclusion practiced at the religious school.

**Leadership Decisions that Promotes Inclusion**

Directors have the responsibility for making many decisions about their Jewish supplementary schools. Some of the decisions include the curriculum that is used in the classrooms, the educators and staff members who are hired, how many staff members are in each classroom, the composition of the classes, and creating programs for the religious school. These decisions can promote or inhibit inclusion of students with disabilities with their same-age peers. The second category is leadership decisions that promote inclusion. Subcategories for leadership decisions that promote inclusion are structural decisions that promote inclusion, classroom decisions that promote inclusion, and ancillary support for an inclusive Jewish supplementary school.
Structural decisions that promote inclusion. The first subcategory of leadership decisions that promote inclusion is structural decisions that promote inclusion. The property for structural decisions that promote inclusion is curriculum decisions that promote inclusion with the dimension being making curriculum decisions that promote inclusion to not making curriculum decisions that promote inclusion. About half of the participants stated that the most significant decision directors made in their religious school that promoted inclusion was to change the Hebrew curriculum or the way Hebrew was taught. Miriam stated:

I think changing the Hebrew curriculum is the most prominent example that comes to mind. [Before I took the director’s job] They were using [a] very work-booky … type of curriculum. It actually, for certain kinds of disabilities, that works great…Sometimes more experiential stuff is harder… But there’s a whole other category of disabilities where that [using work books] makes it harder, so hopefully that [the new curriculum] casts a little bit of a wider net and it made it … more difficult for a couple of kids, but the rest of them seem to respond better. And that, you know, I always weigh that… (Miriam, Lines 464-472)

Naomi noted that she believes one of her decisions that most positively impacted inclusion of students with disabilities in her school was changing the Hebrew curriculum.

And I think that [new Hebrew program’s name]; the more I learned about [new Hebrew program’s name], and the way that it works, the more I realized that [the curriculum would be good for] all of these kids that are having a tough part. And for many parents, whether we like it or not, they come in looking for the bar or bat mitzvah. So every parent I talked to that looks at our temple is like, ‘Oh,
wow,’ you know, like that piece [the new Hebrew program] is something that they really enjoy. (Naomi, Lines 645-649)

These are the Hebrew programs that have been successful for some of the directors and educators: Onward Hebrew, Hebrew through Movement, Hebrew and Harmony, and Shalom Learning. Eve, an educator, believed that the most important decision her director made was to take the stress out of learning Hebrew for students with disabilities and approach it in a very different way.

And, you know, I think that’s kind of the attitude we have in the schools, like, ‘Let’s … go do this, and however we get there, we get there.’ And you know … I think her biggest sea change would be the way that we treat Hebrew; that there’s just the understanding [that] learning Hebrew is going to look different for a lot of people and if kids are going to read transliteration, that’s their version of learning Hebrew, and … that’s okay. You know, you get to a point where … certain kids are not going to get it [be able to read Hebrew] and rather than make them feel like they’re a failure or resent us trying to teach them or keep pulling [them] out [for] extra help … you just find another way. (Eve, Lines 573-580)

Yael stated that her decision that most positively impacted inclusion for students with disabilities in her religious school was reimagining her junior congregation program [Saturday morning services for students from second through sixth grades]. She photocopied prayers from a prayer book and created a program where the students looked for specific words. She also had the students choreograph the service.

So I think one … good example would be our junior congregation program, which falls under my responsibility. And, you know, we have some attendance [issues]
we don’t have great attendance. So I decided I was going to kind of mix it up and make it more active. … I gave the students an opportunity to scavenger hunt through [a facsimile of] the prayer book [for specific words]. … I also did an entire service of dancing. It was a choreograph[ed] service … so you rise for some prayers and you bow for some prayers. So we choreographed the whole dance to the morning service, and then we danced it without the words to see if we could remember the order. So I took a standard service and I made it more inclusive by giving kids an opportunity to express themselves in different ways, and to learn in different ways, not just through repetition. (Yael, Lines 534-549)

Directors have the ability to support inclusion by changing or modifying essential programs that are already in place in their Jewish supplementary school such that students can have the opportunity to be successful in mastering the material and can express themselves in multiple modalities.

Classroom decisions that promote inclusion. The second subcategory of Leadership decisions that promote inclusion is classroom decisions that promote inclusion. The first property of classroom decisions that promote inclusion is general strategies that promote inclusion with the dimension of having general strategies that promote inclusion to not having general strategies that promote inclusion. For this study, general strategies that promote inclusion are strategies that are created for the religious school and not created for a specific student or group of students. More than half of the participants offered general strategies that promoted inclusion in their religious school. Judith, an educator, believed that one of the decisions her director made that positively impacted inclusion was that students with disabilities would not be excluded from their
religious school. She stated, “I mean, nobody is to be excluded. You know, as far as I know, there hasn’t been a situation where a student has not been allowed or been welcomed. No matter what the disability might be” (Judith, Lines 489-491). Two of the educators stated that their director’s decision to have a special education teacher/inclusion coordinator on staff was very important in promoting inclusion in their opinions. Caleb stated that his director “was even able to create an inclusionist [sic] specialist [position] to come to our class and help us understand if we need more help in order to engage the student into our curriculum” (Caleb, Lines 320-322). Judith expressed the same sentiment about having a special education teacher on staff at her religious school.

So [inclusion specialist’s name] is basically that inclusion, uh, person; she’s the … one who’s the special education teacher. And so for me… having [inclusion specialist’s name] there to help and provide [guidance for me] … [inclusion specialist’s name] is a savior sometimes. For sure. … I had someone… a difficult situation and so without her I don’t know that I would have done that and I think [director’s name] having her there is the perfect; this is the perfect way to kind of handle it. (Judith, Lines 505-510)

Naomi noted that her decision to start morning meetings a few years ago was instrumental in creating a more inclusive environment. Sarah stated that she makes a conscious choice to work hard to get to know all the students in her religious school. She is a presence in their classrooms and sits down to talk with them.

I think just by choosing to get to know all the students, I think has really been a huge positive thing that has happened. So I can know the students, you know, not
just by their IEP or what the parents tell me but know actually who they are so I can place them in, whether it’s the right Hebrew group or school group and place them where they should be and not where their parents necessarily think that they should be. (Sarah, Lines 344-348)

Hannah spoke about changing the practice of using fidgets in her Jewish supplementary school. She noted that before she began working at her religious school the practice surrounding fidgets was that anyone who wanted one could come into the office and pick one out from a huge bin to use for the day. She stated that she understood that allowing all students to have fidgets is “certainly one approach and one … prong of an inclusion strategy” (Hannah, Lines 940-941). Hannah said it was not her style and she thought it had some unintended consequences of being a source of conflict when interacting with some of the students. She decided not to mention them even though the fidgets were still there. She and her inclusion coordinator decided which students would benefit from having a fidget and knew how to use it correctly and offered those students a fidget.

We just sort of changed the approach and kept the … need still there. But we changed the way that we communicated around it. And within the first few months of me being there, the kids just stopped asking who didn’t need them. … so it wasn’t like a special prize to … get a toy to play with. It was … okay, you actually understand why this is helpful for you and your needs, and you can accommodate appropriately. (Hannah, Lines 949-956)

The participants in this study listed a diverse range of general strategies that they believed helped facilitate the inclusion of students with disabilities in their Jewish supplementary schools.
The second property of classroom decisions that promote inclusion is student specific strategies that promote inclusion. The dimension is having student specific strategies that promote inclusion to not having student specific strategies that promote inclusion. For this study, student specific strategies that promote inclusion are strategies that were created with a specific student or group of students in mind. About half of the participants contributed information for student specific strategies that promote inclusion. Abigail believed the way she chooses teachers and assistant teachers to work with students with disabilities has positively impacted inclusion in her school. When asked if there was a decision that she made that really helped inclusion of students with disabilities in her program she stated:

I for sure can in terms of staffing. When there’s a choice of classes, sometimes I know which teacher will be more effective with the kid, especially with those with special needs, and also assistant teachers. I have some really great high school assistant teachers and I know … some of them … would be really helpful and skilled with kids with special needs and some are less so; so I’ll … stack a class a certain way. (Abigail, Lines 437-442)

Sarah expressed the same sentiment about making sure students with disabilities were assigned to educators and teen assistants who would work well with them.

I look at the … class groupings before I send them out. And I make sure that students who need extra help will be with a teacher that can focus on them and give them that extra help, or I assign a teen assistant that I know will be … great with the students. (Sarah, Lines 327-330)
Penina, an educator, had a student who had a disability in her class. The student would not work with her in class but would work in class with the classroom assistant. Her director suggested the student continue to work with the assistant. The director then had a conversation with the student’s parents about modifying the student’s goals for that class. The decision the director made about having the student work with the teen assistant enabled the student to continue learning in the classroom and be included in the community of his same-age peers. Caleb stated that he appreciated the fact that when it came time to make a decision about twins who both had disabilities in his classroom, his director included him in the meeting with the director and inclusion coordinator.

…and we all sat, and the director came [up] with the decision of eventually to split the twins up in order for both of them to gain knowledge. And she did not make the decision by herself, she made the decision with me and the [inclusion] specialist as well, so we can all be in the same boat. And it was a great decision. (Caleb, Lines 327-331)

Eve talked about a student who had very severe food sensitivities and the director made the decision to put in place a strict protocol to accommodate the student’s sensitivities.

And every year, this child would move up a grade. Then all the teachers for that grade would get … information saying, ‘Okay, here [is] … what we have to do.’ And I think even the families all were told this; ‘Your child has to wash their hands with soap and water before they come into your classroom. And then every time you leave the classroom for any … activity, you have to go back and wash your hands before you go back to the classroom. And [you are] not allowed to … bring in any treats.’ (Eve, Lines 532-537)
Deborah stated that a former director made the decision to hire a helper for a student who was on the autism spectrum. The helper would take the student out of the classroom for breaks but then return to the classroom after the break. She remarked that it was both less inclusive and more inclusive at the same time.

   It made him… less included, you know, because he took breaks, but it was more inclusive because it … was attending to his needs … so it made it so that he could stay in the classroom. (Deborah, Lines 757-760)

The participants of the study spoke about a wide variety of decisions that directors made for specific students in order to promote the inclusion of these students in their religious schools.

   The third subcategory of classroom decisions that promote inclusion is ancillary support for an inclusive Jewish supplementary school. For this study, ancillary support is “providing support to the primary activities or operation of an organization, industry, or system” (Oxford Languages, n.d., p. 1). The property is programs to enhance inclusion with the dimension of having programs to enhance inclusion to not having programs to enhance inclusion. Two participants mentioned creating ancillary support to further their goals of inclusion of students with disabilities in class with their same-age peers. Naomi believed that one of the most important decisions she made for her religious school was to begin a teen assistant program where she would train teenagers to work in the classrooms with younger students. Miriam stated that in her religious school there had not been an education committee for five years and she wanted to bring that back because it “was very important to me to have a lot of voices around the table” (Miriam, Lines 491-492). She stated she wanted the education committee to “look at different models
for religious school and figure out what might be a fit for [her congregation]” (Miriam, Lines 502-503). Fitting her congregation would also include finding a model that would be a good fit for the students of all abilities who attend her religious school. Both of these decisions provided support for students with disabilities. Naomi’s decision of starting a teen assistant provided direct support by training teens to would work in the religious school classrooms with students of all abilities. Miriam’s decision provided more indirect support by creating an education committee that would be responsible for choosing a model for their religious school that would fit the congregation’s philosophy, wants, and needs.

**Physical Characteristics of the Religious School Building**

The third category physical characteristics of the religious school building describes the physical accessibility of the building for people who have difficulty walking, use walkers, crutches, and especially wheelchairs for mobility. While all of the participants have their own unique experiences working within the architecture and layout of their supplementary school buildings, they have some experiences in common when it comes to building accessibility. The subcategory of physical characteristics of the religious school building is building accessibility.

**Building accessibility.** The subcategory for Physical characteristics of the religious school building is building accessibility. The property for building accessibility is having an accessible building promotes inclusion with the dimension of having an accessible building to not having an accessible building. The participants work in buildings that have a wide range of accessibility; some of the buildings are very accessible while others have one or more areas that are not accessible. Six of the 13
participants perceive their buildings as very accessible. Some of the accessible buildings are new while others have been structurally modified to comply with the Americans with Disabilities Act guidelines. Many of the participants listed areas where their buildings need improvement to become accessible. Almost all of the participants had at least one area where their building could use improvement to become more accessible even if it was a new or newly retrofitted building. Some of the buildings have steps to a second floor or to the basement where there is a room they use but there are no ramps or elevators inside the building. Some of the buildings have various accessibility levels in the bathrooms; they may have wide stalls but do not have a lowered sink or they may not have doors that can open when a button is pushed. Some of the congregations have steps that lead up to the bimah [alter] and do not have a lift or ramp to access that area. Some of the participants mentioned that the playground is not accessible as it has wood chips or the equipment is not wheelchair friendly. One of the participants mentioned the kitchen is not accessible as the aisles are too narrow and the counters are too high. When her religious school classes cook, they have to do all the preparation work in another room. Accessibility is important for inclusion because if a student cannot access an area where the other students are participating in an activity, the student is not included and cannot be part of the same experiences, acquire the same knowledge, and create the same memories as the other students.

**Question 2 Part c: How do Jewish supplementary school directors and educators perceive the experiences of their personnel (e.g., attitudes, training, career experience, experiences with school inclusion and experiences with people who have**
disabilities not in a school setting) in supporting inclusion for students with disabilities in their programs with same-age peers?

This question sought to understand how experiences of Jewish supplementary school directors and educators promotes inclusion of students with disabilities with their same-age peers. Using grounded theory analysis, four categories emerged from the data. The first category, core values, encompasses director’s and educator’s beliefs that advance inclusion of students with disabilities with their same-age peers and directors’ and educators’ attitudes that advance inclusion of students with disabilities with their same-age peers. The second category, inclusion training, addresses how directors and educators learn to include students with disabilities with their same-age peers from formal inclusion training, informal inclusion training, and experiential learning. The third category, career experience, focuses on how some new directors and educators with little experience with inclusion struggle to include students with disabilities in their classes and schools, that many inclusion skills are gained through experiences of including students in classroom and programs, that it is important to know the students, and that talking with parents of students with disabilities can help find the best way to educate them. The fourth category, experience with human diversity, describes how experiences with people who have disabilities, having inclusive family values, and desiring fairness in education promotes inclusion both in religious school and the community.
Table 11

*Personnel Components Perceived as Beneficial for Including Students with Disabilities Academically and Socially with their Same-Age Peers*

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Subcategory</th>
<th>Property</th>
<th>Dimension</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Core values</td>
<td>Beliefs that advance inclusion</td>
<td>Positive relationships between students and educators</td>
<td>Creating positive relationships between educators and students advances inclusion to not creating positive relationships between educators and students does not advance inclusion</td>
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<td>promotes inclusion</td>
<td>Positive relationships among classmates promotes inclusion to positive relationships among classmates does not promote inclusion</td>
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<td>Fairness for all students necessitates inclusion</td>
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<td>Equity for all students advances inclusion</td>
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<td>Attitudes that advance inclusion</td>
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<th>Inclusion training</th>
<th>Formal inclusion training</th>
<th>Formal inclusion training promotes inclusion</th>
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<tr>
<td>Outdated formal training</td>
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<td>Informal inclusion training</td>
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<tr>
<td>Experiential learning</td>
<td>Learning about inclusion from staff members</td>
<td>Learning about inclusion from staff members to not learning about inclusion from staff members</td>
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<td>Learning from other sources</td>
<td></td>
<td>Learning from other sources to not learning from other sources</td>
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<tr>
<td>Career experiences</td>
<td>Career experiences increase inclusion</td>
<td>Some new educators struggle with inclusion to New educators struggle with inclusion to new educators do not struggle with inclusion</td>
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<td>Inclusion skills gained through experience</td>
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<td>Inclusion skills gained through experience to no inclusion skills gained through experience</td>
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<tr>
<td>Experience with human diversity</td>
<td>Experience with disability</td>
<td>Close personal experiences with disability promotes inclusion</td>
<td>Close personal experience with disability promotes inclusion to close personal experience with disability does</td>
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Core Values

The first category is core values. Core values guide our behaviors and are important for including students with disabilities in classes with their same-age peers.

Some of the directors and educators have similar core values about inclusion.

Subcategories for core values are beliefs that advance inclusion and attitudes that advance inclusion.

**Beliefs that advance inclusion.** The first property of the subcategory beliefs that advance inclusion is positive relationships between students and educators advances inclusion. The dimension is creating positive relationships between educators and students advances inclusion to not creating positive relationships between educators and students does not advance inclusion. One of the participants noted that positive

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<th>Experiences with religious school students with disabilities promotes inclusion</th>
<th>Experiences with religious school students with disabilities promotes inclusion to experiences with religious school students with disabilities does not promote inclusion</th>
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<tr>
<td>Family values and fairness increase inclusion</td>
<td>Family values and fairness increase inclusion to family values and fairness do not increase inclusion</td>
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<td>Success with inclusion promotes inclusion</td>
<td>Success with inclusion promotes inclusion to success with inclusion does not promote inclusion</td>
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<td>important for including students with disabilities in classes with their same-age peers. Some of the directors and educators have similar core values about inclusion. Subcategories for core values are beliefs that advance inclusion and attitudes that advance inclusion. <strong>Beliefs that advance inclusion.</strong> The first property of the subcategory beliefs that advance inclusion is positive relationships between students and educators advances inclusion. The dimension is creating positive relationships between educators and students advances inclusion to not creating positive relationships between educators and students does not advance inclusion. One of the participants noted that positive</td>
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relationships between educators and students advance inclusion. Deborah stated that building a relationship with students of all abilities can open them up to learning information with their class members. She noted:

I mean, obviously I’ve made it clear that … personal connection … I believe that to be the most powerful thing, so regardless of disability … that’s the starting point … And that’s where you learn, and everyone starts at different spots, but you[ve] got to start … And open that up. And that’s with a relationship, I think.

(Deborah, Lines 860-864)

Not only does a positive personal relationship with the teacher open children of all abilities up to learning, it also can set the tone for whether a student with a disability is accepted as a fully functioning member of the classroom or is excluded. Teachers’ beliefs about students and their capabilities are picked up by the rest of the students in the class. Having a positive relationship with the teacher can promote inclusion for students with disabilities.

The second property of beliefs that advance inclusion is positive relationships among classmates promotes inclusion. The dimension is positive relationships among classmates promotes inclusion to positive relationships among classmates does not promote inclusion. One participant commented that building positive relationships among the students in the class promotes inclusion. Eve believed that creating relationships among the students in her class is very important for inclusion because students will naturally include each other as they share their strengths with their peers.

Well, I like to tell the kids at the beginning of the school year that we’re a kehillah kadosha [holy community]; that we’re a holy community. And it’s our job to take
care of each other within the class. That there’s going to be things during the year that are easy for you. And there’s going to be things that are hard for you. And so if something is easy for you, then help your neighbor. And if it’s hard for you, [you] know that there’s going to be a friend that’s going to help you out, and that we’re all going to figure stuff out together. So I try to set that tone at the beginning of the year. … I suppose you would say that’s my belief. (Eve, Lines 739-746)

The third property of beliefs that advance inclusion is fairness for all students necessitates inclusion. The dimension is practicing fairness to all students necessitates inclusion to practicing fairness to all students does not necessitate inclusion. Two participants framed inclusion through their belief that all children should have the same opportunities when it comes to having a Jewish education whether they have a disability or not which encompasses the concept of fairness. Orli noted that her beliefs about inclusion evolved from her philosophy that all children can learn and are entitled to a Jewish education. “I believe that every child can learn. I believe that every child is entitled to a Jewish education. And therefore that … frames … how we live out inclusivity in our program” (Orli, Lines 720-722). Miriam also expressed the sentiment that all students deserve a quality Jewish education.

I believe that every child deserves a quality Jewish education. Um, I think all my actions stem from there, right? I try my hardest to give that to every child. I believe it’s the job of the entire synagogue, not just the educator [director] or the teacher. (Miriam, Lines 644-646)
Providing the same opportunities to obtain a Jewish education for all students requires the educator, director, religious school and synagogue treat each student without discrimination or favoritism which is the basic definition of fairness.

The fourth property of the subcategory beliefs that advance inclusion is equity for all students advances inclusion. The dimension is equity for all students advances inclusion to equity for all students does not advance inclusion. For this study, the term ‘equity’ refers to “fairness and justice and is distinguished from equality: Whereas equality means providing the same to all, equity means recognizing that we do not all start from the same place and must acknowledge and make adjustments to imbalances…” (National Association of Colleges and Employers, 2021, p. 1). One participant believed that the students in her class require equity in order for her to teach them in the most effective manner. While Penina believed that all students deserve the opportunity to have a Jewish education, she also stated that not only should all students have the same opportunity, but she recognized that students possess different skills when they enter her classroom and she uses accommodations to adjust for the differences.

