

Final 2005-2006 Evaluation Report:
TaNaKH Standards and Benchmarks Project

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The Melton Research Center for Jewish Education implemented the first year of Phase II of the Jewish Day Schools Standards and Benchmarks Pilot Project during the 2005-2006 school year. This year was effectively a pilot test of the design and implementation of the TaNaKH Educator Consultant (TEC) role. It was an opportunity for the Project to determine how well the TECs were prepared to work with schools that a) chose to participate in the work, and b) agreed to provide the conditions required for participation – time for teachers to meet and work on TaNaKH standards. It was also an opportunity to gain further knowledge about the capacity of the schools to make good use of the TECs to further implement standards-based teaching and learning of TaNaKH.

This report details what the Project accomplished and learned during its pilot year. To that end, it provides follow-up on a) the leadership of the Project at the Melton Center, b) the successes and challenges identified in the mid-year report, and, c) additional positive outcomes and challenges that became apparent at the schools during the second half of the school year. The report also draws conclusions about the success of the project at the end of its first year, and suggests implications for continuing the work with a second cohort of schools.

The findings are based on data collected during the first half of the school year and on data collected by a) attending TEC professional development meetings in March and June 2006, b) conducting second two-day site visits to each of the four schools in the evaluation sample, c) interviewing each TEC once or twice during this time period as well as holding several informal conversations with them, d) having multiple formal and informal interviews/problem solving sessions with Charlotte Abramsom, Project Director, e) interviewing between three and six teachers and the Jewish Studies head at each of the four schools, and f) reviewing logs of weekly/biweekly telephone conversations between the TECs and Jewish Studies head, pre- and post-visit summary documents, and schools' end-of-year evaluations of the Project.

Review of Mid-Year Findings. Education Matters' mid-year evaluation report, dated January 20, 2006, explored the extent to which the schools were living up to the formal participation criteria outlined in the funded proposal and in the schools' formal commitments to the project at that time. If the schools were not meeting their participation commitments, then it would be unlikely that the project would meet its goals. And, it would be unwise to continue to support the work at the schools with Foundation funds.

Analysis of the data collected during the first five months of the project led to the conclusion that the schools, at the end of December 2005, were meeting their commitments. As reported:

- The six heads of schools had met their obligation to insure sufficient time for the Jewish Studies teachers to meet and work on the development of performance assessments. Teachers were attending the meetings and participating in the required work.
- The Jewish Studies Directors had been designing and leading the bi-weekly meetings in consultation with their TECs. Meetings focused on developing teachers' knowledge and skill with respect to the process taught by the Center for Performance Assessment to develop performance assessments that will guide the development of units of study.
- Jewish Studies Directors were meeting their obligation to talk weekly with their TECs about a) the focus and implementation of the bi-weekly meetings, and b) next steps for those meetings and for the TECs on-site visits. As part of this process, TECs completed phone logs after each conversation and sent them to the Project Director, Charlotte Abramson. TECs and the Project Director then discussed the contents of the phone logs so that the Project Director could provide support and guidance to the TECs regarding their "next steps" in working with the Jewish Studies Directors.
- Jewish Studies Directors and TaNaKH teachers at all six schools participated in the first two of the TEC's four school-based professional development sessions. Bi-weekly meetings had been designed to follow-up on the professional development sessions.

Not only were schools complying with these formal project requirements, data analysis revealed that some of their teachers and Jewish Studies Directors were demonstrating considerable engagement with the work and desired to do even more than was expected.

As of December 2005, there was evidence that as a result of participating in the project, schools were also developing and/or increasing their instructionally-focused, collegial culture with respect to Jewish studies. For example, a teacher at one school had exclaimed, "Faculty collaboration is essential for the success of this project. That's a Big Idea!" A teacher in another school asked for additional meetings with the TEC to help them work with the standards. Her colleagues joked, "She wants another meeting!" But they, too, wanted additional time to work with the TEC. Still another teacher reported that this project, because of its focus on TaNaKH standards and benchmarks and on collegial work relationships among teachers would keep him teaching in a Jewish Day School.

By December, the Heads of the schools had made their commitment to the project explicit. They had made time available for the bi-weekly meetings and TEC professional development sessions, and at four of the six schools the Head of school and/or the Associate Head of school had attended at least half of the TEC on-site professional development sessions. Put simply, Head of school participation in the project demonstrated to TaNaKH teachers and to Jewish Studies heads that this project was central to their schools.

Without question, these six schools were living up to the formal criteria required for participation and, for that reason, were able to continue their involvement with the project. This was an important finding as was the fact that the schools valued the contribution of their TECs and wanted to continue to have them provide a) support to the Jewish Studies heads, and b) formal professional development to their teachers.¹

Throughout the rest of the 2005-2006 school year, each school's Jewish Studies head, teachers, and TEC worked together toward achieving the first-year goals outlined in the funded proposal. More specifically, with the support of its TEC, each school aimed to have accomplished the following:

- developed clearly articulated school-wide curricular goals for the teaching of TaNaKH;
- demonstrated teachers' understanding by having them create between two and four appropriate learning activities, performance-based assessments and accompanying scoring guides;
- educated key Judaic Studies personnel so that they have the knowledge and ability to mentor faculty in the process of using standards to improve teaching and learning based on reports from the TECs and the project director; and,
- established a collaborative culture in which faculty can continue to work together to refine and improve their use of Standards and Benchmarks after the project is over.