I believe the kids are all entitled to the same respect and my efforts. They needed to be treated the same, as best as I possibly can. But also … my job is to provide them with [the] accommodations they need. I always tell kids, ‘If you need to wear glasses, you need to wear glasses; you know … that’s your accommodation.’

(Penina, Lines 564-567)
Providing equity for all students allows the educator to create an inclusive classroom because every child has the curriculum, teaching, and accommodations needed to understand the material.

Positive beliefs about students with disabilities and inclusion promote inclusive classrooms where students of all abilities are valued for who they are, have the same opportunities as the rest of the class members, and have full membership in the classroom community.

The second subcategory of core values is attitudes that advance inclusion. The property is positive attitudes advance inclusion with the dimension of positive attitudes advance inclusion to positive attitudes do not advance inclusion. Two participants commented that positive attitudes advance inclusion. Miriam spoke about how important positive attitudes are when creating inclusive classrooms and programs. She noted that for her, keeping a positive attitude about including students with disabilities helped make the work of creating accommodations for everyone who needs them easier and she gets better results.

Attitude is most of the game, right? I have always seen having students with disabilities as an asset to a school. I’ve watched a lot of colleagues … who just saw it as a challenge as well as a burden, and they weren’t able to do it as well. And it wore on them a lot more. So there is a burnout factor. It is really understandable that it’s not always easy to accommodate everyone. But if you change your attitude, that solves a lot of the issue. Whereas it’s naïve to say it’s everything; but it’s a big part of it. … when I start from a place of… how can we
turn this into a gift for the … whole class, it feels easier. And I get better results.

(Miriam, Lines 657-667)

Caleb noted that the attitude an educator brings into the classroom is important because the other students will pick up on the educators attitude. He stated that if the educator accepts the student with a disability, then the rest of the class will accept the student too.

So my main focus is to bring a positive attitude into the classroom, especially for inclusion. Because if you’re showing some frustration because you have … a student with an IEP, the [other] students will notice that there is … something that you don’t like. So if you’re coming with a positive attitude, and you show that you are positive for everything, they will accept him or accept her the way … they are. (Caleb, Lines 473-477)

When directors and educators demonstrate positive attitudes that include welcoming, celebrating, and enjoying students with disabilities in classrooms with their same-age peers they create inclusive classrooms by modeling acceptance of students of all abilities. A few of the directors and a few of the educators stated that having positive beliefs and attitudes about inclusion and students with disabilities is helpful in creating inclusive schools and programs.

**Inclusion Training**

The second category is inclusion training. Many of the participants have taken different types of inclusion training options. They range from courses from a university, college, or community college, to conferences, professional development, and learning from others. Subcategories of inclusion training are formal inclusion training, informal inclusion training, and experiential learning
**Formal inclusion training.** The first subcategory of inclusion training is formal inclusion training. For this study, formal inclusion training is defined as inclusion training that is taught by an institution of higher learning: a university, college, or junior college where the participant is enrolled full time or part time as a student for a semester or more. The first property of formal inclusion training is formal inclusion training promotes inclusion. The dimension is formal inclusion training promotes inclusion to formal inclusion training does not promote inclusion. Four of the participants noted their formal training helped them learn about inclusion. Caleb stated that his formal education helped him understand the dynamics between families and their children. He believed that communicating his ideas to the parents helped engage students in the classroom. “The education that I got helped me … to bring a lot of my ideas out, and how to communicate them to the parents in order to engage the child in the classroom… especially … with inclusion” (Caleb, Lines 488-492). Many of the directors earned a graduate degree from a Jewish seminary that offered inclusion training. Naomi stated that the Jewish seminary she attended focused on inclusion. “I would say at [name of the seminary], it’s a big focus; inclusivity” (Naomi, Line 797). A few of the participants believed their formal inclusion training helped them learn more about inclusion and how to create inclusive programs and classrooms.

The second property of the subcategory formal inclusion training is outdated formal training. The dimension is outdated formal training does not promote inclusion to outdated formal training does promote inclusion. Two of the participants stated that their training was so long ago that they do not use any of the information they learned at that time. There was a large period of time during which the participants received their
formal training in this study, with at least one of them training in the 1980’s to those who were in school during the time the study took place. When asked how her training affected the way she included students with disabilities in her classroom, Deborah noted, “Um, well it’s interesting. The training, I mean it was so long ago…” (Deborah, Line 945). Abigail was more specific about her training:

I was trained to become a director. That was through my master’s program at [name of the institution]. It was a really long time ago. Honestly, most of the things I learned back then, I’m not using anymore because it was in the mid-eighties. everything’s changed! … the way they taught us supervision, the way they taught us curriculum development in the mid-eighties, it’s just not, it’s just not the way we do it anymore. I am not using any curriculum from the eighties … I did get a formal education and a master’s degree, but that’s not what I rely on for the work that I do now. (Abigail, Lines 562-576)

Directors and educators who had formal training many years ago do not use that information for creating inclusive classrooms and programs. Students with disabilities were not guaranteed a free and appropriate education until 1975 and many Jewish supplementary schools did not welcome students with disabilities into their classrooms and programs until later. Participants who trained many years ago probably would not be able to utilize their training on how to include students with disabilities in their classes and programs as so many ideas and techniques are very different now.

Informal inclusion training. The second subcategory of inclusion training is informal inclusion training. For this study, informal inclusion training is: professional development, faculty in-services, conferences that participants attend, or longer training
programs provided by an organization that is not an institution of higher learning. The property of informal inclusion training is informal training promotes inclusion. The dimension is informal training promotes inclusion to informal training does not promote inclusion. More than half of the participants stated that they found informal training very helpful for creating inclusive classrooms and knowing how to teach students of all abilities. Some of the directors have taken a training program from an organization in New York called the Matan Institute which offers inclusion training. Abigail stated that she took a one week training program from Matan and it was very helpful. “I did a one week seminar with Matan in New York. And that was really excellent. And that is stuff that is still relevant because it wasn’t that long ago” (Abigail, Lines 567-569). Yael has taken advantage of different types of informal inclusion training. “I did that Matan program, and there’s sort of, you know, continual learning… We have educator conferences, there’s always, almost always something… or someone out there who has something to offer” (Yael, Lines 737-740). Eve found faculty in-services at her congregation very helpful for inclusion.

But, I think part of the benefit of our school and our community is that we have different teaching in-services, where we focus a lot on diversity and inclusivity. So even when we have … someone in their seventies … we’re still teaching everybody about … what is autism and what is ADD, and how do you teach differentially. And, you know … we’re hitting the young kids, we’re hitting the people that … there’s a lot of religious school teachers who do not have teaching in their background; in their day job. And so I think it’s … really important to have faculty in-services. (Eve, Lines 8843-850)
Sarah found all day training programs to be very helpful as she could hear the information and then have an opportunity to practice the techniques. “…but what really helped me were the trainings, the all day, boring, you know, long trainings, but those are what really helped me and getting to learn…and then also just practicing it is so important” (Sarah, Lines 457-459).

Many of the participants found informal training to be extremely helpful for learning how to create inclusive classes for students of all abilities and techniques for teaching students with disabilities.

**Experiential learning.** The third subcategory of inclusion training is experiential learning. Some of the participants stated that they learned the most through observing others or experiences they had in the classroom. The first property of experiential learning is learning about inclusion from staff members. The dimension is learning about inclusion from staff members to not learning about inclusion from staff members. Three of the participants noted that they learned the most about inclusion from other teachers who were on staff at their Jewish supplementary schools. Many of the teachers they learned from were certified teachers or special education teachers. Naomi learned from her assistant director who was a special educator. “…she was able to bring a lot of her stuff [expertise] into the temple. …And I just learned a lot from her” (Naomi, Lines 808-810). Miriam believed that she learned the most about inclusion from her teachers. “I learned from my teachers, the most actually. A lot of the ones who are degreed teachers… and watching what they do, they bring a lot of expertise to the table” (Miriam, Lines 683-685). Two of the participants believed they learned how to include students by doing it; by teaching and finding out what works and what does not work. Orli earned a
special education degree as an undergraduate but because she trained a while ago, the
methods she was taught are out of date. She believed that her experiences are much more
valuable in learning about inclusion than her training. She also uses the Matan training
program for teen assistant teachers to train her teen assistant teachers about inclusion in
the classroom.

…my special education training was in my undergrad. And it’s like what we
talked about the other day; it was definitely behavioristic. … So I really would
say it’s more just building experience upon experience, less than about my
training. I mean, sure, I’ve taken a webinar here or there. …and then also when
you teach you learn. So like … the Matan [training materials for teen assistants]
you know. Like we have that; that’s what we use with our madrichim ... And so,
I always learn something as I’m teaching [the teen assistants] about the different
things, but I really think it’s really more experience than … about training for me.
(Orlie, Lines 744-751)

Some of the participants noted that learning from other teachers at their religious school
or by experience in the classroom has helped them the most when it comes to creating
inclusive classrooms and teaching students of all abilities.

The second property of the subcategory experiential learning is learning from
other sources. The dimension is learning from other sources to not learning from other
sources. Two of the participants talked about some unique ways they have learned how
to include students with disabilities in their classrooms and create an inclusive
environment. Penina works as a teacher educator during the week and noted that
everything she learned for her job is applicable to inclusion training. “Oh, … everything
… the techniques, the teaching strategies [affect the way she includes students with disabilities in her class]” (Penina, Line 607). Miriam’s graduate training was done using a cohort model. She noted that she utilizes her cohort for asking questions and uses the knowledge of the group.

It’s all cohort based and so … we then have this network of colleagues where we can … shoot questions around … after a Sunday … morning we’ll have a debrief and … we can kind of use the knowledge of the group. (Miriam, Lines 699-702)

Miriam also stated that she learned a great deal about inclusion from a student’s weekday teachers. Whenever Miriam has a student who requires many accommodations, she would ask the student’s parents if she could contact the student’s weekday teacher. She said the weekday teachers had been wonderful about offering information about what they do during the week.

I’ve learned so much from the kids’ weekday school. So if there’s really a child who needs a lot of accommodation, one of the first things I asked [the parents] is, ‘Do you mind if I call their weekday teacher, because they do have the training?’ And sometimes I’ll talk to their general ed. teachers, sometimes it’s their special education teacher. Either way, they give me so many resources … and they’ll … email me the visual schedule they use and … the rules poster with the visuals on it … it’s just been really helpful. And they [the weekday teachers] care about their students too. They want them to be successful in their extracurriculars too, not just when they’re under their care so that’s been really helpful. (Miriam, Lines 759-767)
The directors and educators in this study have used many conventional and unconventional methods to learn about including students with disabilities in their classrooms and programs. While some of the inclusion training methods were from their academic training, they also utilized other creative ways to learn information about inclusion that they believed were very effective.

**Career Experience**

The category career experience encompasses both the amount of time and the experiences that a director or educator has in working in a Jewish supplementary school in their current position. The participants have had different career experiences but have some common elements. The subcategory for career experience is career experience increases inclusion.

**Career experience increases inclusion.** The subcategory of career experience is career experience increases inclusion. The first property of career experience increases inclusion is some new educators struggle with inclusion. The dimension of the property some new educators struggle with inclusion is new educators struggle with inclusion to new educators do not struggle with inclusion. Three educators spoke about the trouble they had creating an inclusive classroom and teaching students of all abilities when they began their teaching career. Caleb stated that when he began his teaching career, he did not know much about inclusion or how to work with the children in his class.

I will say the beginning of my teaching career, um, I did not have any, really, understanding of inclusion. I did not know really what to do with children; with … their work. I had a hard time understanding how to engage with them. And slowly, with the years [years teaching in the classroom] and experience and
education, I came … to more understanding of the needs and how to provide the needs and meet the needs. (Caleb, Lines 495-499)

Penina stated that initially, she struggled to teach students who had mild disabilities and did not understand that students say things to educators that educators should not take personally.

…even the most mild cases were a challenge for me in the beginning, of course. When I first started teaching Hebrew school, … I hadn’t even decided to go into education. Yeah, I didn’t … know what I didn’t know. And so … I took things personally, you get mad, you get frustrated … you, reprimand in the wrong way. And I had some [bad role models] … back then there were a lot of bad role models that you had. … I am always learning; I’m always trying something new. (Penina, Lines 635-651)

For these participants, having more experiences in the classroom, trying new techniques, and teaching for a longer period of time helped them become inclusive educators.

The second property for the subcategory career experience increases inclusion is inclusion skills gained through experience. The dimension is inclusion skills gained through experience to no inclusion skills gained through experience. Almost half of the participants spoke about how their career experience has increased their ability to create inclusive classes and programs in Jewish supplementary schools. However, one participant noted that when a teacher has been teaching the same way for a long time, the teacher may not be willing to learn a new way of teaching even if it would create more inclusive classrooms. Judith believed that she has improved as a teacher and in the area
of including students with disabilities in her classes through her career as a religious school educator.

I like to think that it’s just basically every year I learn a little bit more, you know. The first … year is always the worst and then you learn from that. And the second is a little better, and you just … keep going. And so, I would hope that … having done it [teaching], you [are] … learning a little bit by little bit every year; that … my teaching has become better and more inclusive. (Judith, Lines 584-588)

It is also important to point out that there was a participant who dissented; Eve did not believe that having more experience in the classroom always enables educators to become more inclusive teachers. “No, not necessarily. I think…I don’t know, I don’t want to make any kind of sweeping message. I mean, you could argue that if you’ve been teaching a long time you’re set in your ways right? [and won’t change the way you teach to better include students with disabilities in the classroom]” (Eve, Lines 841-843).

The directors don’t always teach in the classroom, so their inclusion experiences are different from the classroom educators. Directors often: create inclusion learning experiences/lesson plans for classroom educators; help the staff work together as a team on inclusion goals; communicate with parents of students with disabilities; and help facilitate inclusion of students with their same-age peers. Directors noted that they have gained inclusion skills through their career experience. Sarah noted “the longer that I’m here, the more that I get to know the students and the families, so I am able to know what they need, know what helps them best learn, best succeed” (Sarah, Lines 470-472).
Tamar stated that she works hard to create a buy-in for inclusion with her staff and also helps them work together as a team.

It has always been less about my vision [of inclusion], and more about getting everyone to buy into it [inclusion]. And the comfort level. And I have gotten better every year at the buy-in, the education, the creating the environment. That comes with wisdom, that comes with experience, that comes with just getting older and people respecting me more. … [It’s] not just hiring the right people who are smarter and better, but getting them all to work better as a team. That’s where it’s changed [over the years]. … [it’s] about creating the environment and creating the team that is willing to work with you. (Tamar, Lines 939-955)

Yael believed that because of her career experiences she is now able to be more proactive in talking with parents about their children who have disabilities.

I think I have become less reticent to sit down with parents and ask probing questions. Um, when I first started, I was observing and kind of figuring out who I was in this new role. And there were kids, where I could see they might have been struggling, but they were generally okay. So I just kind of let it ride, unless a parent called to talk to me. I’m much more proactive now. So I try to get ahead of potential issues. And even if I’m wrong, … I would rather be wrong and have the parents … become annoyed at me if it’s in the child’s best interest. I don’t think I would have put myself in that vulnerable position five years ago. (Yael, Lines 745-751)
Most of the participants believed they became better at including students with disabilities in their religious schools and classrooms and programs through their Jewish supplementary school career experiences.

**Experience with Human Diversity**

Human diversity is the variation among people. It can be in regards to appearance, culture, abilities, religion, gender, race, class, sexual orientation, gender identity, language, marital status, and other qualities that vary among humans. For the most part, we experience human diversity every day as we see, hear, and interact with others.

**Experience with disability.** Disability is just a part of normal human diversity. Not counting their experiences with students who have disabilities at their Jewish supplementary schools, almost every one of the participants had personal experiences with people who had disabilities either from birth or acquired during their lives. Some had disabilities themselves, some had close family members who had disabilities, some had friends who had disabilities, some had friends who had children with disabilities, and some socialized with groups of people with disabilities through ongoing events or had a family member who worked in the disability field and attended work related activities with the family member. Deborah expressed her thoughts on the universality of disability by stating, “I think that everyone has got to have some kind of personal experience with someone with disabilities; whether they be physical, mental, emotional. I mean there’s just no way they couldn’t, you know, I mean it’s humans, you know” (Deborah, Lines 1009-1012). All of the participants have their own unique experiences with people who have disabilities and yet they share some common elements in that they all work towards
including everyone in their religious schools. The subcategory for experience with human diversity is experience with disability. The first property of experience with disability is close personal experience with disability encourages inclusion. The dimension is close personal experience with disability promotes inclusion to close personal experience with disability does not promotes inclusion. Tamar had experiences with people who had disabilities since she was a young child, and came from a family where disability was normalized. She believed her upbringing and exposure to people with disabilities helped create the person that she has become. Tamar works hard to include students of all abilities with their same-age peers in lessons and activities during religious school. She believes “that anyone can do anything they want to do. We just have to figure it out differently” (Tamar, Lines, 800-801). Sarah has known people with disabilities from an early age and came from a family that stressed inclusion. When asked how knowing people with disabilities personally impacted the way she includes others, she stated:

It just shows me … how important it is to include all students no matter their ability or disability because they’re just like … everyone else; they have feelings, they have wants and needs, they want to be playing with their friends. … they don’t notice, typically or hopefully, that … that they’re different. And so I want to encourage that and encourage all people to feel that way as well. (Sarah, Lines 518-522)

Hannah noted that she was very lucky that her predecessors believed in inclusion and created a very inclusive religious school. Her goal is to “make it even better and more inclusive and more accepting” (Hannah, Line 1048). She believes that because of her
experiences with Jewish people who have disabilities, inclusion is important to her.

Hannah stated:

[I know of Jewish people with disabilities] who have struggled to find their way in the Jewish community or who have had these really beautiful stories of finding a way with whatever they were dealing with to also connect to their Judaism. So to me, that’s really inspirational and I want to help create that for as many people as I can. (Hannah, Lines 1050-1053)

Participants who have relationships with people who have disabilities outside of the religious school classroom have a strong drive to create inclusive Jewish supplementary schools and classrooms. Deborah noted, “It gives it a much more personal… it makes it [a] more personal [undertaking to provide inclusion for students with disabilities]” (Deborah, Line 1009).

The second property of the subcategory experiences with disability is experiences with religious school students with disabilities promotes inclusion. The dimension is experiences with religious school students with disabilities promotes inclusion to experiences with religious school students with disabilities does not promote inclusion. All of the participants in the study have had experiences with students with disabilities in religious school. Abigail noted that one of the strongest influences in how she includes students with disabilities in her Jewish supplementary school came from a student she had earlier in her career and his parents. The student used a wheelchair for mobility.

He could speak, but it was difficult to understand; you had to really focus to understand his speech. … And the kids … in his grade just came … to love him and accept him and be patient while he was speaking because it took a while to
hear what he was saying. But … over time … they just learned that they wanted to hear what he had to say. And he was just … a force. … he really taught me a lot just about what I needed to do to be inclusive and to make everything available to him. And his parents were also just spectacular and really taught me a lot about what I could do… and … how we could take him on field trips and how we could include him and everything. …when anything came up [where I had questions as to how to include him] I would just call his parents and they would work with me and give me guidance and we made it work. So I learned a ton from him. (Abigail, Lines 517-531)

Learning the nuances of how to include students with disabilities in Jewish supplementary schools and classes from people with disabilities and their families promotes inclusion of other students with disabilities in religious school.

The third property of experiences with disability is family values and fairness increase inclusion. The dimension is family values and fairness increase inclusion to family values and fairness do not increase inclusion. Judith was the only participant who noted that she did not know anyone with a visible disability when she was growing up. She stated that she did not have peers who had physical disabilities when she was growing up and did not know if her peers had hidden disabilities such as learning or emotional disabilities. She grew up in a small Jewish community. She stated that her mother taught her that no one could be excluded.

I can’t really think of like a specific experience. … My mom just raised me that … nobody gets excluded. It doesn’t like … there isn’t a specific anything that’s been there [no situation where a peer who was disabled was excluded]. … that
[is] just is the way I was taught. And so, that just of has translated into how I teach it; just nobody gets excluded. (Judith, Lines 536-540)

When thinking about her experience with inclusion as a child, Judith believed that everyone in religious school learned the same information and had the same opportunities; the experience was the same for everyone; it was fair for everyone.

…there wasn’t anything that I knew of as a student; as a child. And maybe that was just it; it just…was. In my mind everybody just went to Sunday school, and … you did the same things, and you learned the same … stuff as everybody else.

And so I guess in my mind, that’s just how it is. That’s how it works, everybody…goes to Sunday school, it’s like, you learn the same things. And you talk about the same holidays. (Judith, Lines 599-604)

Judith believes that her determination to include students with disabilities came from her mother’s value of not excluding anyone and her belief in fairness; that everyone has the same opportunities to learn the same material.

The fourth property of the subcategory experience with disability is success with inclusion promotes inclusion. The dimension is success with inclusion promotes inclusion to success with inclusion does not promote inclusion. Orli was the only participant who talked about how having success with inclusion encourages her to try inclusion in more complicated situations. Orli had many connections to people with disabilities and worked hard to create an inclusive religious school program for all her students. She believed that when programs are successful with inclusion, the directors and educators are more apt to try more complicated aspects of inclusion.
Well, I think success begets success, right? And I think that when we … collect enough of these stories and we become more confident [we try more complicated types of inclusion]. I’ll be honest with you; … when I started as the director, I was a little nervous about some of the [inclusive situations], because I … knew in my heart, what was the right thing, but in practice, I wasn’t sure how we were going to do it. And there were times when [some inclusion attempts did not work out] and … I’m thinking, maybe this wasn’t such a good idea. But those … stories are far exceeded by the number of stories where it worked, and where there were … authentic genuine relationships between these kids, and when you could see how … it worked. So I think that … it really comes down to having success with trying, then makes you willing to try more, or push the envelope a little bit more, or say ‘What would happen if…?’ (Orli, Lines 772-783)

Successful inclusion encourages directors and educators to continue including students with disabilities and may even challenge them to try a more complicated type of inclusive experience for students with disabilities. Yael, whose personal network includes people with disabilities, noted that she not only provides inclusion of students with disabilities in religious school but has also become more aware of the inclusivity of other environments. …and it’s not just with students actually, you know. As I get older, I am much more aware of like, sight and hearing and lighting and large print and seating. And like for example, I was instructed a few years ago, never hold a microphone and say, ‘Can you hear me at the back of the room?’ Because if you have to ask … you should have figured that out ahead of time. You should have tested the sound system. So I would say my experiences … both as a director, but also my
life experience, have just given me a heightened awareness of what to look for and never to make the assumption that everyone can do the same thing in the same way. I’m always trying to consider … the different denominators that I’m dealing with. (Yael, Lines 755-763)

Having experiences and connections with people who have disabilities outside of religious school and family values that encourage fairness in education promotes inclusion in Jewish supplementary schools and the community.

**Question 2 Part d:** What supports do Jewish supplementary school directors and educators perceive the congregation provides to the school for including students with disabilities in their programs with their same-age peers?

This question seeks to understand what types of supports Jewish supplementary school directors and educators perceive their congregations supply to them to help include students with disabilities with their same-age peers in their classes and programs. One category emerged from the data. The category was congregational support which focuses on financial support and some of the equipment, accommodations and services they pay for, congregant support and the support that people in leadership positions supply for the directors and educators of their congregational school.
Table 12

*Congregational Support Perceived as Beneficial for Including Students with Disabilities Academically and Socially with their Same-Age Peers*

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<tr>
<th>Category</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
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<td>Congregational support promotes inclusion</td>
<td>Financial support promotes inclusion in Jewish supplementary schools</td>
<td>Financial support promotes inclusion in Jewish supplementary schools to financial support does not support inclusion in Jewish supplementary schools</td>
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<td>Congregant support of inclusion enhances success</td>
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<tr>
<td>Leadership’s support</td>
<td>Clergy’s support of inclusion enhances success</td>
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Congregational Support

There are many ways that congregations can support inclusion in their religious schools. While the participants came from small, medium, and large congregations with differing resources available to them, there were many common supports that most of the participants received from their congregations. The subcategories for congregational support are congregational support promotes inclusion and leadership’s support of inclusion enhances success.

**Congregational support promotes inclusion.** The first subcategory for congregational support is congregational support promotes inclusion. The first property of congregational support promotes inclusion is financial support promotes inclusion in Jewish supplementary schools. The dimension is financial support promotes inclusion in Jewish supplementary schools to financial support does not support inclusion in Jewish supplementary schools. Almost all of the directors in the study stated that they had a budget for their school that they could use to buy supports for inclusion. Miriam stated that she has the ability to choose how she decides to spend her budget.

> I have a lot of freedom. There’s a budget to buy whatever supports I need; if there’s a resource I need or a piece of equipment… [If] I need to buy a bouncy ball for someone to sit down [on] in class, I have the freedom to do that. … But, you know … if I want to budget for a [specific piece of equipment for inclusion], I can build that in [to the budget]. They’re … very supportive in that way.

(Miriam, Lines 725-729)

Orli noted that her religious school committee has raised money for specific supplies that they needed. She stated, “I think that our religious school committee, when we have
needed some things [specific pieces of equipment for inclusion], … we’ve gone to them, and they raise the money for those sort of things. We haven’t asked for a lot of money” (Orli, Lines 813-816). Some of the directors have used their budgets or money from the congregation to hire people to create inclusion curricula and/or for inclusion training. Yael stated that she had someone create a curriculum for students with disabilities and also had a woman who works as a shadow in the religious school and as an aid for her weekday job do an in-service for her staff.

We have in the past, hired people to come in to do inclusion work for us. … and the woman I mentioned, who is the aid, is shadowing one of our students. The congregation has paid for her to do teacher training for our entire staff. … she doesn’t talk about how you deal with kids with disabilities; she talks about how you deal with kids. … what’s a reasonable attention span for a seven year old? How do you break up your lessons so that there are physical components and break times? So I would say, unlike some congregations, it’s not a full time, all the time program. But when I’ve asked for support, I’ve received it. (Yael, Lines 822-836)

Hannah stated that her congregation pays for accommodations for students with disabilities and does not ask for money from a family to include their child in the religious school program. She also noted that she has opportunities to have professional learning, attend conferences, workshops, speakers for information pertaining to inclusion that the congregation pays for.

So certainly financial support. We never ask any family that needs different accommodations or supports to pay for them. We always cover any costs of staff
or materials, or anything like that. So, certainly, that’s a big piece of it. And I’d say also just in terms of support for me, I have an opportunity to do professional learning around this topic if I need it. So I’m really lucky in that respect that I’m able to attend conferences, … I’ve been able to attend … workshops, or speakers who address some of these issues. So … I have my own … budget for professional development, [for] professional learning. And if I were to ever come to them and say … I needed something specific, I’m sure they’d be very open to providing it or letting me do things. … The religious school is a mission driven part of our work. So anything that we need, we can usually find a way to get.

(Hannah, Lines 978-988)

Eve stated that her congregation pays for an inclusion coordinator for the religious school, and that some of their religious school teachers are special education teachers during their weekday jobs. “We [the religious school staff] work closely with [name of the inclusion coordinator]. We also have other teachers that do teach during the week [as special educators]” (Eve, lines 866-867). Eve also noted that their religious school provides shadows for students in the religious school that need that type of support.

Participants noted many types of financial support the congregation provides to the religious schools to create inclusive programs and classrooms. Congregations in this study have paid for some or all of these inclusion supports: equipment, inclusion training, professional development, inclusion coordinators, and student accommodations such as extra staff, shadows, or specialized equipment. Some congregations have also paid people to create inclusive curricula, and offer the director workshops, conferences, and other types of professional development.
The second property of congregational support promotes inclusion is congregant support of inclusion enhances success. The dimension is congregant support of inclusion enhances success to congregant support of inclusion does not enhance success. Inclusion of people with disabilities in the religious school and the congregation is much easier when the congregants believe inclusion is important. Many of the participants spoke about different ways congregants help the congregation achieve inclusion. One way to make a congregation inclusive is to have congregants make everyone who visits the congregation feel comfortable and accepted. Deborah stated that her congregation is a “very warm and welcoming place” (Deborah, Line 1027). Tamar was very pleased that her congregation bought in to inclusion; “[they] got it way before I ever got there” (Tamar, Lines 966-967). She also noted that for the congregants, inclusion “is systemic, not just [in] the [religious] school” (Tamar, Lines 974-975). Most of the religious school directors noted they have asked congregants with knowledge of inclusion questions about inclusion. Tamar stated that she taps into the congregants for their expertise in inclusion. “I do tap into congregants and I also ask a lot of questions [of congregants]. I’m not afraid to ask questions” (Tamar, Lines 1033-1034). Naomi believed that congregants who are the parents of her religious school students with disabilities are excellent resources when it comes to creating inclusive environments for their children. “I think my parents are probably the best resources. Because they’re gonna … tell us exactly what we need to know and how to do things [to help their children succeed in our religious school program]” (Naomi, Lines 843-845). Naomi also said she has utilized two parents to help her train teen classroom assistants.
I have two parents who I’m close with that both work with … kids … in the elementary schools. So I started an eighth grade training program for our eighth graders who want to become aids in the classrooms. And I had these two women come and they did a whole morning with them where they… brought them into classrooms to observe the classroom. And so the idea was to say … if you were a learner that couldn’t do this, or couldn’t do that … how do you think that teacher was doing? … So they have them doing a lot of [observing and identifying issues for students with disabilities]. Plus a lot of different things like, put on these … oven mitts. Now write your name with a pencil … Different games to help them figure it out. So I have people that I can always count on to help me bring that side of it in there. … I think that there’s a lot of people around that are willing to help out and do things with us. (Naomi, Lines 850-865)

Caleb noted that a congregant worked with the director of his religious school to redesign the classrooms. “…we have [a] few… congregants that will come and give their advice on designing the classrooms. That’s actually how [director’s name] did that; she worked with one of the congregants. Really, just sit [sic] down and did all the classrooms…” (Caleb, Lines 563-565).

Within a congregation, there are many congregants who have knowledge about inclusion. Most of the participants in the study stated that they utilized congregants with specific knowledge to help them achieve inclusion in their religious schools.

**Leadership’s support of inclusion enhances success.** The second subcategory of the category congregational support is leadership’s support of inclusion enhances success. The first property of leadership’s support of inclusion enhances success is
clergy’s support of inclusion enhances success. The dimension is clergy’s support of inclusion enhances success to clergy’s support of inclusion does not enhance success. Clergy can support inclusion in many ways. They can talk about inclusion from the pulpit; they can be positive role models when it comes to inclusion and people with disabilities that demonstrates that people with disabilities have the same worth and value as any other congregant, they can create fundraising opportunities for equipment or personnel so the religious school can be more inclusive, and clergy can communicate the importance of inclusion to the staff and the congregation. All of the participants stated that the clergy at their congregations were supportive of inclusion. Abigail noted that the clergy at her congregation were very supportive of inclusion. “…our clergy and, and leadership are … completely supportive of all that we’re doing … and certainly support inclusion” (Abigail, Lines 589-590). Caleb agreed with Abigail’s sentiment and added that the clergy at his congregation are role models for positive attitudes towards inclusion.

Our, our rabbi, our [cantor], the leaders of the synagogue … have a really great attitude towards inclusion, and make sure that everybody are (sic) happy, where they [are] at. … They’re all trying to be showing [sic] positive [attitudes] as … good role models for their [congregational] community. (Caleb, Lines 566-569)

One participant created a religious service once a month for people with disabilities and their families. These services give everyone attending an opportunity to create new connections with other families. The participant stated, “The clergy has supported my [the name of the religious services]. They do [the rabbis lead the service] … on a rotating basis. … and they know that… it’s very important to me… Each of them takes a
…service, so they do three or four a year” (Lines 816-819). Judith spoke of how the clergy in her congregation are supportive of inclusion.

…as far as I have ever encountered, the attitude of clergy … is to my understanding along the same lines, as [name of the director’s] is. … It [the religious school] is open to anyone who would like to participate … we call it [name of the religious school program], but Sunday school. And so I haven’t ever run across an attitude or anything different as far as … [the] clergy… (Judith, Lines 622-626)

Having clergy supportive of inclusive programs and classrooms promotes successful inclusion of students with disabilities in the religious school. Participants noted that the clergy at their congregations were supportive of inclusion.

The second property of the subcategory leadership’s support of inclusion enhances success is congregational board of directors’ support of inclusion enhances inclusion. The dimension is congregational board of directors’ support of inclusion enhances inclusion to congregational board of directors’ support of inclusion does not enhance inclusion. The congregational board of directors often make many of the decisions with regard to finances and policies of the congregation. This means they have an influence on how inclusion is funded and the policies of the congregation surrounding inclusion. Two of the participants talked about the inclusion support they receive from the congregational board of directors. Naomi stated that the board members have been very supportive about her ideas for the religious school. “I think for us the fact that we have board members and people on the senior staff who are open to letting us kind of do whatever we want to do, I think is huge” (Naomi, Lines 619-620). She also noted that
she accepted her current position because they wanted her to reimagine the religious school. “one of the reasons why [I accepted this position]… was because they wanted me to innovate and go crazy and do weird stuff… and so I think that support is even more important than the monetary piece of it” (Naomi, Lines 833-839). Miriam stated that the board of directors at her congregation do not second-guess her decisions about how she creates inclusive classes in her Jewish supplementary school.

So, you know, the board doesn’t micromanage; they don’t ask about, … ‘Why did you do this for such and such [or for] students?’ They kind of go with it and obviously I keep the rabbi and … the lay leadership [congregational board of directors] informed when I need to. But there’s a lot of freedom to just do it. If I need to move the room that something’s happening in so that it’s successful for someone, nobody blinks an eye [they do not have a ramp to access classrooms upstairs in their building] (Miriam, Lines 729-733)

The third property of the subcategory leadership’s support of inclusion enhances success is director’s support of inclusion enhances inclusion. The dimension is director’s support of inclusion enhances inclusion to director’s support of inclusion does not enhance inclusion. Jewish supplementary school directors have a great deal to do with the success of inclusion in a religious school. They hire the staff who may or may not be supportive of inclusion, they spend part of their budget on inclusion aids and personnel, they can provide professional development on inclusion, if they are in a small congregation, they are often charged with the inclusion coordinator’s job of helping the staff create inclusive classrooms and programs, and they create the attitude about inclusion that permeates the religious school. Being an inclusive religious school
requires a great deal of extra work; if the director does not see the value of inclusion, the director will probably not want to put in the extra work and so will not have an inclusive religious school. All of the educators stated that their directors were very supportive of inclusion. Penina noted that her director was very supportive towards inclusion and also to the way Penina chose to create an inclusive classroom. She said, “…with [director’s name] being just, … ‘Do what you need to do,” you know, supporting that way. ‘Do what you think is best”’ (Penina, Lines 680-681).

All of the educators stated that their directors were very supportive of inclusion and worked hard to create inclusive programs and classrooms in their Jewish supplementary schools.

**Question 3: What barriers do Jewish supplementary school directors and educators perceive as impeding the meaningful inclusion of students with disabilities in their religious school programs?**

Question three seeks to reveal the barriers that Jewish supplementary school directors and educators perceive as impeding the meaningful inclusion of students with disabilities in religious school programs and classes. The participants answered this question using experiences within their own Jewish supplementary schools as well as general knowledge of how meaningful inclusion is created. Not all answers in this section refer to the participants’ current religious school experiences. Applying grounded theory analysis with its constant comparison method at all levels of analysis (Corbin & Strauss, 1990), five categories emerged from the data. The first category of student characteristics addressed negative student behaviors that can prevent students from attending Jewish supplementary schools as well as students with medical conditions that
require more medical care than a Jewish supplementary school can provide. The second category, faculty training, delineated how the lack of: education training of Jewish supplementary school educators, knowledge in supporting students with disabilities, and continuing professional development in inclusion can adversely impact inclusion for faculty at religious schools. Clergy, who can be part of Jewish supplementary school faculty, should also have some training in inclusion to help them work with students of all abilities in their congregations. The third category, congregational resources, focused on the physical characteristics of the building that make inclusion difficult and how the congregation’s finances can negatively impact inclusion. The fourth category, communication with parents, described how parental withholding of pertinent information about their child’s disability from Jewish supplementary schools can adversely affect inclusion and some directors’ realization that they may not be serving all the students in their congregations with disabilities in their programs because they have not advertised their inclusive classes and programs. The fifth and last category, beliefs about inclusion, uncovered that there may be a gap between teachers’ beliefs about inclusion and their actual practice of inclusion and how inclusion needs to be a priority.
Table 13

Barriers Perceived as Impeding Meaningful Academic and Social Inclusion of Students with Disabilities with their Same-Age Peers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Subcategory</th>
<th>Property</th>
<th>Dimension</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>Aggressive behavior towards others</td>
<td>No aggressive behavior towards others to aggressive behavior towards others</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Throwing tantrums</td>
<td>No tantrums to full blown tantrans</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>A student who is a flight risk</td>
<td>Not being a flight risk to being a flight risk</td>
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<tr>
<td>Medical conditions</td>
<td></td>
<td>Needing medical care from a professional while at religious school</td>
<td>Needing no medical care to needing a great deal of medical care</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faculty training</td>
<td>Religious school educators</td>
<td>Educator training</td>
<td>Having education training to not having education training</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supporting students with disabilities</td>
<td></td>
<td>Educators with knowledge to support students with disabilities</td>
<td>Having the knowledge to support students with disabilities to not having the knowledge to support students with disabilities</td>
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<tr>
<td>Clergy</td>
<td></td>
<td>Training in inclusion</td>
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<tr>
<td>Congregational resources</td>
<td>Physical characteristics of the space</td>
<td>Accessibility of the building</td>
<td>Accessible to not accessible</td>
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<tr>
<td>Creating smaller classrooms</td>
<td>Having smaller classrooms to having larger classrooms</td>
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<tr>
<td>Financial constraints</td>
<td>Expense of including a student with disabilities</td>
<td>Having enough money to pay for the appropriate staff and accommodations for a student with disabilities to not having enough money to pay for the appropriate staff and accommodations for a student with disabilities</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hiring staff members with specific skills to support the director and educators</td>
<td>Having money to hire a staff member with specific skills to not having money to hire a staff member with specific skills</td>
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<td>Cultivating new funding sources</td>
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<td>Communication with parents</td>
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<td>Not withholding any information to withholding all information</td>
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<tr>
<td>Increasing parental awareness</td>
<td>Publicizing inclusive programs</td>
<td>Publicizing inclusive programs to not publicizing inclusive programs</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beliefs about inclusion</td>
<td>Practice of inclusion</td>
<td>Teachers’ practice of inclusion</td>
<td>Teachers practice inclusion to teachers do not practice inclusion</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Director’s practice of inclusion</td>
<td>willing to do the work for inclusion to not willing to do the work for inclusion</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Attitudes of other stakeholders in the congregation</td>
<td>Positive attitude towards inclusion to negative attitude toward inclusion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Prioritizing inclusion</td>
<td>Maintaining inclusion once it has been created</td>
<td>Making sure inclusion is important to not making sure that inclusion is important</td>
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**Student Characteristics**

The first category is student characteristics. Student characteristics encompass the many traits that make each learner unique. Although there are many characteristics of students, the directors and educators in this study noted specific negative behaviors and medical conditions that could be barriers to including students with disabilities in classes with their same-age peers. The subcategories for student characteristics are: negative
student behaviors and medical conditions that require monitoring by a medical professional.

**Negative student behaviors.** The first subcategory of student characteristics is negative student behaviors. The first property of negative student behaviors is aggressive behavior towards others with the dimension of no aggressive behavior towards others to aggressive behavior towards others. Jewish supplementary school directors and educators are charged with not only educating their students but also keeping them safe in their classrooms and schools. Students who are aggressive towards their peers and staff members do not contribute to a safe learning environment and cannot attend class if they are unable to stop their aggressive behavior. Often directors will try different interventions to help the child change his or her behavior and remain in religious school. Two participants talked about having students with aggressive behavior in their religious school programs and how difficult it was for them to make the decision that the student needed to take a break from religious school for a period of time. A participant stated, “the [student] was physically disruptive and hurting other students. I … think the intervention needed to be much more intensive than what we could provide in four hours a week. … And it was beyond our ability, and it broke our hearts” (Lines 1044-1206). Some directors noted that when they had to ask a family not to bring their child to religious school anymore it affected them, although they still wanted to provide a Jewish education for the student. Another participant said:

… he got physical with another student. And every time we tried something more [an intervention], and he had to take a break from religious school for a couple of months and then eventually we had to tell him, he wasn’t welcome at religious
school or youth group anymore. And, seeing how that... we still were committed to giving him a Jewish life somehow, but we couldn’t have him with his peers and that really affected me” (Lines 618-623).

Students who continue to have aggressive behaviors towards their peers and staff members cannot attend Jewish supplementary school with their peers if they are unable to stop their aggressive behavior. This impedes their ability to be meaningfully included with their same-age peers.

The second property of negative behaviors is throwing tantrums with the dimensions of no tantrums to full blown tantrums. Tantrums, or uncontrolled outbursts because of anger or frustration, often prevent learning in the classroom by frightening peers and staff members. Some children throw things during tantrums. These behaviors can create an unsafe environment for everyone in the room. Two participants noted they had students who had tantrums in the classroom. A participant noted, “This is a kid who … is having mental health issues. A[n] [elementary school age student] who was going into full blown tantrums and throwing things and scaring his classmates. And I think I felt potential danger” (Lines 686-688). Another participant stated that they could not keep a child who had tantrums safe in the classroom. “Unfortunate[ly] we were unable to provide [a] 100% safe space for him all the time due to his tantrums and outbursts” (Lines 636-637). Students who have tantrums and are unable to control their behavior cannot participate in religious school classes or be meaningfully included with their same-age peers.