These projects goals were ambitious, perhaps too ambitious for the pilot year of a project designed to implement standards-based instructional improvement in one school year.² However, working toward the goals served the purpose of providing a) a clear set of outcomes against which to measure the progress of the Center, the TECS, and the schools, and b) evidence about what it is and is not possible to achieve in one school year.

Given all that is known about using standards and performance assessment to drive meaningful instructional improvement, and given what is known about developing skillful external coaches (TECs) to guide such work, the achievements of Phase II of the Standards and Benchmarks Project in its first year should be considered significant and encouraging even though schools could not reach all of the specified goals.

Based on careful data analysis, it is clear that the first year of Phase II was successful in increasing the capacity of Conservative, Reform, and Community day schools to teach TaNaKH based on the standards developed and pilot tested during Phase I of the project. The Project

¹The mid-year report also noted challenges to further project development in the context of this strong beginning.

²The literature on instructional improvement in general education makes clear that changing instructional practice and deepening teachers' subject matter knowledge takes at least three to five years. There is little in the current literature that describes the trajectory of coach (TEC) development from novice to expert.

demonstrated that the Center, with the support of the AVI CHAI Foundation, and under the leadership of Charlotte Abramson was capable of recruiting and preparing four knowledgeable individuals to serve as TaNaKH Educator Consultants (TECs) who could provide standards-based coaching to one or two of the six Phase I schools that participated in Phase II of the project.

The report turns now to the findings on which this conclusion is based.

Findings at the End of the 2005-2006 School Year

One important question to address at the end of the first year of Phase II is: did the Standards and Benchmarks Project located in the Melton Center demonstrate the capacity to recruit, hire, and prepare a set of TECs who could work successfully with the schools involved in the Standards and Benchmarks Project? The answer is yes. The Project at the Melton Center, under the capable leadership of Charlotte Abramson demonstrated this capacity in multiple ways.

1. *The Project recruited, developed, and supported a cadre of TECs who now have the knowledge and skill with which to work effectively with Jewish day schools to improve the teaching and learning of TaNaKH. And, these new TECs established successful collaborative relationships with the Jewish Studies heads at the six schools and with the teachers involved in the project.*³ Studies of the implementation of instructional coaching in literacy and mathematics, for example, demonstrate that in order for coaches to be successful in garnering teachers' respect, they must demonstrate a) knowledge of relevant content, b) knowledge of teaching that content in schools like the ones in which the teachers work, and c) the ability to forge trusting relationships with adults that encourage those adults to work with the coach to improve their practice. All four of the TECs were successful in this regard.

2. *The Project Director stayed attentive to the roll-out of the Project during the TECs' pilot year. She kept in close contact with the TECs by holding frequent telephone conversations with them and by attending their first and second school-based professional development sessions.* Shortly after the school year began, the Project Director realized that she needed to learn more about the TECs' developing knowledge and skill and about their work in the schools' by attending more than the planned one on-site professional development session led by each TEC. Attending one session led her to understand that she could be helpful to the development of the Project and the TECs by being on site to help the TEC explain aspects of the process of working with standards

³One of the four original TECs was not assigned to a new school in the second cohort. Although the school with which she worked in Cohort I valued her role and formally engaged her to work with it in the coming school year, the Project Director and the TEC agreed that some of the demands of the work were beyond her expertise and comfort level.

and/or make mid-visit corrections when the work seemed to falter.⁴ As a result, the Project Director arranged to participate in additional visits. Close connections with the on-site work gave the Project Director insight into the TECs' individual strengths and it led her to determine, in consultation with others, that one TEC who was not comfortable in the role should not continue after the first year.

3. *Close attention to implementation allowed the Project Director to understand that the project needed to provide Jewish Studies heads with deeper initial understanding of the purpose of the Standards and Benchmarks project and with greater capacity to explain it to their teachers.* During the first two on-site professional development sessions at the schools, it became clear that Jewish Studies heads as well as teachers were getting lost in the technical processes associated with using standards and developing performance assessments and failing to link this work with teaching and learning in the classes. They lost sight of increasing student learning as the Project's goal. When this became apparent, the Project Director reminded TECs to review the Project's purposes with the Jewish Studies heads and with the teachers.⁵
4. *The Project Director provided the TECs with high quality, relevant professional development at the beginning of their work. She followed their work, discussed their progress, noted their challenges, realized they needed additional professional development and provided it for them.* This was critically important to the success of the project which depended heavily on the knowledge and skill of the TECs who were pioneering this coaching role.
5. *The design of the project – the combination of biweekly meetings, weekly phone conversations between the TEC and Jewish Studies head, and on-site professional development sessions – proved strong.* The combination of project components, when well implemented, kept the work progressing and provided a strong basis for each TEC visit.
6. *The Project Director, having a) established ground rules for schools' participation, and b) carefully explained them to the schools, when necessary, reminded school leaders of their obligations to the Project.* For example, when a school wavered in its commitment to provide teachers with time for the biweekly meetings, the Project Director spoke to the head of school about the need for this protected time. Time was then provided. By taking on this role, the Project Director made clear to the schools the importance of the ongoing

⁴In taking on this role at the schools, the Project Director a) helped clarify standards-based reform for the teachers and Jewish Studies heads and b) provided additional professional development for the TECs.