The third property of negative behaviors is a student who is a flight risk with the dimensions of not being a flight risk to being a flight risk. These are students who will
run out of the classroom or another place where the students should be staying. The student can choose to run around inside the building or can also choose to run outside away from the religious school building. Students who are flight risks pose concerns for safety; both their own and the staff member who is trying to keep them safe. Students who flee from the classroom hinder learning. Since the educator needs to follow the student to try to keep him or her safe, the class may need to join another class in order for them to be supervised. Sometimes students who have left their classroom or building need to be restrained to stop them from running again. Often there are few educators or directors who are certified and know how to safely restrain a student at Jewish supplementary schools. Only one participant stated she was unable to keep a student in their program because the student was a flight risk. “He would … try to run and at one point ran out our door and had to be … restrained” (Lines 96-97). Students who are a flight risk may not be able to participate in a Jewish supplementary school and so will not have the experience of being included with their same-age peers.

However, students who have been asked to leave their religious school program for negative behaviors are sometimes required to stay home for a period of time rather than being terminated from the program. One participant stated, “…I did ask a family to keep their kid home for a period [of time] just because it was… [the child’s behavior] was out of control.” (Lines 61-63). Sometimes students are successfully able to return to their Jewish supplementary school after taking time off and working on their issues. One of the participants noted:

There was a period where there was someone who was having issues where we were not equipped to handle it at that point. But things got worked out at home
and ... things behind the scenes that needed to happen, happened. And ... that allowed for that student to come back and be part of everything. So there was a time where there was ... a circumstance but it worked out, thankfully, in the end.

(Lines 692-696)

Students who exhibit unsafe behavior in religious school cannot be meaningfully included with their same-age peers because they are a threat to themselves or others. However, if the student is able to control his or her behavior at a later point in time, the student can often rejoin their class at their Jewish supplementary school. All five of the participants who reported that they had students that were unable to attend Jewish supplementary school felt very badly that they had to remove the students from the religious school because of the student’s behavior.

Medical conditions. The second subcategory of student characteristics is medical conditions. The property of medical conditions is needing medical care from a professional while at religious school with the dimension of needing no medical care to needing a great deal of medical care. Some directors and educators feel comfortable giving some type of medical care to their students at Jewish supplementary schools as long as they have a medical plan in place for how to handle the situation. Some directors keep an epi pen for their students who may have a strong reaction to a specific allergen and some also feel comfortable keeping insulin for students who are diabetics. However, there are some medical conditions that require a trained medical professional to help the student throughout the day. Unfortunately most, if not all, Jewish supplementary schools do not have a nurse on duty during religious school hours and do not have the finances to pay for a nurse. This means that the family would need to provide a medical professional
for the student while the student was at religious school. Families of children with medical needs often receive some respite hours from a medical professional. However, the parents may choose not to use the respite hours for their child to attend Jewish supplementary school. Only one participant stated that she was not able to accommodate a student because of a medical condition.

I have one child this year that I was not able to accommodate. … [the child] had a [piece of medical equipment that needed monitoring by a medical professional]. And we were not comfortable with it because we don’t have the training [to do that procedure]. And so we said if she brought her respite care worker, a nurse, that sort of thing, it would be okay. And the parents chose not to use those precious hours that they have of care … for the child to come to religious school. But we really tried. (Lines 130-136)

Students who have medical conditions that require monitoring by a medical professional often do not have the opportunity to attend Jewish supplementary school because they need a medical professional to accompany them while they are there. Sadly, they are unable to be meaningfully included in a religious school with their same-age peers.

**Faculty Training**

The second category of faculty training describes the training that Jewish supplementary school faculty have before they accept the job as a Jewish supplementary school educator as well as the training they receive during the period of time that they are teaching at a religious school. Many of the Jewish supplementary school directors and educators in this study believed that a lack of educator training in education, special
education, and not attending professional development can create a barrier to inclusion as
the educators may lack skills and knowledge that could help them maximize the way they
include students of all abilities in their classes. The data suggested that clergy should
also have some training in inclusion as they often work with the bar or bat mitzvah
students and/or teach high school age religious school students. The subcategories for
faculty training are religious school educators, supporting students with disabilities,
clergy, and professional development.

Religious school educators. The first subcategory of faculty training is religious
school educators. The first property of religious school educators is educator training and
the dimension is having education training to not having education training. Although
there do not seem to be many educational requirements to be a Jewish supplementary
school educator, five directors noted that they wished their educators were better trained
and had more skills to implement inclusion of students with disabilities in classes with
their same-age peers (Tamar, Abigail, Orli, Naomi, and Miriam). Naomi stated, “the
truth is our teachers are not … usually trained educators” (Naomi, Lines 474-475).
Caleb, an educator, believed that there are not many licensed or certified teachers who
teach religious school. “There are not a lot of licensed … teachers to come and teach in
this profession, unfortunate[ly]” (Caleb, Lines 617-618). Abigail stated that she would
like better trained educators for her religious school. “I mean back to … teacher training.
I wish my teachers had more skills, and knew more, and I have a few that are skilled but
not enough” (Abigail, Lines 677-678). Caleb believed that better trained teachers would
improve inclusion. “Having more equipped teachers with the right tools in order to deal
with more inclusion in the school” (Caleb Lines 693-694). Yael, a director, expressed a
similar idea in that she felt that not having appropriate training translates to not providing
the best environment for inclusion. “…getting back to the whole training is … not
having adequate training to provide an optimal environment [for inclusion]” (Yael, Lines
1023-1024). A few of the participants stated that not having better trained teachers is one
of the most significant barriers for inclusion (Miriam, Naomi, Tamar, and Caleb). Tamar
stated, “so … the barriers are, we don’t. … There aren’t enough staff who have enough
skills to be able to always be the right teacher at the right place, in the right time. I think
that is the number one barrier” (Tamar, Lines 1188-1190). Miriam summed it up when
she stated, “I think personnel [having well trained educators] is the biggest one [barrier to
inclusion]. You can want to do inclusion really well but if you don’t have the right
person to facilitate, or the right teacher for the classroom, that’s going to be your biggest
challenge” (Miriam, Lines 874-877). Having educators that are not trained well and do
not possess the skills or tools to create curriculum and teach in inclusive classrooms can
be a barrier to inclusion.

**Supporting students with disabilities.** The second subcategory of faculty
training is supporting students with disabilities. The property is educators with
knowledge to support students with disabilities. The dimension is having the knowledge
to support students with disabilities to not having the knowledge to support students with
disabilities. Two of the participants stated that they would like to have educators on staff
who had knowledge about special education and how to support students with
disabilities. Penina believed an educator who was a certified special education teacher
would help make her Jewish supplementary school more inclusive for students with
disabilities.
Well, it would be nice if we could have a teacher that was certified in disability, … not full time but on staff. Even if it was some kind of either push in or pull out. (Penina, Lines 866-867)

Tamar stated that she wanted “more trained teachers; more teachers that are trained in special needs, and more teachers who are comfortable in that area. We’re getting there, we’re just not there yet, but we are getting there” (Tamar, Lines 1245-1246). When explaining her quote, Tamar noted, “I would like all teachers, certified or not, trained in supporting those with special needs” (Tamar, Lines 1304-1305).

Not having educators who know how to support students with disabilities in Jewish supplementary schools can be a barrier to inclusion since educators who have training in special education and can support students with disabilities can create programs for and teach in inclusive classrooms.

**Clergy.** The third subcategory of faculty training is clergy. The property is training in inclusion with the dimension having clergy trained in inclusion to not having clergy trained in inclusion. In most Jewish supplementary schools, there are times that clergy members, rabbis and cantors, work with students. If the student has a bar or bat mitzvah, they usually have the opportunity to work with clergy. Some religious schools have the rabbis teach high school students. As she was thinking about barriers of inclusion in general, one of the participants noted that some clergy members may not know how to work with some students that have specific types of disabilities and wondered if some continuing education in disabilities would be helpful for them. “I would say something that would be great is the continued effort for clergy to have some touches of inclusivity training” (Lines 1027-1028). It is possible that clergy could attend
professional development sessions on inclusion with the religious school educators or seek information in many other ways. Having clergy members who do not know how to work with students with disabilities could be a barrier to inclusion.

**Professional development in inclusion.** The fourth subcategory of faculty training is professional development in inclusion. The property of professional development in inclusion is educators’ professional development in inclusion with the dimension being educators having professional development in inclusion to educators not having professional development in inclusion. For this study, professional development in inclusion for Jewish supplementary school educators is defined as continuing education for religious school teachers on the topic of inclusion or other topics that intersect with inclusion such as differentiated learning or classroom management that occurs during the period of time that they are teaching at a religious school. This education can be a one-time class, a class that meets on multiple dates, or a class that meets for a semester; it can be on line or meet in person; and it can be organized by the religious school, an organization made up of the city-wide Jewish supplementary school directors, the city’s Jewish federation or other entities, Jewish or non-Jewish, such as a community college or university that can provide education on inclusion of students with disabilities in classes with their same-age peers. More than half of the Jewish supplementary school directors and educators believed that professional development or continuing education would be very helpful to increase the quality and quantity of inclusion in their religious schools. When asked what was missing or what could be improved upon to make religious school more inclusive, Caleb stated, “maybe provide more … education or more continu[ing] education” (Caleb, Line 697). Penina noted that
she would like more training on how to create an inclusive classroom. “I just think …
more ideas on how to be inclusive. I think a little bit more examples of lessons. Maybe … kind of a workshop model of… you have a student…[how do you create a lesson for everyone]” (Penina, Lines 702-703). Judith stated “I would love some more … tips and tricks and things; like real things that would help” (Judith, Lines 639-641). Sarah felt that professional development would “be a huge asset” for religious school educators (Sarah, Line 746). Abigail would like to have her madrichim take part in a continuing education program that helps teens feel more confident working with students with disabilities. “…it would be great if more of my madrichim could take part in that program and feel more confident in terms of working with them [students with disabilities in the classrooms]” (Abigail, Lines 678-680). Continuing education in inclusion is a way for Jewish supplementary school educators to acquire more skills in how to include students with disabilities in religious school classrooms. Not participating in continuing education means that the educator is not learning new skills to improve inclusion in his or her class or program, which can be a barrier to inclusion.

**Congregational Resources**

The third category is congregational resources. For the purpose of this paper, congregational resources include the physical configuration of the building and the finances available to the director of the Jewish supplementary school from the congregation. The directors and educators in this study identified areas in some of the congregation’s buildings as well as financial limitations that could be barriers to including students with disabilities in classes with their same age peers. The
subcategories for congregational resources are physical characteristics of the space and financial constraints.

**Physical characteristics of the space.** The first subcategory of congregational resources is physical characteristics of the space. The first property of physical characteristics of the space is accessibility of the building with the dimension of accessible to not accessible. Some of the study’s participants noted that their buildings had spaces that were not accessible to people who had trouble walking, used crutches, a walker, a wheelchair, or had temporary disabilities such as a broken leg (Judith, Abigail, Deborah, Yael, and Miriam). While directors and educators can always change the location of an activity or classroom, when things are changed people take notice and realize something is different; it is apparent to students and staff members that there is a change in the traditional classroom assignments of the religious school. Judith summed it up by saying:

…like the building itself, I mean … things can always be moved around to wherever. But by doing that, already, you know, something is different. So, for me that, that one’s a hard one. … if my classroom is normally here, but this year we have to be in a different area because we need it for accessible for somebody; automatically everybody knows; you pick up on that. (Judith, Lines 681-685)

Some of the congregations had other areas besides classrooms that were inaccessible to students who use wheelchairs, crutches, or walkers. Those areas are: the ark where the Torah is kept, bathrooms may not have all the components to be completely inclusive, the kitchen, and the playground for younger students. Buildings with inaccessible areas deprive students of a truly inclusive experience; it is impossible to be meaningfully
included with peers when the student with a disability is unable to access the same space as peers.

The second property of physical characteristics of the space is creating smaller classrooms with the dimension of having smaller classrooms to having larger classrooms. One way to increase the effectiveness of inclusion is to have more classrooms with fewer students in each room, allowing students the opportunity to have more quality interactions with the educator and peers. In order for that to occur, Jewish supplementary schools needs to have more classrooms available at their school. Only Naomi stated that fewer students in the classrooms would be helpful for inclusion because it would be easier for students to move around in the room and there would be a better teacher-student ratio for interactions with the teacher. She noted that one of her goals is to have “…enough physical space, so I can have smaller classrooms just to make sure it’s easier for everyone, no matter what your challenges” (Naomi, Lines 976-977). Classes with many students in them may not be the optimal environment for creating meaningful inclusion of students with disabilities with their same age peers.

Financial constraints. The second subcategory of congregational resources is financial constraints. The first property of financial constraints is expense of including a student with disabilities with the dimension of having enough money to pay for the appropriate staff and accommodations for a student with disabilities to not having enough money to pay for the appropriate staff and accommodations for a student with disabilities. Four of the participants talked about the expense of having an inclusive program and classrooms. Tamar stated that in her opinion, “I think [the] biggest barriers are always
financial” (Tamar, Lines 1193-1194). Often students with disabilities require extra staff or equipment that can become expensive for the religious school. Yael noted:

…financial, so that is definitely a barrier. If there are specific, perhaps more costly needs to include a child, I can’t guarantee that I have the money. For example, my student who has an aid, the parents pay for that aid. And I don’t know … if they ever asked the congregation to pay, because that pre-exists me. I don’t know if it is the right word, but you know what I mean. (Yael, Lines 1012-1016)

Families that include members with disabilities often pay for some of the therapies and equipment out of pocket which can be very expensive. Some of these families may even need assistance to help defray the cost of religious school for their children. Orli stated:

It’s expensive to have the extra staff. And oftentimes the families who need the aid, they are paying for so many other therapies and programs that they are the ones who oftentimes need scholarship and an aid, and, you know a trained madriach [teen helper in the classroom, singular], madrichim … And so the expense I would say is probably our biggest obstacle in tight financial times. When … things are going great, it’s easier to get … money to help … paying for these sorts of things. But right now especially … with money being tight, I think its much harder. (Orli, Lines 880-889)

Even if the student with a disability does not need a designated aid, the educator often needs an extra staff person in the classroom to support the teacher and all the students in the class. This would require the Jewish supplementary school to pay another salary
which may be more than what has been budgeted to the religious school by the
congregation. Penina stated:

I’m thinking having enough support; it’s really about [being] supported. So if I
have 15 kids that I am supposed to be working with and don’t have a problem
[with any of those students, but] I have one kid that is requiring all my support,
then … I’m taking away from those other kids, especially when it comes to ...
when I’m trying to listen to everybody read [Hebrew] to me. [For] that you need,
you need at least a couple, five minutes … with each child to at least gauge where
they are. (Penina, Lines 765-770)

Including students with disabilities often requires directors to pay for more staff members
in the classrooms. This may be an issue if the Jewish supplementary school does not
have the money to pay for another salary. However, classes without the needed support
may not provide a quality inclusive experience for both students with and without
disabilities and may be barriers to inclusion.

The second property of financial constraints is hiring staff members with specific
skills to support the director and educators with the dimension of. As mentioned
previously in the Methods section, Jewish supplementary schools that have inclusion
coordinators are the schools from large congregations, which may just be a matter of size
and finances. However, all directors and educators would benefit from an inclusion
director at their school. Two participants would like to hire staff members who have
special skills to support the director and educators. Orli stated:

I think if we had a designated special education teacher who could kind of help
facilitate. … Unfortunately, on a Sunday morning, if, … there’s a kid who throws
up, and you’re trying to take care of them and call the parent, and get… and at the same time that another teacher is like, ‘I need help with…I’m having some real problems with…’ it would be nice to have … a partner in being able to kind of help with the integration. I’d like to say that I’m in every classroom every Sunday, but we all know … that we get pulled away for … the problem of the day. And so, just to be able to give… I would like to have a designated special education [inclusion] coordinator who could be sort of the point person to be checking in every week and to be a resource for those teachers at the moment that they needed it. (Orli, Lines 916-925)

Not having an inclusion coordinator can impede the process of inclusion as the director cannot be in multiple places during the day and the director may not have the training to help include students optimally in classes with their same-age peers. Related to an inclusion coordinator, Miriam stated that she would like to have a consultant to help her teachers create lesson plans that will work for students of all abilities in a classroom.

I would love to have, like a consultant who really knew special education who could sit with a classroom teacher when they write the lesson plan. To be able to say ‘Okay, now here’s how this might work for the student with a disability [who needs a fair amount of support]. Here’s how you can tweak it for the whole class to make it work for the student with a disability. (Miriam, Lines 888-893)

Having students with disabilities that require a fair amount of support can make writing lessons a challenge for teachers. Lesson plans that do not engage and appropriately challenge students can be a barrier to inclusion as some of the students may be bored or frustrated and exhibit inappropriate behaviors.
The third property of the subcategory financial constraints is cultivating new funding sources with the dimension of having funding sources to not having funding sources. Finding funding for inclusive programs can be daunting for Jewish supplementary school directors. Congregations, which are technically considered nonprofit religious corporations, must stay within their budget and only spend the money they have. Two participants mentioned that it is hard to find funding for inclusion and religious school directors may wish branch out and begin looking outside the typical entities that fund religious schools. Often, if there is a staff member that needs to be hired after the religious school year has started to facilitate inclusion, there is no money left in the budget. Tamar recalled a conversation she had in the past, “the conversations often … is [sic]: ‘Well your faculty budget’s paid for. So figure it out’” (Tamar, Line 1203). Yael suggested that Jewish supplementary schools need to look to community resources to help fund inclusion programs. She stated:

Having community resources as well, because every congregation, except the super lucky ones, are struggling financially and structurally. Um, there needs to be help from [Jewish] federations, from social service agencies, from nonprofits, from the county. And we need to know how to take advantage of it. (Yael, Lines 1133-1136)

Funding to create inclusive classrooms and programs at Jewish supplementary schools is very expensive and the lack of funding for programs and staff can be an obstacle to meaningful inclusion of students with disabilities in their religious school programs.
Communication with Parents

The fourth category is communication with parents. Parents, directors and educators at Jewish supplementary schools communicate with each other often during the years that students are enrolled in the schools. Although most communications are productive and help students have a more positive experience in religious school, directors and educators have identified situations where the lack of communication with parents may hinder the ability for students with disabilities to be meaningfully included with their same age peers. Some directors and educators also acknowledged that they need to publicize the fact that they have inclusive programs for students with disabilities as they believed not all students with disabilities were taking advantage of the programs they have created. The subcategories for communication with parents are incomplete disclosure and increasing parental awareness.

Incomplete disclosure. The first subcategory of communication with parents is incomplete disclosure. The property of incomplete disclosure is withholding pertinent information which has the dimension of not withholding any information to withholding all information. Most of the directors at the Jewish supplementary schools that participated in this project have created a section in their enrollment form that asks important information about the student’s learning style, learning challenges, and health issues. The forms often ask if the child has an Individualized Educational Plan (IEP) or 504 plan. There are also opportunities for parents to describe their child’s learning successes and challenges as well as their behavior and health issues. According to the Jewish supplementary school directors who participated in this study, many parents of students with disabilities were honest about their child’s abilities, behaviors, and health
issues. However, there were some parents who were reluctant to disclose some or all of their child’s disabilities. Three directors discussed how that lack of transparency could be a barrier to inclusion. When directors and educators do not know about a child’s disabilities it is difficult for them to provide the correct support to the student so that the student is successful in religious school. Hannah stated that if she knew about a student’s disabilities at the beginning of the school year she could have made the experience much better for the student.

Going back to the families, like communication, that’s also a big barrier that if families choose not to share certain things with us or make decisions about their child’s health and well-being that they then don’t tell us about [them] and then it impacts their religious school experience. That can really be a barrier to inclusion as well. … there are a lot of things that I learned … after the fact or they came up three or four months in, and I’m like, ‘Oh my gosh, that makes so much sense. If you had just told me that, I could have helped early; I could have made this better.’ (Hannah, Lines 1004-1010).

Knowing about the disabilities that students have before school begins can also help Jewish supplementary schools stay within their budget. If they know that a student will be attending religious school and needs a faculty member who has specific skills (such as being fluent with sign language or knowing how to use a braille machine) or needing another staff member in the classroom, they do not have to scramble to find the funding for those positions after school started and they have already hired their staff and most likely have depleted their budget. Tamar stated;
Often I need somebody with a specific skill that we don’t necessarily have that specific skill or we have two children who need it, and one person who has it; that’s usually it. And then being able to have the finances to pay somebody to then be brought in. (Tamar, lines 1199 to 1201)

It is also important to know about student disabilities before school begins so directors can choose the students for each classroom, consult with the student’s parents about the student’s learning strengths and needs, and plan learning opportunities that are accessible to all students. As Naomi stated:

So I think… communication from parents, like wishing if they … could tell me ahead of time, we could plan and figure it out. But you can’t, you can’t create an inclusive environment without knowing what you need to include.

( Naomi, Lines 982-985)

Parents who do not disclose their child’s disabilities can create a barrier to inclusion in religious school. It is difficult to provide appropriate support so all students can be successful in Jewish supplementary schools when parents are not willing to be transparent about their child’s needs with the religious school director.

**Increasing parental awareness.** The second subcategory of communication with parents is increasing parental awareness. The property of increasing parental awareness is publicizing inclusive programs which has the dimension of publicizing inclusive programs to not publicizing inclusive programs. All of the Jewish supplementary schools in this study accept students with disabilities in their schools and include them in classes with their same age peers. However, three of the directors did not believe that all
families in their congregations and the broader Jewish community know that students with disabilities are welcome in their programs. Abigail believed a communication plan could inform people that her school accepts students with disabilities. Abigail wanted “a budget to create a communication plan to let people know that we are inclusive and willing to work with families to make sure that Jewish education is accessible to everyone” (Abigail Lines 717-718). Sarah noted that although she has a large school population, she does not have as many students with disabilities as she would expect in her school.

And I want parents to know … So we don’t have many students with disabilities; I … don’t know, maybe 10 or less, which in a large school isn’t that many. And I feel like there has to be more. … So I want our parents to know, as well as other parents to know, that, … we are inclusive and that we are … working towards being more inclusive every day. So if they’re … somewhere where they’re not; they don’t feel that they… they can always come to us and say, you know, we want to try it [attending religious school]. (Sarah, Lines 747-752)

Sometimes parents of children with disabilities do not believe that Jewish supplementary schools would accept their children into their programs. Often parents never ask the religious school director if there is a place in the religious school community for their child. Tamar believed that many parents of children with disabilities do not ask their congregation’s religious school director about having their child attend Jewish supplementary school as they think their child would be rejected. “And I think the third barrier [to inclusion] is … how parents feel about religious school; what they think we can’t do before they even ask if we can do it” (Tamar, Lines 1192-1193). It is difficult to
include students with disabilities in religious school classes with their same-age peers if their families do not know that the school is inclusive and would like to provide a Jewish education for their children with disabilities. Not knowing about inclusive religious school programs can be a barrier to including all of the children in the congregation who have disabilities in religious school with their same-age peers.

Beliefs About Inclusion

The fifth category is beliefs about inclusion. A belief can be described as an idea that a person believes to be true. The subcategories for beliefs about inclusion are practice of inclusion and prioritizing inclusion.

**Practice of inclusion.** The first subcategory of beliefs about inclusion is practice of inclusion. The first property of practice of inclusion is teachers’ practice of inclusion with the dimension of teachers practice inclusion to teachers do not practice inclusion. Four of the participants addressed this topic. Theoretically educators can say they believe in inclusion but they may not always choose methods of teaching that promote inclusion. In reality there may be a gap between their beliefs about inclusion and their practices. Hannah stated, “I think sometimes some of the barriers might come from the staff. As much as they are well intentioned, and believe in inclusion on paper, their teaching style or their approach might inadvertently create barriers [to inclusion]” (Hannah, Lines 991-993). It might be that teachers have a hard time moving away from frontal teaching which does not promote inclusion. Penina stated:

But I could see other people; they were very frontal teachers. So she [the director] really, and even the directors before that, had a hard time because the
teachers wanted to go in and do that old school; teach, read in front of the kids, talk to them, talk at the kids. (Penina, Lines 485-488)

Some of the Jewish supplementary school directors have created specific standards that they want all educators to use when teaching their students (Tamar and Hannah). Some teachers may have trouble changing the way they teach and students with disabilities may not be able learn or complete an assignment because the teacher is choosing to teach in a specific way. Hannah noted:

   It can be a barrier when a teacher says … ‘This is the way we’re doing things and this kid just can’t do it or they’re not.’ When their approach to teaching doesn’t fit some of the standards that we’ve laid out for … inclusion, that can be really hard. (Hannah, Lines 1002-1004)

Educators may believe that it is the director’s responsibility to deal with the inclusion of students or with a student with a disability that they are having trouble with in class because the educators do not have the resources and/or tools. Hannah explained:

   …they feel like it’s my responsibility to deal with the inclusion or to … deal with a special needs kid; that they can’t handle it. Or that they don’t have the resources or the tools. Which I think honestly, if you dug down deeper, it’s really just that they get personally overwhelmed by it. So that can sometimes be a barrier… (Hannah, Lines 993-996)

Sarah believed that some educators do not have a knowledge base when it comes to working with students with disabilities and are afraid to have students with disabilities in their classes. “I think for the teachers … the biggest barrier would just be not knowing
and not having a knowledge base on how to overcome those fears” (Sarah, Lines 706-707).

Teachers’ practice of inclusion can be a barrier towards including students with disabilities in class with their same-age peers if they are not willing to change the way they teach, if they believe inclusion is the director’s responsibility, and if they are afraid to teach students with disabilities.

The second property of the category beliefs about inclusion is directors’ practice of inclusion with the dimension of willing to do the work for inclusion to not willing to do the work for inclusion. Sometimes a director could choose not to put in the extra work it takes to include students with disabilities. Sarah was the only participant who addressed this topic. She imagined how directors could contribute to barriers to inclusion and stated:

But I think … it [barriers to inclusion] would be a willingness not to do it. If I’m not willing to put in that extra work of making sure all the kids are included no matter what, then it just wouldn’t … work. So I think it starts with me [the director]… (Sarah, Lines 707-710)

Directors’ practice of inclusion can create an inclusive school or fail to create an inclusive school. When directors are not willing to put in the work it takes to create an inclusive school it can be a barrier to inclusion.

The third property of the category beliefs about inclusion is the attitudes of other stakeholders in the congregation with the dimension positive attitude towards inclusion to negative attitude toward inclusion. In some congregations there are other parents or people in the congregational community who do not have a child with a disability and
believe having inclusive classrooms will in some way negatively affect the way the rest of the students in the class experience religious school. Two of the participants addressed this topic. Yael stated:

I would say another barrier, and I have seen this, not in my school, thank goodness, but I saw it when my children were in religious school. Um, there are perhaps other parents or people in the community that feel like the child with the disability is a detriment to the other children; the child is distracting or taking up too many resources or, you know, can’t sit still and ‘it’s affecting my child’s ability to learn.’ So maybe there is a lack of empathy in the community. (Yael, Lines 1018-1022)

Sometimes, it is advantageous to speak to stakeholders who are hesitant about inclusion. In those one-on-one conversations, the director can talk about the positive experiences inclusion provides for both students with and without disabilities. It is also important to make sure the stakeholders understand the congregation’s commitment to inclusion. Orli noted:

I think being very transparent about your commitment to inclusion is important … because there are … those parents who will push back and who will say, ‘Well, I’m afraid my kid’s not going to get as much attention if we have to have this kid in the class.’ … And so you have to be able to say … ‘This is what we believe; this is … what we as a congregation believe. (Orli, Lines 512-516)

Sometimes not everyone in the congregation believes that the congregation needs to educate all of the children whose families belong to the congregation. Some people may not want to spend the money needed to include all students with disabilities. Yael noted:
There needs to be more awareness on behalf of the Board [of directors of the congregation], the Oversight Committee, the people controlling the money, that not all kids learn the same way. That we have to make an investment; we can’t just say ‘Well this kid’s too much trouble.’ (Yael, lines 1128-1131)

Barriers to inclusion can be created when educators and directors do not practice inclusion appropriately and/or when other stakeholders in the congregation have negative attitudes towards inclusion.

**Prioritizing inclusion.** The second subcategory of beliefs about inclusion is prioritizing inclusion. The property of prioritizing inclusion is maintaining inclusion once it has been created. The dimension is making sure inclusion is important to not making sure that inclusion is important. While there is a great deal of hard work in creating an inclusive religious school, it is also very important to maintain the program by making sure that inclusion is considered important by the congregation. Eve was the only participant who addressed this topic. She stated:

I think it’s, not so much what you improve on; it’s, it’s just maintaining…making sure that that’s [inclusion] always considered to be important which I think it has been the whole time I’ve been there [at her religious school]. So… making sure that you have the staff, and the … teachers, the heads of the program, the version that everybody’s on the same page, and … making sure that they’re making people feel welcome and included in everything. (Eve, lines 1045-1049).

Not maintaining an inclusive program in a school that has already created one can be a barrier to inclusion. One way to maintain an inclusive program is to make sure that inclusion is important to the congregation members. If they do not believe it is
important, they will not be willing to continue working on the program or pay for needed staff and equipment.

The participants of this study described many different ways stakeholders and congregations could create barriers to inclusion for students with disabilities which included student characteristics, faculty training, congregational resources, communication with parents, and beliefs about inclusion.

**Discussion of Demographic Checklist Results**

**Years Working as a Director or Educator at a Jewish Supplementary School**

For this study, half of the directors in this study were in the early stage of their career while all of the educators were in the mid-career and mature career stages. However, there were eight directors in the study as opposed to five educators. If the number of participants who were directors and educators was the same, it is possible that the number of participants in the categories of early career stage, mid-career stage, and mature career stage might have been more similar. Although this information did not pertain to any of the research questions, Hannah stated, “I spent a lot of time as a religious school classroom teacher before and during my study, my Jewish education studies.” This data suggests that at least one of the directors was a religious school teacher before she became a director. For this study only the years that the directors were directing a Jewish supplementary school were counted for religious school directors; it did not count the years that directors worked as religious school educators or the years that directors were assistant directors. It is unknown if these results are consistent with the total population of Jewish supplementary school directors and educators.
Professional Development on Inclusion of Students with Disabilities

Most of the participants, ten out of 13, or 76.92%, believed they have received in-service training on how to include students with disabilities in their classes and programs from either their supplementary school, the Jewish community, or both. This data suggests that both the Jewish supplementary schools and the Jewish community value including students with disabilities in religious school because they fund continuing education that teaches about inclusion. It is unknown if the total population of religious school directors and educators have professional development opportunities.

Reciprocal Friendships Between Students With and Without Disabilities

All participants stated that they have observed reciprocal friendships between students with and without disabilities where both students were equal partners in the relationship and the relationship was beneficial to both students. From information gleaned from the interviews, the data suggests that some of these friendships occurred naturally through opportunities during religious school and religious school special events while others were engineered by staff members who worked hard behind the scenes to create the conditions for the friendships to occur. The data from the interviews suggest that creating reciprocal friendships is an important goal of some of the directors and educators who work on creating a community within their classes and programs. The participants did note that not all students were able to find a friend at religious school. It is unknown if having reciprocal friendships between students of all abilities is typical or atypical in other religious school classrooms and programs.
**Comfort Level with Creating Curriculum for and/or Teaching in an Inclusive Classroom**

Eleven of the 13 participants, 84.61% were either Very Comfortable, Fairly Comfortable, or Comfortable with creating a curriculum for and/or teaching in an inclusive classroom. The mode, which is the most appropriate measure of central tendency for this question, stated that seven of the 13 participants were Very Comfortable with creating curriculum for and/or teaching in an inclusive classroom. While most participants did not elaborate on how they decided which phrase most aligned with their comfort level, one participant noted that her information on inclusion came from experience and professional development. “[I am] fairly comfortable [with inclusive classes], and if I can just add to that… Because I have learned from experience and professional development as opposed to having formally trained or gone through an academic program” (Yael, Lines 69-73). This data suggests that having professional development was a consideration for at least one of the participants. Ten of the 13 participants believed they have had in-service training on inclusion and that is very similar to the 11 out of 13 participants who have some level of comfort with creating curriculum for and/or teaching in an inclusive classroom. It is possible that professional development programs have increased the comfort level of some of the participants. The data suggests that 11 of the 13 participants, or 84.61%, of the directors and educators have some degree of comfort creating curriculum for and/or teaching in an inclusive classroom. It is unknown if feeling comfortable with teaching in and/or creating curriculum for inclusive religious schools is typical or atypical for the total population of Jewish supplementary school directors and educators.
Ability for Inclusion and Planning for Students with Disabilities

One of the criteria for participation in this study was that every Jewish supplementary school involved in the study has included students with disabilities in their programs and classrooms. Three of the 13 participants, or 23.07%, worked in religious schools where the congregation had an inclusion committee and six of the 13 participants, or 46.15%, worked in religious schools that had an inclusion coordinator. According to the data, all of the congregations and supplementary schools that had an inclusion committee and/or an inclusion coordinator were large congregations with over 750 family units. It is possible that only large congregations can pay for an inclusion coordinator. However, data from this study suggests that religious schools that do not have inclusion committees or inclusion coordinators definitely perceive that their religious school is able to include students with disabilities in their classrooms and programs. This data could be encouraging for religious schools that do not have enough money to pay for an inclusion coordinator or have not created an inclusion committee yet. This data could demonstrate that inclusion is definitely possible without the aid of an inclusion coordinator or inclusion committee. It is unknown if the total population of congregations who do not have an inclusion committee and/or inclusion coordinator would be able to create inclusive programs for their students with disabilities.

Inclusion of Students with Different Types of Disabilities

Directors and educators at Jewish supplementary schools who participated in this study believed their religious school could provide a Jewish education for students with many types of disabilities. The data suggests that all participants, 100%, believed their religious schools could include students with specific learning disabilities, who were on
the autism spectrum, who had communication disorders, and who had attention deficit disorder. Twelve of the 13 participants, 92.30%, believed their school could include a student with an intellectual disability. Eleven of the 13 participants, 84.61% believed their school could include students with visual impairment, physical disabilities, and other health impairments. Nine of the 13 participants, 69.23%, believed their school could include a student with a hearing impairment, an emotional or behavioral disorder, a traumatic brain injury, a mental illness, and a student who had multiple disabilities. Eight of the participants, 61.53%, believed their school could include a student who was deaf and blind. Data suggests that the mean for including hypothetical students with the 14 disabilities used for this study into religious schools and classrooms is 10.71, the median is 11, and the mode is 9. For this section, the median is the most appropriate measure of central tendency because the data is categorical and there are no extreme scores in the data set (Salkind, 2014). Of note, the data suggests participants believed that their religious schools would be able to include many if not most students with disabilities in their classrooms and programs. This is promising for parents who do not believe that their child with disabilities could attend religious school because of the child’s medical needs, intellectual abilities, sensory deficits, or behavioral issues. The data suggests that the participants believed that students with disabilities belong in their Jewish community and have a place in their religious schools. It is unknown if the total population of Jewish supplementary schools directors and educators have the same beliefs about their Jewish supplementary schools.
Discussion of Interview Results

Question 1a Part 1: How Jewish Supplementary School Directors and Educators Define Meaningful Academic Inclusion

Jewish supplementary school directors and educators defined meaningful academic inclusion as being comprised of three themes. The first theme is academics where students of all abilities are working together in the classroom, are engaged and challenged, are learning in the way that works best for each student, are all working on the same topic in the classroom, and students are accepting of their classmates who are different from themselves. The second theme is connections where students are creating a Jewish community through their connections to each other and connecting to their Jewish identity. The third theme is experiences where students are building positive Jewish experiences in religious school. Participants defined meaningful academic inclusion as being a combination of teaching academics to students, creating connections to both their peers and their Jewish identity and having positive Jewish experiences. The data suggests that for meaningful academic inclusion to occur, students could learn Judaic knowledge and how to connect to their Jewish identity through positive Jewish experiences within a community of Jewish peers.

Question 1a Part 2: How Jewish Supplementary School Directors and Educators Perceive they Have Provided Meaningful Academic Inclusion

Participants believed that providing academic inclusion for students with disabilities was comprised of two themes. The first theme is planning for students with disabilities in religious school by creating a plan for each student with disabilities, creating goals and objectives with benchmarks, using the student’s IEP from secular
school as a guide, having each student’s participation in religious school consistent with
the student’s needs, and having the directors and/or inclusion coordinators sit down with
the parents to design a plan for a student with a disability. The second theme was
creating appropriate academic accommodations. They noted that they used
accommodations to help students learn to read Hebrew or provide transliteration for those
who struggle to read Hebrew and using those proven accommodations for students during
their bar or bat mitzvah ceremony. They also use many different types of academic
accommodations in the classroom; some that are aimed at specific disabilities and others
that are just good teaching strategies for all students. Data suggests that participants
believed providing meaningful academic inclusion is comprised of two themes. The first
theme involves creating a plan for students with disabilities in religious school. The
second theme is designing academic accommodations for students with disabilities.

However, one participant suggested a change to the emphasis in this section from
academics to community as she believed that being part of the community supersedes
learning academics, especially for students who may not master the academic portions of
religious school. She believed “all Jewish children are entitled to be included in their
community. And one of the ways is through education” (Abgail, 357-358).

**Question 1b Part 1: How Jewish Supplementary School Directors and Educators
Define Meaningful Social Inclusion**

Participants in the study defined meaningful social inclusion as being comprised
of two themes. The first theme is interactions. Students need to have reciprocal
interactions where they are interacting respectfully with their peers, are connecting to
another person, are enjoying the company of one another and have friends. The second
theme is the culture of the classroom and the school. The first part of the theme of culture is to have students create a welcoming culture where the environment is comfortable and that comfort encourages students to interact with one another, where students learn to make amends to their peers when they do something wrong, and where students have a sense of belonging. The second theme of the culture of the classroom and school is creating an inclusive culture where staff create the conditions for inclusion to occur covertly, the school community is invested in inclusion, no one is by themselves at religious school, and students create their classroom norms and culture. Participants believed that meaningful social inclusion was defined as a mixture of having reciprocal interactions, creating a welcoming culture and creating an inclusive culture. The data suggests that for social inclusion to occur, there should be both a welcoming and an inclusive culture among the peers and staff at religious schools as well as reciprocal interactions among the students. The data suggests that participants believed that in both the definitions of meaningful academic inclusion and meaningful social inclusion, connections to peers, was a theme.

**Question 1b Part 2: How Jewish Supplementary School Directors and Educators Perceive they Have Provided Meaningful Social Inclusion**

While achieving social inclusion can be more challenging than achieving academic inclusion, the directors and educators believed providing meaningful social inclusion was comprised of five themes. The first theme was having a community. They stated that creating a community produces a sense of belonging, that it was important to keep students with disabilities in their community of same-age peers, that when a new student with disabilities that require a significant amount of support joins an existing
class it is essential to prepare the class for the student, that part of creating a community is designating time to get to know everyone in the class, working to create and maintain a community, and that intentional groupings for classrooms help create cohesive classes which encourages inclusion. The second theme is creating inclusive programs where students of all abilities can participate. This can be achieved by using all-school programs, having teens create community programs, and using modality-based learning where all students can participate. The third theme is designing opportunities for students to connect with one another by using classroom seating as a way to provide social inclusion, having students working together and having opportunities to work with every classmate, providing opportunities for inclusion, facilitating and modeling inclusion for very young children by inviting peers to play and teaching students how to talk with each other, creating an environment conducive to inclusion and seeing the potential in their peers, enlisting the help of other students or madrichim to help students connect to one another by creating buddies and making sure no one sits alone, and that it is important to build relationships by creating friendships, allowing relationships to happen naturally, grouping students by interests and being in class together for years. The fourth theme is to control for exclusion by controlling group memberships to reduce the chance of cliques forming in the classroom. The fifth theme is to support an inclusive school community by preserving the culture of inclusion, intentionally maintaining inclusion in the religious school and having positive interactions between the students. Data suggests that providing meaningful social inclusion requires students to have a sense of belonging within their community, to have inclusive programs, to have opportunities for students to
connect with each other, controlling for exclusion (students could not be excluded from groups), and the students and staff need to support an inclusive school community.

**Question 2 Part a: Educational Components Jewish Supplementary School Directors and Educators Perceive as Beneficial for Including Students with Disabilities Academically and Socially with their Same-Age Peers**

Participants provided a great deal of data on which educational components they believed promoted inclusion of students with disabilities with their same-age peers in their religious schools. They identified four educational themes. The first theme is philosophy of inclusion where beliefs about inclusion, both general beliefs about inclusion as well as applied teaching beliefs about inclusion, helped participants create inclusive programs and classes. The second theme is educational process which occurs with a curriculum that promotes inclusion by having flexibility in the curriculum design, flexibility in the curriculum execution, instructional activities that promote inclusion, instructional materials that encourage inclusion, utilizing instructional materials for students of all abilities and preferences, human resources that support inclusion, supplying teachers with appropriate personnel to enhance inclusion, teaching methods that enhance inclusion, and using multiple teaching modalities to enhance inclusion. The third theme is building an inclusive environment through creating an inclusive climate, having a community effort for inclusion, building a culture of inclusion, having an inclusive staff made up of staff members who are diverse in their Judaism, having teachers create inclusive classrooms, having students create an inclusive environment, and having students create academic and social opportunities. The fourth theme is building relationships through creating positive classroom relationships, creating a
community, utilizing non-peer relationships, having positive student-teacher relationships, having positive student-mentor relationships, using special events to build relationships, and building relationships outside of religious school. Data suggests that the educational themes that promote inclusion of students with disabilities with their same-age peers involves having a philosophy of inclusion that guides directors and educators to create inclusive programs and classrooms, creating an educational process which utilizes curriculum, instructional materials, human resources, and teaching methods that promotes inclusion, building an inclusive environment within the religious school, and building relationships among students and staff of all abilities.

**Question 2 Part b: Organizational Components Jewish Supplementary School Directors and Educators Perceive as Beneficial for Including Students with Disabilities Academically and Socially with their Same-Age Peers**

Participants identified three organizational themes that they perceived were important to the inclusion of students with disabilities in their Jewish supplementary schools. The first theme is the director’s qualities that promote inclusion which includes the director’s characteristics of professional curiosity and flexibility, the director’s inclusion standards which encompass both the director’s general standards of inclusion and the director’s specific standards of inclusion, interpersonal relationships, involvement with students, relationships with parents, and relationships with educators. The second theme is the leadership decisions that promote inclusion which includes structural decisions that promote inclusion, curriculum decisions that promote inclusion, classroom decisions that promote inclusion, general strategies that promote inclusion, student specific strategies that promote inclusion, ancillary support for an inclusive Jewish
supplementary school, and programs to enhance inclusion. The third theme is the physical characteristics of the religious school building, building accessibility, and having an accessible building promotes inclusion. Data suggests that the organizational themes that promote inclusion of students with disabilities with their same-age peers are the director’s qualities, the director’s leadership decisions, and the physical characteristics of the religious school building.

**Question 2 Part c: Personnel Experiences that Jewish Supplementary School Directors and Educators Perceive as Supporting Inclusion for Students with Disabilities in their Programs with Same-Age Peers**

Participants provided a great deal of data on which personnel experiences they perceived as significant for inclusion of students with disabilities with their same-age peers in their Jewish supplementary schools. They identified four themes that they believed contributed to inclusion. The first theme is core values which includes beliefs that advance inclusion on relationships between students and educators, relationships among classmates, fairness for all students, equity for all students, attitudes that advance inclusion, and positive attitudes that advance inclusion. The second theme is inclusion training which encompasses formal inclusion training, informal inclusion training, and experiential learning where directors and educators learn from staff members and other sources which included colleagues and students’ weekday teachers. The third theme was career experience where they noted that new educators sometimes struggle with understanding and implementing inclusion but gained skills through experience and time spent directing or teaching in inclusive religious schools. The fourth theme is experience with human diversity which addressed having experiences with people who have
disabilities outside of religious school, experiences with religious school students with disabilities, family values and fairness on inclusion, and having success with inclusion creates the desire to have more success with inclusion. Data suggests that the personal experiences of directors and educators that promote inclusion are core values, inclusion training, career experiences, and experiences with human diversity.

**Question 2 Part d: The Supports that Jewish Supplementary School Directors and Educators Perceive their Congregation Provides to the Religious School for Including Students with Disabilities in their Programs with Same-Age Peers**

Participants identified one major theme of support that congregations provide to the religious school to include students with disabilities with their same-age peers in religious school classes and programs. That theme, congregational support, includes financial support, congregant support, and leadership’s support which includes clergy support, congregational board of directors’ support and the religious school director’s support. Data suggests that congregational support is essential for including students with disabilities with their same-age peers in Jewish supplementary schools.

**Question 3: The Barriers that Jewish Supplementary School Directors and Educators Perceive as Impeding the Meaningful Academic and Social Inclusion of Students with Disabilities in Religious School Programs**

Participants identified many different types of barriers that they perceived impeded meaningful inclusion of students with disabilities with their same-age peers in religious school classrooms and programs. There were five central themes. The first theme is student characteristics that included negative student behavior such as aggressive behavior towards others, throwing tantrums, and students who are flight risks
as well as students who need medical care from a professional while at religious school. The second theme is faculty training which included educator training, having the knowledge to support students with disabilities, having training in inclusion, and professional development. The third theme is congregational resources which includes the physical characteristics of the building, the accessibility of the building, creating smaller classrooms, financial constraints of the congregation which includes the expense of including a student with disabilities in religious school, hiring staff members with specific skills to support the director and educators, and cultivating new funding sources. The fourth theme is communication with parents which includes parents withholding pertinent information about their child who is enrolled in the religious school and increasing parental awareness about accepting students with disabilities by publicizing the programs that the congregation offers. The fifth theme is beliefs about inclusion which includes the practice of inclusion by the teachers and the directors, the attitudes other stakeholders have about including students with disabilities in the religious school, and prioritizing inclusion by maintaining it once it has been created. Data suggests that negative student characteristics, lack of faculty training, lacking congregational resources, poor communication with parents, and some beliefs about inclusion can all inhibit inclusion in Jewish supplementary schools.

**Discussion**

Understanding how Jewish supplementary school directors and educators define meaningful inclusion, how they perceive they have provided meaningful inclusion for students with disabilities in their classes and programs, what educational, organizational, personnel, and congregational components do they perceive contribute to inclusion and
what barriers do they perceive impede inclusion in Jewish supplementary schools is comprised of many themes. Because the questions and sub-questions ask different questions which produce different data, each question and sub-question was analyzed separately.

Data suggests that the definition of meaningful academic inclusion is described by the themes of academics, connections, and positive Jewish experiences. To provide meaningful academic inclusion, data suggests there needs to be two themes; planning for students with disabilities in religious school and academic accommodations. Data suggests that the definition of meaningful social inclusion is comprised of two themes; interactions and culture. In order to create meaningful social inclusion, data suggests there should be five themes which are community, inclusive programming, designing opportunities for students to connect with one another, controlling for exclusion, and supporting an inclusive school community. Data suggests that the educational components of Jewish supplementary schools that promotes inclusion is comprised of four themes, philosophy of inclusion, educational process, building an inclusive environment, and building relationships. Data suggests there are three organizational themes that are important to the inclusion of students with disabilities in their Jewish supplementary schools which are director’s qualities, leadership decisions, and physical characteristics of the religious school building. Data suggests that the personal experiences of directors and educators that promote inclusion have the four themes of core values, inclusion training, career experiences, and experiences with human diversity. There is one theme that data suggests the congregation provides to support Jewish supplementary school directors and educators to assist them in including students with
disabilities with their same-age peers and it is congregational support. According to the data, there are five themes which describe the barriers that Jewish supplementary school directors and educators believe impede inclusion of students with disabilities with their same-age peers. They are student characteristics, faculty training, congregational resources, communication with parents, and beliefs about inclusion.

**Summary**

This chapter presented the findings of the research analysis. The chapter is organized such that the findings of the demographic checklist are listed first and the findings of the interview protocol are listed second. The chapter ends with a discussion of the findings of the interview protocol. The organization of the discussion is that each research question or sub-question is listed and is followed by the themes that answer the question or sub-question.

**CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION**

This chapter presents conclusions that have been drawn from the data that was presented in Chapter 4. It also contains a discussion of the implications for action and recommendations for further research.

**Major Findings**

As stated in the last chapter, because two of the research questions are separated into sub-questions that ask for different information, each question and sub-question was analyzed separately for categories and themes. The major findings are presented by question and sub-question.

Data suggests that the definition of meaningful academic inclusion is described by the themes of academics, connections, and positive Jewish experiences. To provide
meaningful academic inclusion, data suggests there needs to be two themes; planning for students with disabilities in religious school and academic accommodations. Data suggests that the definition of meaningful social inclusion is comprised of two themes; interactions and culture. In order to create meaningful social inclusion, date suggests there should be five themes which are community, inclusive programming, designing opportunities for students to connect with one another, controlling for exclusion, and supporting an inclusive school community. Data suggests that the educational components of Jewish supplementary schools that promotes inclusion is comprised of four themes, philosophy of inclusion, educational process, building an inclusive environment, and building relationships. Data suggests there are three organizational themes that are important to the inclusion of students with disabilities in their Jewish supplementary schools which are director’s qualities, leadership decisions, and physical characteristics of the religious school building. Data suggests that the personal experiences of directors and educators that promote inclusion have the four themes of core values, inclusion training, career experiences, and experiences with human diversity. There is one theme that data suggests the congregation provides to support Jewish supplementary school directors and educators to assist them in including students with disabilities with their same-age peers and it is congregational support. According to the data, there are five themes which describe the barriers that Jewish supplementary school directors and educators believe impede inclusion of students with disabilities with their same-age peers. They are student characteristics, faculty training, congregational resources, communication with parents, and beliefs about inclusion.
Findings Related to the Literature

There were many topics about inclusion in their religious schools that the participants discussed that were also examined in the literature review of this study. Data from the participants suggest that having students connect to their Jewish identity was significant for the directors and educators and was one of the themes for how they defined meaningful academic inclusion. The literature also noted its prominence by stating that creating an identity is important (Christensen, et al., 2009), that Jewish supplementary school gives many children their original source of Jewish identification, it gives them pride in their religion (Schoem, 1983) and parents of children with disabilities believe “children with disabilities are entitled to have a sense of identity as a member of their faith community” (Christensen, et al., 2009, p. 79). Data from the participants suggests that community, connections, and friendship are themes for many of the aspects of inclusion in the study: defining meaningful academic and social inclusion, providing social inclusion, and educational methods that promote inclusion. Schoem (2010) noted that Jewish supplementary schools have an informal hidden curriculum comprised of community, connections and friendship- the opportunity for students to form friendships, create a connection to peers, and build a community- which is important to each student. Schoem (2010) sums it up by stating that the hidden agenda of religious school is “the relational, the personal, and the community” (p. 292). Baumeister and Leary (1995) stated that human beings have a basic need to form interpersonal attachments such as friendships and Gaventa (1993) noted that currently friendship is thought of as an essential component for integrating people with developmental disabilities into their communities. The data suggests that participants value relationships
between educators and their students and it was a theme for organizational components and personnel experiences that support inclusion. In the literature, Schoem (1980) stated that teachers should create strong positive relationships between themselves and each student in the class. He noted that students are aware of how teachers feel about them and students should believe their teachers like them and are concerned about them outside of the classroom. The data suggests that participants believed accepting attitudes of the directors and educators promoted inclusion; when teachers exhibit an accepting attitude of a student with a disability they also model how the other students in the class will accept that student. Having a positive attitude about students with disabilities was a theme of how personal experiences of the staff can affect inclusion. Olson (2017) stated that attitudes of those who work closely with people who have disabilities can have a significant influence on the way others in a particular culture [such as a classroom or school] view disability and people with disabilities. Teacher attitudes towards disability and people with disabilities are important since a teacher’s attitude can make the difference between exclusion and inclusion for a student with disabilities (Olson, 2017). Jewish supplementary school directors and educators noted that it is important to control for exclusion in classrooms by limiting cliques. The data suggests that it is a theme for the ways the participants provide meaningful inclusion for students with disabilities. The literature also states that exclusion can happen in inclusive classrooms and it is important for educators and directors to be vigilant and monitor the words, actions, and dynamics of their students to make sure exclusion is not occurring (Novick & Glanz, 2011). Some of the Jewish supplementary school directors believed their educators could use more training on how to work with students with disabilities in their classrooms. Data suggests
the theme that educators who do not have enough continuing professional development on inclusion create a barrier to meaningful academic and social inclusion. The literature agrees with this hypothesis. Miller-Jacobs (2008) argues that it is important to provide teachers with ongoing professional development activities on inclusion. A small survey of Jewish supplementary school educators discovered that the teachers who took the survey wanted professional development and other learning opportunities to help them identify the learning needs of students with disabilities (Christensen et al., 2009). Martin et al. (2003) noted that the more training a teacher has in working with students with disabilities, the more likely they are to be successful in creating an inclusive classroom. Participants believed that some students will need to have Hebrew accommodations in order to learn their bar or bat mitzvah Torah portion and the prayers and blessings that are used in services and at home for holidays. Participants stated that they use many types of accommodations to help students learn the Hebrew prayers; one of them is by using transliteration where Hebrew words are spelled phonetically using English letters. Having Hebrew accommodations was a theme for providing meaningful academic inclusion of students with disabilities in classes with their same-age peers. The literature also noted that some students will never learn to read Hebrew because that is not how their brains work. In an article by Rubin (2009) who quotes Wendy Dratler, a presenter at a professional development conference on special education, Dratler stated that there is a solution to the problem [of some students who cannot learn to read Hebrew] and her solution is using transliteration. According to Dratler, (as interviewed by Rubin, 2009), many children who are unable to learn to read Hebrew believe they are letting their families down. Dratler stated that once she tells children with disabilities that it is all
right to read Hebrew using transliteration as long as they say all the words, they completely let go of their anxiety. In this study, Jewish supplementary school directors and educators brought up many topics about the inclusion of students with disabilities in classrooms with their same-age peers that were also discussed in the literature review.

**Surprises**

There was definitely some unanticipated information revealed in this study. The first surprise from the data involved the amount of different types of programs there are for teaching students Hebrew in religious schools. During the interviews, a few of the participants described some of the new programs for learning Hebrew and they are very different than how Hebrew was taught previously where students learn to recognize the letters, learn the sounds that each letter makes and then learn to sound out words. One of the new programs has students become very familiar with spoken Hebrew and does not bring in reading until later. However, that is really the way young children learn their first language; they learn to understand words, then to speak them, and lastly to read them. One participant described her Hebrew program as moving from large classroom learning to small group learning where there are no more than four students in a group and the students are arranged by ability. She stated the new program was a positive change for her students. Some participants had good results with Hebrew Through Movement, Onward Hebrew, Shalom Learning, and Hebrew and Harmony. Also surprising was the fact that most of the religious schools were willing to make many different types of accommodations for learning Hebrew, or the prayers, or having an individualized bar or bat mitzvah ceremony. Jewish supplementary schools want to have
their students be successful in learning their prayers and creating a meaningful bar or bat mitzvah ceremony for their students.

The second surprise was that none of the Jewish supplementary schools utilized resource rooms for teaching academics, especially Hebrew. This was surprising since some secular schools use resource rooms to help some students with their academic subjects. Once it was clear that the Jewish supplementary school directors and educators in this study stress the social aspect of religious school more than the academic aspect, it made perfect sense. Resource rooms would remove students from the classroom for tutoring and they would miss the conversations, opportunities to be part of the community, opportunities for inclusion, and the opportunities for connecting with others through working on projects together which could produce positive relationships and could progress to friendships.

The third surprise from the data was how Jewish supplementary schools teach academic subjects such as Judaics, to their students. I expected them to use a program like differentiated instruction, universal design for learning, peer support strategies, or peer assisted learning strategies. However, Jewish supplementary school students do not have to pass any type of exam and there are no standards they have to master to graduate from religious school. Although four of the directors noted that their program uses differentiated instruction, none of the teachers mentioned it even when they were asked how they present information to their students. This does not mean that they do not use it; it just means that they did not use the words differentiated instruction. However, there are definitely components of differentiated instruction that they use in their classrooms. Many of the directors and educators stated they use multiple methods of presenting
information such as using an activity as well as auditory, visual, and kinesthetic methods of teaching when teaching content. One director has her educators present each lesson in four different modalities. When working on process, students often work with a buddy or in groups and students with disabilities can receive support from their buddies or group-mates. Students are given options as to how to express the product of their learning. For the directors and educators in this survey, using multiple ways of presenting information with components of differentiated instruction may be the preferred way to introduce students to new information. This could be a function of the fact that Jewish supplementary schools seem to be emphasizing the social aspects more than the academic aspects in religious school. Often using multiple modalities can incorporate games or activities that are done in pairs, groups, or teams which also fosters interactions and creates community. Perhaps because the social aspects of religious school are emphasized over the academic aspects, differentiated instruction or other best practice teaching methods are not as necessary.

Lastly, it is remarkable how many academic accommodations the religious schools are utilizing for their students. The directors and educators appear to seek out information from many sources to find accommodations that will help their students with disabilities. Directors ask the student’s parents, professionals that they know personally, and professionals who may be on staff at the religious school. Miriam noted that if parents give her permission, in some cases she has reached out to the student’s weekday teachers; sometimes the general education teacher and sometimes the special education teacher. She noted that the weekday teachers are very helpful and have emailed her the visual schedule and classroom rules that are used in the student’s secular classroom.
Miriam believes that the weekday teachers truly want their students to be successful outside of secular school and have been happy to offer suggestions and accommodations.

**Discoveries**

Many of the participants discussed different types of effective instructional and leadership practices that were used in their classrooms and religious school programs with students of all abilities in the study. This was noteworthy since only a few of the participants had any type of formal special education training. Some of the effective instructional practices that participants embraced were positive attitudes towards inclusion, knowledge of inclusive practices, creation of effective learning environments, creation of a culture of inclusion, and accessibility. Some of the effective educational leadership practices were ongoing professional development and successful leadership. Research studies suggest that the type of effective instructional and leadership practices that were used by the study participants contribute to effective inclusion of students with disabilities in general education classes (Ballard & Dymond, 2017; Buysse, Skinner, & Grant, 2001; Christensen, et al., 2009; Hall, Dunlap, Causton-Theoharis, & Theoharis; Kochhar, West, & Taymans, 2000; Kraus, 2008; Martin, et al., 2003; McLeskey, et al., 2013; Miller-Jacobs, 2008; Novick & Glanz, 2011; Olson, 2017; Scharlach, 2008).

All the participants had positive attitudes towards inclusion. They believed that all Jewish children are entitled to be part of their community and Jewish supplementary schools should provide a Jewish education for all the children in their congregations. Positive attitudes play an extremely important role in the inclusion of students with disabilities with their same-age peers. A study conducted by Martin, Ireland, Johnson, and Claxton (2003) suggests that a teacher’s positive attitude towards inclusion
contributes to successful inclusion of students with disabilities in general education classes. Positive attitudes towards students with disabilities also permeate many of the other effective instructional and leadership practices that Jewish supplementary school directors and educators used in their classrooms and religious school programs with students of all abilities.

All of the directors and educators in the study had some knowledge of inclusive practices. Many of the participants learned about inclusive practices from inclusion training. Some of the participants were training to become educators at a university or junior college and were involved in formal inclusion training. The majority, or ten of the 13 participants believed they received some training about inclusive practices from ongoing professional development, also known as informal inclusion training. Some participants stated they learned about inclusive practices from experiential learning where they learned by watching other educators, watching or working with the inclusion coordinator, or by asking their director to observe their classroom and offer feedback. One director would reach out to the student’s weekday teacher with permission from the parents to ask about ways to include the student with his or her peers in religious school. At least one of the directors kept up on the newest educational pedagogy which would include inclusive practices and she would pass along the information to her educators.

Inclusion training teaches directors and educators inclusive practices. It is possible that learning about inclusion is more powerful when religious school educators have the opportunity to learn together during professional development sessions. When religious school teachers participate in professional development together, they have “the
opportunity to learn together, experiment with new approaches and reflect on their impact on students with special needs” (Miller-Jacobs, 2008, p. 130).

By utilizing their knowledge of inclusive practices, the directors and educators created effective learning environments. Most of the participants did not use didactic and lecture-based methods for teaching which may make understanding the material difficult for some students with disabilities (Ballard & Dymond, 2017). Instead they used differentiated instruction, which is an evidence-based best practice teaching method, and multiple methods of presenting information. Both methods promote student choices in how they access the content, how they work on the process, and how they present the product of the lesson. With differentiated instruction and multiple methods of presenting information, teachers design lessons by taking into account the strengths and weaknesses of students so students can understand information through different modalities and grasp key features of the information (McLeskey et al., 2013). Educators also had very positive attitudes towards students with disabilities. When educators believe students with disabilities are different from students without disabilities, they might unintentionally treat them differently. It is possible that educators could have lower expectations for students with disabilities, thus limiting their educational opportunities. Scharlach (2008) found that preservice teachers’ beliefs about students with a reading disability “influenced both the expectations for struggling readers and their explanation for their students’ successful or unsuccessful achievement of those expectations” (Scharlach, 2008, p. 11). Because of their positive attitudes about students with disabilities, directors and educators did not have lower expectations of what students with disabilities could achieve.
The directors and educators created an effective school culture of inclusion of all students. Creating an inclusive culture requires that everyone in the classroom or religious school views every other person as an equal, where everyone’s contributions are valued, and each participant has a sense of belonging. One of the ways to create a culture of inclusion is by having a positive attitude about every child and educator in the class and the program. Teacher attitudes not only impact the way teachers view students with disabilities, they can also shape the way classmates view a peer with disabilities. Olson (2017) argues that the attitudes of people who work closely with individuals with disabilities can have a significant influence on the way others in that culture [such as a classroom or school] view disability and people with disabilities. Attitude and behavior are connected (Olson, 2017). A teacher’s attitude can make the difference between exclusion and inclusion for a student with a disability in the classroom because of the way the teacher and peers think about and interact with a student with a disability. However, positive attitudes from the teacher and the other class members result in an inclusive classroom culture.

Many of the directors and educators who participated in this study believed their religious school was for the most part accessible to people with disabilities. For those who did not believe their religious school was accessible, at least one of them was already working on ways to increase accessibility in their congregation and Jewish supplementary schools. Accessibility is an important part of inclusion; students who cannot enter or navigate in their classrooms or other areas that are available to their peers do not have the same experiences, learning opportunities, and ability to be part of the community as their same-age peers. They can also feel excluded because they cannot
access the space. Ballard and Dymond (2017) argued that not having physical access to a space that the rest of the class can access is a barrier to inclusion.

All the directors stated that they want their educators to have quality ongoing professional development on inclusion. Miller-Jacobs argues that it is important to provide teachers with ongoing professional development activities on inclusion. Ten out of 13 participants in this study believed they have received professional development on how to include students with disabilities in their classrooms and programs. Ongoing professional development promotes inclusion. Some of the educators noted that they would like more professional development on inclusion. Desiring ongoing professional development on inclusion seems to be a common request from directors and educators at Jewish supplementary schools. A small survey of Jewish supplementary school educators discovered that the educators who took the survey wanted professional development and other learning opportunities to help them identify the learning needs of students with disabilities (Christensen et al., 2009). Ongoing professional development can help educators and directors learn how to include a student with a disability both academically and socially in the classroom. Martin, Ireland, Johnson, and Claxton (2003) noted that the more training a teacher has in working with students with disabilities, the more likely the teacher is to be successful in creating an inclusive classroom. Many Jewish supplementary school educators work part time at their religious school, are not teachers during their weekday jobs, and do not have formal training in how to educate students. Professional development is especially important for part time teachers and directors who were not specifically trained for their positions (Kraus, 2008). Providing high-quality ongoing professional development for these staff members that is designed
for their particular job can help them become competent and confident in their roles (Kraus, 2008).

The religious school directors exhibited successful leadership traits. To successfully include students in classes with their same-age peers “requires effort, creativity, and a unique commitment to the success of each child in a program” (Hall, Dunlap, Causton-Theoharis, & Theoharis, 2013, p. 2). Leaders play a crucial role in creating a successful inclusive program (Buysse, Skinner, & Grant, 2001; Hall, Dunlap, Causton-Theoharis, & Theoharis, 2013; Novick and Glanz, 2011). Directors, educators, and parents of students with disabilities believe that administrative leadership and support as well as a well-articulated philosophy and a set of program standards contribute to quality inclusion of students with disabilities (Buysse, Skinner, & Grant, 200). All the Jewish supplementary school directors believed that all Jewish children are entitled to be part of their Jewish community and to have a Jewish education with their same-age peers. Principals and administrators who do not believe that students with disabilities should be educated with their peers without disabilities create barriers to inclusion while principals and administrators who see the value of inclusion for both students with and without disabilities create an environment that encourages successful inclusion (Kochhar, West, & Taymans, 2000).

During the interviews, many of the participants discussed different types of effective instructional and leadership practices they used in their classrooms and religious school programs with students of all abilities. These effective teaching and learning practices as well as effective educational leadership practices are associated with published evidence-based best practice educational methods. It is impressive that
religious schools, that often are not able to employ trained educators, have such high-quality inclusion capabilities. It should be noted that according to the literature, positive attitudes about practicing inclusion and people with disabilities are very important for meaningful inclusion of students with disabilities in classes with their same-age peers. The participants in this study all had very positive attitudes about inclusion and people with disabilities. This might help explain why participants perceived that inclusion worked well in their Jewish supplementary schools.

Conclusions

This study generated a great amount of data about the participants’ perception of inclusion of students with disabilities in religious school classes with their same-age peers. There were many themes, and some of them spanned multiple findings. One theme, including students with disabilities in their religious school classes and programs was extremely important to all of the participants in this study and participants were very committed to the process of inclusion. Participants noted that they often created conditions for inclusion to occur without anyone knowing about all the work they did beforehand. Most of the participants believed that both the directors and the educators were responsible for creating inclusive environments at their schools. It was obvious that the directors put in a great deal of time and planning to include students of all abilities. Some of the directors whose schools were in larger congregations had inclusion coordinators who helped the them. The directors of schools who did not have inclusion coordinators were the de facto inclusion coordinators and performed their duties as a director as well as an inclusion coordinator. None of the participants complained about the extra time it took to provide that service. Miriam stated she tries to find ways in
which students with disabilities are gifts to the class. Yael noted that staff who were not invested in creating an inclusive religious school program may want to find a different line of work. She stated:

If anyone said, ‘That’s just too much trouble.’ … find something else to do for work, right? There are so many… I mean, maybe not now in this economy, but … you can choose to do something … that you add value to. (Yael, Lines 804-806)

One of the themes that spanned multiple findings was having a philosophy of inclusion. The theme was listed many different ways: beliefs about inclusion, philosophy of inclusion, director’s inclusion standards, core values, and beliefs that advanced inclusion. Participants seemed to believe that in order for inclusion to be successful, directors and educators should have a philosophy of inclusion that states that inclusion of students with disabilities in their religious school classes and programs is crucial; that all Jewish children are entitled to be part of their Jewish community and to have a Jewish education.

The directors in this study appeared to have some traits in common: they took pride in their career, they were committed to facilitating the inclusion of students with disabilities in their classes and programs, and they believed all Jewish children are entitled to be part of the Jewish community and have a Jewish education. When speaking about themselves and their careers, it seemed they view having the opportunity to educate children about their religion, help them form their Jewish identity and become members of the Jewish community as a privilege; they were all passionate about what they do for a living. Directors also have to work hard to convince all stakeholders such as staff,
parents, students, clergy, the congregation’s board of directors, and the congregation to buy into the idea of the importance of creating an inclusive environment in their religious schools. It is possible that some stakeholders may have biased attitudes towards students with disabilities and believe they will slow down the education of the other students in the class. Other stakeholders may not want to spend so much money educating just one student with a disability if that student requires expensive equipment or extra staff. Creating an inclusive environment is an expensive proposition and requires more money than just providing a religious school for students without disabilities. Directors have to be able to make a strong case for why inclusion in their religious school is essential to their stakeholders in order to acquire enough funding from the congregation to create an inclusive environment. To include students with disabilities in the religious school programs, directors need more staffing in each classroom, more professional development on inclusion and related topics for the staff, they may need to purchase a different Hebrew education program, they may need equipment such as laptops, I-pads or a speech generating device/assistive communication device, they may require staff with very specific skills such as a sign language interpreter, and an inclusion coordinator. Directors have to convince stakeholders that they need to invest in the education of every child in the congregations; not just the ones who are easy and less expensive to educate.

The Jewish supplementary school directors and educators in this study perceive they have created inclusive programs with high quality instruction for their students. Most participants noted they no longer use didactic and lecture based methods of teaching which make it difficult for some students with disabilities to understand the information (Ballard & Dymond, 2017). All of the participants stated they use
Differentiated instruction or multiple methods of presenting information to students in their classes. Differentiated instruction has been researched and designated an evidence-based best practice for learning information. However, both differentiated instruction and multiple methods of presenting information share many traits in common. Both differentiated instruction and multiple methods of presenting information present many choices for students such that they can utilize their strongest method of learning information. Students have choices as to how they access the educational content, how they choose to work on the process, and how they present the product of the lesson. For both of these methods of instruction, educators design the lessons by considering the strengths and needs of students so students can understand information through different modalities and grasp key features of information (McLeskey et al., 2013).

It seems that each Jewish supplementary school has created its own way to provide innovative curricula, accommodations, and modifications for their students with and without disabilities; that each religious school is in its own educational silo. All the directors and educators in this study are very creative and have designed high quality educational games and activities for their students. Participants spoke of the different educational games and activities they have created such as: Jeopardy, Lego, escape rooms, and original projects. It almost seems that many religious schools may be reinventing the wheel when it comes to creating games, activities, accommodations, and modifications for including students with disabilities.

I would like to start a website where Jewish supplementary school directors and educators could share the personal best practices that have been successful for them for including students of all abilities in their classrooms and programs. This could grow into
a national clearinghouse for Jewish supplementary schools, something similar to the What Works Clearinghouse where different educational programs, products, and practices could be reviewed. If there was one national website, directors and educators could compare programs, products, and practices without needing to go to multiple websites and read reviews from people who have used the program, product, or practice. Directors and educators could make more informed decisions about what they might wish to try in their religious school. This could be valuable to Jewish supplementary school directors and educators. If there is more research on Jewish supplementary schools in the future, it is possible that evidence based, best practices could be determined for curricula, Hebrew programs, teaching methods, accommodations, and modifications. All that information could be available on this proposed national clearinghouse for Jewish supplementary school website.

One of the ways that the Jewish supplementary school directors and educators acquire information on new teaching methods, innovative curricula, accommodations and modifications is through continuing professional development. A study by Martin, Ireland, Johnson, and Claxton (2003) suggests that the more training a teacher has in working with students with disabilities, the more likely the teacher is to be successful in creating an inclusive classroom. The data suggests most directors wanted more staff members who were trained to work with students with disabilities. When the directors were asked what type of support they would ask for from their congregation if money was no object, many said they would ask for training for their educators. During the interviews some of the directors noted that it is very difficult for them to acquire good professional development; many programs are out of town and are expensive.
said it is costly to bring in a lecturer from out of town. It is possible that congregations may have congregants who would be excellent speakers and could provide professional development for their educators. I would like to begin a program to utilize the experts who are members of the congregations. Members who are special education teachers, general education teachers, occupational therapists, physical therapists, speech and language therapists, pediatricians, child development specialists, educators from the local university, early childhood education teachers, technology experts, board certified behavior analysts, psychologists, counselors, or social workers could be excellent speakers. Professional development topics could be on different teaching methods such as differentiated instruction, universal design for learning, peer support strategies, or peer assisted learning strategies, classroom management, typical child and adolescent development, accommodations, modifications, using technology in the classroom and using technology for students with disabilities, information on Autism spectrum disorder, and other topics that would be requested by the educators and directors. There could be a person who would be responsible for finding a speaker once each month. If the congregants are only asked to speak once each year, they may be willing to donate their time or the religious school or congregation could give them an honorarium of a gift card. Often people are very happy to share their expertise with others and the fact that they are helping train the religious school teachers in their congregation may increase the rate of participation from the congregants.

Another theme that bridged multiple findings was social interactions. When the data was analyzed it suggested that participants believed that many of the answers to the protocol questions, even the answer to a question about academic inclusion, contained the
theme of social interactions with others. The theme had different names and was listed as: connections, interactions, reciprocal interactions, community, building relationships, interpersonal relationships, and friendships. The data suggested that for inclusion to be successful, positive social interactions should permeate most aspects of the process of creating inclusive classrooms and programs. Inclusion of students with disabilities in classrooms and programs with their same-age peers appears to require connections to other people. Even the definitions of academic inclusion and social inclusion created by the participants of the study contain some type of social interactions with others. When looking at the data on teaching academics in inclusive classrooms in this study, academics does not seem to be done without some form of social interactions; often academics are taught using games, working in groups, teams, and creating projects with others. Carter, Cushing, and Kennedy, (2009) state that “students often learn best from peers” (Carter et al., 2009, p. 49). Perhaps learning within a community is a better way to learn information. It is possible that students learn better when they are having fun, and learning within a community is certainly more fun than learning sitting in a desk filling out a worksheet. Deborah believed that having a connection to others opens people up to the content being taught, and learning is less stressful because the student feels safe in the community and has a sense of belonging. When students feel they belong in their community, it is a safe place to learn, debate, and be interested in something.

At least two of the religious schools in the study use the morning meeting component from the Responsive Classroom program where students build a classroom community by getting to know each other and having an opportunity to share themselves
with their peers. The Responsive Classroom program is a “student-centered, social and emotional learning approach to teaching and discipline … designed to create safe, joyful and engaging classrooms and school communities for both students and teachers” (Responsive Classroom, n.d.). The participants who used the program believed it helped create positive interactions and a sense of community within their classrooms and religious schools. Naomi explained how the morning meeting works in her religious school classrooms.

I think the main piece [of providing social inclusion for students with disabilities] in the school part is the morning meeting; that everybody has a chance to go through all of the steps of sharing and doing an activity and a greeting. And the idea is that everyone belongs in this room, and everyone has a purpose and something they’re bringing to it. And when you’re gone, you’re missed. … We know that you’re part of the group and part of the group is gone. And that if we’re a chain link … circle, if a chain has gone, it doesn’t matter which link is gone, the chain is no longer complete and whole. So I think that piece helps [social inclusion] and that’s why we brought that in. (Naomi, Lines 413-419)

Hannah explained why she believed the morning meeting was so effective in creating a culture of inclusion in her school.

I think it [Responsive Classroom] translates particularly well to religious school/supplemental school settings. I think there's a lot for us to learn from it. And I think it has a number of strategies within it that … facilitate inclusion. Like having a morning meeting every day; having time where everyone gets to have their voice heard, and to share … to give that kid who maybe needs… no one's
going to ask them about their day, or maybe they haven't been able to share a highlight of their week. … creating a space consistently in the routine where that exists for them. (Hannah, Lines 718-724)

Using the morning meeting to begin each classroom session seems like an excellent way to create relationships and a community. From the information that the students and educators share about their lives during the morning meeting, students may find others who have the same hobbies or they like the same sports, or books, or leisure activities. Having things in common is one way to create a positive relationship that can blossom into a friendship. The morning meeting also has students practice important life skills such as being able to speak in front of people and organizing one’s thoughts to transfer information from the speaker to the listeners. Morning meeting also seems to provide a vehicle for students to understand that they are part of the community and they belong within that community.

Data suggests that for the most part, religious schools are not emphasizing academics as much as they are emphasizing the social aspects of being in religious school classrooms: creating relationships among peers and educators, having a sense of belonging to the Jewish community, and building a Jewish identity. Perhaps because we live in a society where information about Judaism is so easy to look up, directors and educators believe that having a sense of community, a feeling of belonging and positive feeling about who you are is more important for their students. It is possible the changes from having the emphasis of the class move from a focus on academics to a focus on social aspects of religious school occurred because of the demographics of the Jewish community. Years ago, most Jews lived clustered together in a small area. Their
children went to school together, they played together, and it was easy to have Jewish friends and know that you belonged to your Jewish community. Children created their Jewish identity from their family, their friends, their friends’ parents, and their neighborhoods. Currently, Jews no longer live clustered together. They often live in neighborhoods where they are the only Jewish family and their children may be the only Jewish students in their secular school classes. Although they have their family, it is hard for them to build relationships with Jewish peers, be part of a Jewish community or create their Jewish identity in their neighborhoods or schools. The only place where they consistently see Jewish friends and educators is when they attend Jewish supplementary school. Jewish supplementary schools have the ability to give students the space and time to create relationships with their teachers and peers, build their Jewish community, and construct their Jewish identity. Another possibility is that utilizing social interactions is the approach that religious schools have found successful in including children with disabilities in their programs and classes. The definition of the word inclusion actually means you are part of a group. A student can’t be part of a group while sitting at a desk in the same way that the student can be part of a group in a social situation. Perhaps because Jewish supplementary schools do not have any state standards they need to teach their students and do not assign students homework or tests, and so are not tied to teaching academics, they have discovered that using social interactions has increased their ability to include students in their classrooms and programs, create relationships with their peers and teachers, build a community in the classrooms, craft a Jewish identity, and construct a culture of inclusion. Abigail stated her goals as the director of a synagogue school are more social than they are academic. She said, “I guess when I
think about the inclusion I think less about the academics and more about the social” (Abigail, Lines 261-262). She continued by saying:

As a synagogue school, my … overall goals are as much social as they are academic or even more social than they are academic. That my primary goal is that kids go home saying, ‘I really love it at Temple and I want to go back.’ And they don’t get there by what…I think they do sometimes. I mean they get there partially by feeling a sense of accomplishment and having learned something and feeling good about it. But they also largely get there by building relationships with their teachers and with their friends. And I want all my kids including my kids with special needs to have that feeling and want to come back. (Abigail, Lines 264-270)

The data from this research study contained many themes. The themes that seemed most significant were the importance of inclusion in Jewish supplementary schools, directors and staff having a philosophy of inclusion, that congregational stakeholders must believe in the importance of inclusion, the significance of social interactions, and emphasizing the social component of religious school rather than the academic component of religious school.

**Implications for Action**

Since there are few if any known studies on meaningful academic and social inclusion in Jewish supplementary schools in peer reviewed journals, it would be important to make the information from this study available to Jewish communities. Though the study is based on perceptions of the directors and educators and did not evaluate best practices on how to include students with disabilities in Jewish
supplementary schools, it does have suggestions from religious school directors and educators of the ways they have created inclusive classrooms in their schools. Although this information is not generalizable to other settings, it could be helpful for other Jewish supplementary schools if they have similar students, families, schools, and communities to the participants. Religious school directors and educators can use the thick, rich description of the study participants, the students and families who attend the religious schools, their school settings and their communities in Chapter 3 and Chapter 4 to see if their students, families, schools and communities are similar. If they are similar, some of the information on how to create meaningful academic and social inclusion may be appropriate for their schools. Much of the information about how to create inclusive classrooms is not specific to Judaism and could be used by religious schools of other faiths who would like to create inclusive religious school classrooms and programs if their students, families, schools, and communities are similar to those of the participants.

In addition to the students with disabilities, the other students in the classroom might also benefit from some of the methods used by the religious school directors and educators in this study to create academic and social inclusion. The study participants believe they are excellent methods to teach students of all abilities because of the individualized instruction and/or supports for students to learn optimally.

Understanding how Jewish supplementary schools create meaningful inclusive classrooms so students of all abilities can comprehend the curriculum and participate in social activities with their peers could be very useful for religious school educators. Most of the directors believed that many of their educators do not have enough inclusion
training. Utilizing some of the information in this study, religious school directors could
design continuing education programs for their educators.

Building an inclusive community within the classroom where all students are
viewed as equal members of the community and encouraging friendships between
students with and without disabilities could help students with disabilities find jobs when
they become adults. When students attend Jewish supplementary school classes with
peers of all abilities and view their peers as equals, they have the opportunity to get to
know each other, spend time together, create positive memories with each other, and
realize that they may have common interests. These opportunities could contribute to
creating life-long friendships. By creating friendships, inclusive classrooms could
generate friendship networks which may help students with disabilities find jobs as
adults. According to Flexer, Baer, Luft, and Simmons (2013) “…research indicates that
self-friend-family networks account for more than 80 percent of the jobs obtained by
students [with disabilities] after graduation [from high school]” (p. 194). Another way
inclusive classrooms may contribute to helping people with disabilities find jobs is that
after having successful relationships with people who have disabilities in religious
school, employers may choose to hire people with disabilities for jobs in their companies.

Finding employment is important for people with disabilities as they have a higher
unemployment rate when compared with people who do not have a disability. From
information gathered in 2018, the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics reported that the
employment-population ratio- the proportion of the population that is employed- for
people with disabilities was 19.1 percent. This is a much lower rate than the
employment-population ratio for people who do not have a disability which was 65.9

There are two programs that I will begin designing immediately. The first program will be a website where Jewish supplementary school directors and educators could share their personal best practices that have been successful for them in including students of all abilities in their classrooms and programs. This could grow into a national clearinghouse for Jewish supplementary schools, something similar to the What Works Clearinghouse where different educational programs, products, and practices could be reviewed. Directors and educators could also post information on commercial education programs that have been successful for their religious school such as the Hebrew programs they are using. If researchers begin to study Jewish supplementary schools, it is possible that studies could be designed to discover evidence based, best practice methods for academic and social inclusion of students with disabilities in religious school classrooms with their same-age peers.

The second program would be to find speakers for professional development for my congregation. By utilizing congregation members who have expertise in special education topics, teaching methods for students of all abilities, creating a classroom community, creating inclusive classrooms, classroom management, typical childhood development, creating lesson plans, and other areas of interest to the directors and educators, the religious school could have high quality professional development. If that is successful I could help other congregations set up a similar program for their congregations.
Limitations of the Study

This study had limitations. One limitation was that although the participants lived in different cities in the United States, not all areas of the country were represented in this study. There were some areas that were over-represented while there were no participants from the northeast area of the country. This did not create a true representation of how students were included in their Jewish supplementary schools throughout the United States.

Another limitation is the size of the study which only included 13 participants: 8 directors and 5 educators out of the hundreds of Jewish supplementary school directors and educators throughout the United States. Although the information gathered was rich and diverse, because there were not many participants, there is a great deal that is still unknown about how Jewish supplementary schools create inclusive classrooms. It is also unknown whether the beliefs, attitudes, teaching methods, and commitment to inclusion of the directors and educators who participated in the study were typical or atypical of Jewish supplementary school directors and educators in the United States since all of these participants have students with disabilities enrolled in their Jewish supplementary schools.

Some of the directors talked about their lack of knowledge in how to evaluate the instructional practices that are used in their Jewish supplementary schools. They seemed to be unsure as to what they should be looking for when they evaluate instructional practices. One important question is what do the directors believe should be the focus of their assessment when evaluating the instructional practices that their educators are using? There could be many topics that they could evaluate: Judaic knowledge, reading
Hebrew prayers, Jewish identity, feeling they are part of the congregational Jewish community, ability to create friendships, and change and/or quality of their social interactions with their same-age peers and educators in religious school. This could be a question for future research.

This was a qualitative study that was based on a constructivist world view where the objective was to understand how Jewish supplementary school directors and educators built subjective meanings from their experiences in creating an inclusive classroom and school. Although the study provided a great deal of subjective information, in order to have a more complete understanding of how Jewish supplementary schools create inclusive classrooms and programs, it would be helpful to assess student achievement and conduct direct observation of student behavior. Future research should consider including the variables of student achievement and direct observation of student behavior. Gathering data on student achievement and having the researcher directly observe student behavior in Jewish supplementary schools could provide a more complete picture of the effectiveness and challenges of inclusion in religious schools. This could be examined in future research.

It is also possible some directors and educators chose not to participate in the study because they do not provide inclusive classrooms for their religious school students with disabilities or they do not feel comfortable with the type of inclusion they are providing for students with disabilities. This left gaps in the data that was gathered during the interviews. Because all of the Jewish supplementary schools were providing inclusion for their students with disabilities, this study may falsely indicate that a higher
percentage of Jewish supplementary schools have inclusive classrooms when in reality, that may not be the case.

A final limitation was not including information from the students with disabilities or their parents in the study. Meaningful inclusion is really best judged by those involved in the inclusive experience which would include not only the directors and educators, but also the students and their parents. This study did not address what the students and parents desired in an inclusive supplementary school experience. What is considered inclusive to one person may not be considered inclusive to another person. While Jewish supplementary school directors and educators may believe they were providing an inclusive and meaningful experience for students with disabilities, it may not be what the students or parents wanted from their supplementary school experience. This could be a topic of future research.

It must be noted that also included within the limitations of this study was that the results would not necessarily be what was happening in all Jewish supplementary schools, but rather only what was happening within the sample.

**Recommendations for Further Research**

**Larger sample size.** One improvement for this study would be to have a larger sample size, although the amount of data generated would be cumbersome. All the participants in this study were very positive about and invested in providing meaningful academic and social inclusion for students with disabilities. It is unknown if these directors and educators are typical or atypical in their beliefs about and practices of inclusion for students with disabilities in Jewish supplementary schools. One of the criteria for inclusion in this study was that all participants needed to work for a Jewish
supplementary school that accepted students with disabilities in their school. This automatically excluded all schools who do not accept students with disabilities in their programs. However, it is unknown if there are Jewish supplementary schools that are unable to accept students with disabilities. It would be important to understand if all Jewish religious schools accept students with disabilities or if there are religious schools who do not accept students with disabilities. Conducting a larger study may help answer this question.

**Selection bias.** The participants were definitely biased towards having positive beliefs and attitudes towards inclusion. Because I wanted to understand how students with disabilities were included in their Jewish supplementary schools, one of the criteria for inclusion in the study was that the religious school accepted students with disabilities. While this criteria gave me very rich information about inclusion in those religious schools, the participants may not represent the total population of Jewish supplementary school directors and educators when it comes to attitudes and beliefs about inclusion, providing inclusion to students with disabilities, and whether or not the congregation has an inclusion committee or the religious school has an inclusion coordinator. Because the directors in the study were so positive about inclusion, they may have strongly encouraged their congregations to create inclusion committees and/or hire inclusion coordinators. Unfortunately, there is no information on how many Jewish congregations and supplementary schools have inclusion committees and/or inclusion coordinators. In an undated article by Winer, Aron, and Perman, they note that some congregations in the Reform branch of Judaism have a “growing awareness of learners with disabilities” (p. 10) and found that at least eight congregations had hired inclusion specialists and four
more were in the process of hiring inclusion specialists when their article was published. That is a very small percentage of Reform congregations as there are 845 congregations affiliated with the Reform branch of Judaism in the United States (Wikipedia, 2021, p. 1). Because there is no date on the article by Winer, Aron and Perman, it is unknown how recently their information was gathered. Conducting more research in the future and asking questions about whether the congregation has an inclusion committee and the religious school has an inclusion coordinator may provide a more realistic snapshot about inclusion in Jewish supplementary schools at this point in time.

**My Future Research**

The next steps in understanding meaningful inclusion for students with disabilities in Jewish supplementary schools would be to study how students with disabilities and their parents would design meaningful participation in inclusive classes within Jewish supplementary schools. Ideally, there would be two studies; one from the students’ perspective and one from the parents’ perspective. It is possible that students and parents may make different choices as to how they would like the student included in a classroom with same-age peers. It is also possible that what students and their parents choose may depend on the characteristics of the student with a disability. I plan to move forward with these studies on students with disabilities and their parents in the near future. I would like to triangulate the information from the three studies (the directors and educators, the students with disabilities, and the parents of students with disabilities) to ascertain what is desired by all stakeholders (students, parents, directors and educators) to help create inclusive programs and classes in Jewish supplementary schools such that the students
with disabilities and their parents can choose how they wish to be meaningfully included in their religious school educational program.

I would like to conduct a phenomenological study looking for the essence of the experiences for students with disabilities in religious school. I am interested in what the experience is like for them. This could be linked with studying meaningful inclusion from the students’ point of view; how they were included and what they would like inclusion to look like for them.

I am interested in knowing how students with disabilities currently receive their Jewish education throughout the United States. This would require using a survey that would be distributed nationally to find out information about how students are included in Jewish supplementary schools and to see if there are different patterns and trends in the way students with disabilities are included in their religious schools for:

a. The different branches of Judaism that have religious schools (Reform, Conservative, and Reconstructionist). Is there a pattern or trend in the way each branch of Judaism educates students with disabilities?

b. Whether the congregations are large or small. Does congregation size have anything to do with the trends and patterns in how inclusion is created for small, medium, and large congregations?

c. The geographic area of the country. Are there trends and patterns depending on which part of the country the congregation is located in?

I would like to study effective academic models of instruction and models for increasing socialization among students with and without disabilities in their Jewish supplementary schools. Since all students acquire information and socialize differently,
there may be specific academic and socialization models that could work with specific types of learners. This study could be accomplished by using the variables of assessing student achievement and direct observation of behavior. Included in this study could be an evaluation of instructional practices that Jewish supplementary school directors and educators are using in their inclusive classrooms.

I am very interested in how Jewish supplementary schools help young people create a Jewish identity for themselves as well as studying the intersectionality of being a person belonging to two different minority groups; being Jewish and having a disability. Is there a primary identity of a person who is Jewish and also has a disability or are both equally important? Are there patterns and trends?

I would like to study the outcomes of Jewish students with disabilities who graduated from a religious school program and are now 18 years of age or older; are they connected to a Jewish community after they were confirmed from their religious school, were they able to form lasting friendships with classmates of all abilities from their religious school class, did they form a strong Jewish identity, do they celebrate some of the Jewish holidays, do they attend some services at a synagogue or temple, if they have a partner, is the partner Jewish?

**Concluding Remarks**

This chapter included a summary of the research study, findings related to the literature, surprises, and conclusions that were drawn from the data that was included in chapter 4. It also contains a discussion of the implications for action, recommendations for further research, and further research that I would like to begin.
While there were many themes revealed during this study, some of the most dominant were that inclusion was very important to the participants of the study and they were committed to the process of including students with disabilities in religious school classes with their same-age peers. The participants noted that having a philosophy of inclusion that states the importance of inclusion was extremely important for inclusion to be successful. All congregational stakeholders (students, parents, religious school directors and educators, clergy, the congregation’s board of directors and the congregation) must support inclusion for it to be successful at the congregation’s religious school. The Jewish supplementary school directors and educators noted that social interaction was the most pervasive trait of inclusion in that it was a theme in most of the answers to the research questions. It appears in order for inclusion to be successful in the classrooms and programs, there must be connections, social interactions, and a sense of belonging to a community. Also revealed in the data was the theme that Jewish supplementary schools emphasize the social component in the classroom more than the academic component in the classroom to promote inclusion.

Conducting this study has been a gift in so many ways. I had the opportunity to learn so much from the Jewish supplementary school directors and educators who agreed to be interviewed and I am very thankful for their participation. I hope that others will begin to study Jewish supplementary schools as they are one of the ways the Jewish community is enculturating the next generation of Jewish adults.

The world includes people of many different abilities, and classes in Jewish supplementary schools should reflect that diversity. Inclusive education ensures that all students learn that belonging in the classroom is a right and not a privileged status that
needs to be earned (Kunc, 1992). Orli believes that every Jewish child has the right to attend the Jewish supplementary school at their congregation and be part of the Jewish community. She stated:

We had one student who had multiple disabilities … and the teacher said, ‘You know, I’m wondering if he’s actually getting anything out of it, right?’ Because … he was … nonverbal, in a wheelchair. And … my response was, ‘I don’t think that that’s for us to decide. Now, if you talk to the child’s mother, she would say that he … knows when they’re driving up. He knows when they are [here] … In the way that … a mother knows that…he’s happy to be here.’ I also think that it’s really … good to show the typical kids … that Jews come in all shapes, sizes, and abilities. And if we can’t … bring them into our religious school classrooms and normalize that that child has just as much of a right to be here as any other child. And that’s not up to us to decide if they’re getting anything out of it. (Orli, Lines 250-259)

“We do not ‘do’ inclusion ‘for’ people with disabilities. Rather, it is incumbent upon us to figure out how all the things we do can be inclusive” (Lisa Friedman, n.d.)
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http://ebi.missouri.edu/?p=972


Thank you so much for participating in this interview. The interview is part of a dissertation project whose purpose is to better understand the topic of inclusion of students with disabilities in Jewish supplementary schools.

Your confidentiality will be respected and protected. To protect your privacy, the following measures will ensure that no one will learn your identity or be able to connect you to any information that you may reveal during the interview.

No real names will be used when transcribing the audio recording or in writing up the study. Any identifying names will be fictional and the fictional names will not share the first letter with your real name.

Your personal characteristics such as the city in which you reside, your age, and race will not be used in this study. For the analysis of the data, your comments may be grouped with participants who have your training and/or have been teaching or directing for around the same amount of years as you.

The audio recordings will only be reviewed in my home and in the office of my dissertation advisor and I will transcribe the tapes.

The recordings and notes will be kept in a locked file cabinet in my home; there is only one key which I will have. The information that is on my computer is protected by a password and any external hard drive or zip drive that is used to back up the computer information will also remain locked up in the file cabinet except when they are being used.
The recordings and notes will be destroyed after the dissertation is finished and the report of this research has been accepted for publication (Sieber, 1992).

While there may be no immediate benefits for you from contributing to this research study, it will increase the knowledge in the field about the inclusion of students with disabilities attending Jewish supplementary schools.

This interview will utilize the definition of disability that is used in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) to define students in Jewish supplementary schools who would benefit from special education and/or related services. According to IDEA 2004, a student with a disability is a student who has been evaluated through a nondiscriminatory evaluation and is determined to have:

- Intellectual disability, a hearing impairment (including deafness), a speech or language impairment, a visual impairment (including blindness), a serious emotional disturbance,
- an orthopedic impairment, autism, a traumatic brain injury, an other health impairment, a specific learning disability, deaf-blindness, or multiple disabilities, and who by reason thereof, needs special education and related services. (U. S. Department of Education, n.d. p. 1)

Q-1: Briefly, tell me about your student demographics in your school or class.

P-1: Tell me what you believe your students enjoy most about attending religious school.
P-2: Tell me about your criteria for accepting students with disabilities into your religious school program.

P-3: Do parents let you know if their student has disabilities?

P-4: Tell me how you educate students with disabilities.

P-5: Tell me where you educate students with disabilities.

Q-2: Tell me about how you provide academic inclusion for students with disabilities in your Jewish supplementary school or class with their same-age peers.

P-1: Tell me how you present information to all of your students.

P-2: Tell me how your students can demonstrate their knowledge of the information that you taught them.

P-3: Tell me how you keep your students engaged with the information you are teaching.

P-4: Tell me your definition of meaningful academic inclusion.

Q-3: Tell me how you provide social inclusion for students with disabilities in your Jewish supplementary school or class with their same-age peers.

P-1: Tell me about the social opportunities available in your school or classroom.

P-2: Tell me how you encourage social interactions among students of all abilities.

P-3: Tell me about your definition of meaningful social inclusion.

P-4: How does meaningful social inclusion tie into Jewish identity?
Q-4: There are many different types of educational components used in Jewish supplementary schools. They can include: teaching methods; curricula; instructional activities; instructional materials; and field trips. Tell me which educational components you believe are beneficial for including students academically and socially with their same-age peers in your supplementary school program or class.

Q-5: Tell me about a successful inclusive occasion in your program or classroom.

P-1: Tell me how you knew it was successful?

P-2: Tell me about what made it successful?

Q-6: There are many types of organizational components that can support inclusion in Jewish supplementary schools. Organizational components can include: decisions directors make that impact teachers and instruction; directors’ leadership style; and physical barriers within the building. Tell me which organizational components support inclusion for students with disabilities in your supplementary school program or class.

P-1: Tell me about a decision your director (or you if participant is a director) made that impacted inclusion of students with disabilities in your program or classroom.

P-2: Tell me about the leadership style of your director (or your leadership style if the participant is a director).

P-3: Tell me how that style impacts inclusion of students with disabilities in your program or classroom?
P-4: Tell me about the accessibility of your building. How does that impact the inclusion of students with disabilities in your program or classroom.

P-5: Tell me which areas in the building students with disabilities are not able to access or utilize?

Q-7: People have many experiences throughout their lives. Tell me about your experiences that have influenced you when it comes to inclusion of students with disabilities in your program or classroom.

P-1: A belief can be described as an idea that a person believes to be true. Tell me how beliefs affect the way you include students with disabilities in your program or classroom.

P-2: Tell me whether you support or do not support this statement: “All Jewish children are entitled to a Jewish education.” Why?

P-3: An attitude can be described the way a person thinks about others or objects. These thoughts allow the person to make decisions and behave in a certain way. Tell me how attitudes can impact the way you include students with disabilities.

P-4: Tell me about your training. How does your training affect the way you include students with disabilities in your program or classroom?

P-5: Tell me how many years you have been teaching. Tell me how that impacts the way you include students with disabilities in your program or classroom.

P-6: Tell me about your experiences with inclusion. How does that affect how you include students with disabilities in a your program or classroom.
P-7: Tell me about your experiences with people who have disabilities outside a school setting. How does that influence the way you include students with disabilities in your program or classroom?

Q-8: There are many types of supports a congregation can provide to help include students with disabilities into its religious school. Some examples could be: monetary, staff, clergy’s attitudes about inclusion, congregation members with expertise in special education, occupational therapy, physical therapy, and speech and language pathology. Tell me about the supports that the congregation provides to your Jewish supplementary school which impact the inclusion of students with disabilities.

P-1: Tell me what type of support you would ask the congregation for to increase the amount of inclusion of students with disabilities in religious school

Q-9: (For Directors) Tell me about the educators that work at your Jewish supplementary school.

P-1: Tell me about your religious school’s criteria for hiring educators.

P-2: Tell me about the professional development/in-service your teachers receive.

P-3: Have your educators expressed a desire to have specific topics for their professional development/in-service programs and if so, what have they requested?
(For Educators) Tell me about any type of professional development/in-service that you would like to attend to support you in creating and implementing an inclusive classroom?

Q-10: Tell me about your religious school inclusion curriculum.

P-1: Tell me about the overarching program for inclusion that is carried throughout all classrooms and activities connected to the school.

P-2: Tell me how you create a welcoming attitude for all students within the religious school and the classrooms.

(For Directors) P-3: Tell me about the information you want all students to know and understand when they graduate from your program?

Q-11: What do you believe helps facilitate the inclusion of students with disabilities with their same age peers?

Q-12: There are many types of barriers for inclusion of students with disabilities in Jewish supplementary schools. Some examples could be: financial, personnel, attitudes, physical barriers, etc. Tell me about the barriers for educating students with disabilities in your religious school.

P-1: Tell me whether there have been students with disabilities that your school was not equipped to educate.

P-2: For those children, tell me what would your school have needed to educate them?
Q-13: Tell me how you evaluate your religious school program for success and effectiveness.

Q-14: What do you believe parents of children with disabilities want out of a Jewish religious school program?

Q-15: What do you believe the purpose of religious school is?

Q-16: Tell me what you believe is missing or could be improved to make your supplementary school more inclusive for students with disabilities.

Q-17: Is there anything else you would like to tell me?
Appendix B

Demographic Checklist

Demographics: Please fill in the blank or circle the response that applies to each question.

What is your position at the supplementary school?
Director          Educator           Other ___________________________________________

With what denomination does your congregation identify? Please circle the response that applies.
Orthodox          Conservative          Reform          Reconstructionist          Jewish Renewal Movement
Other ___________________________________________

In which state, within the United States, is your congregation located?

What size is your congregation? Please circle the response that applies.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Size</th>
<th>Families</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Up to 249</td>
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<tr>
<td>250 to 499</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>500 to 799</td>
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</table>

1. How many years have you been teaching or directing at a Jewish religious school?

2. If you graduated from college or are attending college currently, what is/was your major?

3. Within the classroom, do students of all abilities have reciprocal friendships? Reciprocal friendships are friendships that are mutually beneficial for both parties; it is not a helper-helpee relationship. Please circle the response that applies to your program.

   Yes                  No                  Don’t Know/Not Sure
4. Does your school or the Jewish community have professional development on inclusion of students who have disabilities? Please check the response that applies to your program.

   Yes   No   If so, who sponsors it?  Religious School  Jewish Community

5. What is your comfort level with creating a curricula for and/or teaching in an inclusive classroom? Please circle the response that comes the closest to your feelings.

   Very Comfortable  Fairly Comfortable  Somewhat Comfortable  Not Comfortable  Don’t Know/Not Sure

6. Does your school have an overarching program for inclusion that is carried throughout all classrooms and activities connected to the school? Please circle the response that applies to your program.

   Yes   No

7. What types of disabilities can you accommodate in your supplementary school program? Please check all responses that apply to your program.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Disability</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Specific learning disability</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visual impairment including blindness</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hearing loss/impairment including deafness</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Autism spectrum disorder including what was previously called Asperger’s disorder</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical disabilities/Orthopedic impairment including students who use wheelchairs</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Intellectual disability</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Communication disorder/Speech or language impairment</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional or Behavioral disorder</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Traumatic brain injury</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Mental Illness</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Deaf-blindness</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Multiple disabilities</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other health impairment (i.e. asthma, diabetes, epilepsy, a heart condition, etc.)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

8. Does your congregation have an Inclusion Committee?
9. Does your school have an inclusion coordinator?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Don’t Know/Not Sure</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
Hi Ms./Mr. ______________________,

My name is Zeena Goldenberg and I am working on my doctoral degree in special education at the University of Missouri St. Louis (UMSL.) I am looking for participants to interview for my doctoral dissertation which is on how Jewish supplementary schools include students with disabilities in their classrooms and schools. For my research, I am interviewing the director of the religious school as well as a classroom educator from each participating school. The interview takes approximately 90 minutes and because of social distancing, it is accomplished through Skype. I have taught religious school for about 19 years and am very interested in how religious schools approach inclusion of students with disabilities in their programs and classrooms.

I am very appreciative of my participants' time and each interviewee will receive a $25.00 gift certificate from Amazon for participating in the study. I also place a great deal of emphasis on confidentiality. I transcribe the interviews myself and participants' identities are disguised if one of their quotes is used in the study.

Thank you so much for considering participating in this research study. If you would like more information or to set up an interview, please call me at XXX-XXX-XXXX or email me at zfgoldenberg@gmail.com

Thank you for your time,
Zeena Goldenberg
Appendix D

Email Sent to Religious School Directors Who Were Referred to Me by a Participant

Hi Ms./Mr.____________

_______________ referred you to me, and suggested you might be willing to be interviewed for my study. I am working on my doctoral degree in special education at UMSL. My dissertation is on how Jewish religious schools include students with disabilities in their classrooms and schools. The interview takes about 90 minutes and because of social distancing they are done through Skype. I am very appreciative of your time, and you will receive a $25.00 gift certificate from Amazon for participating in the study. I also place a great deal of emphasis on confidentiality. I transcribe the tapes myself and your identity is disguised if I use one of your quotes in the study.

I am hoping we can talk about the project so I can give you more information. I would be happy to call you during the evening if that is a time that works for you. Just let me know if you are interested, and if so, when I could call you.

Thank you for your time,
Zeena Goldenberg