⁵This finding has led to increased attention to the purpose of the project in the professional development that will be provided to the new cohort of schools.

work, and provided necessary support to the TECs who could not implement their roles if the schools were not adhering to their commitments.

7. *The Project Director and the TECs developed greater understanding of the challenges associated with implementing the project at the schools and made mid-course adjustments, as needed.* As noted above, the Project Director realized the importance of reminding teachers and Jewish Studies heads about the rationale for the Project. By the end of the year, the Project Director had also learned the importance of grounding the Standards and Benchmarks work in aspects of each school's curriculum whether or not that curriculum might change as a result of the Standards Project. Grounding some of the standards-based work in the content that might be taught with MATOK or Tal Am had the potential to help teachers understand the project in the context of their current curriculum. Without such an explicit connection, teachers often felt that they were being asked to develop entirely new materials and discard recently adopted programs.
8. *Implementation of the first year of Phase II made it clear that Jewish Studies heads and teachers need to see, at the outset of their work, an example of a standards-based unit with sample lessons, performance assessments, and scoring guides.* Without such exemplars, school-based educators are not clear about what they are working to achieve. Without such exemplars, teachers and even the Jewish Studies head might leave the professional development sessions with knowledge of the process of selecting and unwrapping a standard but without a clear idea of how this work was linked to the development of teachable units of instruction and to sets of lessons and assessments within the units. Such an exemplar is being developed for use with the second Cohort of schools.
9. *At the end of the school year, the Jewish Studies heads at five of the six schools wanted to find the resources with which to hire the TECs to work with them during the 2006-2007 school year.* All four of the Jewish Studies heads in the evaluation sample lauded their TEC's knowledge and skill. At three of the four schools, every teacher interviewed reported on the high quality and value of their TEC.⁶ At the time of this report, two of the schools have completed a formal agreement with the Melton Center to hire their TEC for the next school year, however several of the other Phase II schools were seeking funds with which to employ their TECs. Jewish Studies heads noted that the TEC visits and phone conversations helped keep the work central in the school. They felt that a continuing formal commitment that required them to work with the standards prior to a

⁶This was not the case on the fourth school largely because the teachers had little interaction with the TEC in light of the school's difficulty implementing the project. This school's situation will be discussed further in the next section of the report.

TEC visit would keep them focused and would keep other school priorities from taking their teachers' time.⁷

Taken together, these findings lead to the conclusion that the first year of the Project was well-designed and implemented and benefitted from the able leadership of the Project Director who paid careful attention to all aspects of implementation, analyzed what she was learning, and made adjustments as needed. In addition, she used what she learned to strengthen the professional development that will be provided for Cohort II schools.

Now, it is appropriate to ask, given the Project's support to schools: What did the schools accomplish? What explains the variation in those accomplishments? What can the Project learn from these findings?

The View from the Schools. Before addressing these questions, it is relevant to describe the work implemented at the schools during TEC visits and in-between those visits at the biweekly meetings. Such descriptions will provide the context for discussing achievements, variations in achievements, and challenges to high quality implementation of the Project work.⁸

With respect to the school-based professional development at the schools in the evaluation sample, each TEC, in collaboration with a Jewish Studies head, organized the two day visits differently. In theory, TECs were to spend two days, four times during the school year, working with TaNaKH teachers and the Jewish Studies heads at each school. In between visits, the TEC and Jewish Studies heads were to have weekly telephone meetings to discuss the design and implementation of biweekly meetings and other issues that might arise. And, they were to use this time to plan for the next school-based professional development meeting in light of the teachers' progress and the goals of the Project.

In practice, because of school-based considerations, the amount of time TECs spent with teachers and the Jewish Studies head varied considerably. For example:

- In one school the TEC implemented a full day of professional development and had a loose schedule for the second day which might include a conversation with the Jewish Studies head and a brief classroom observation or two.
- In another school, the TEC worked with one group of teachers for three hours on the first day and with another group of teachers for three hours on the second day. Afternoon time was unstructured. Given this organization, teachers had one-half a day of the TEC's time.

⁷The February 2007 report will detail the extent to which project work continued during the 2006-2007 school year with or without the TECs' involvement.

⁸In an effort to maintain promised confidentiality, this discussion of the school-based work omits examples that might make the identify of the schools known to others.

- In the third school, due to the integrated Jewish and general studies program, the TEC worked initially with the whole faculty. However, during the second half of the school year, due to organizational complications at the school, the TEC was unable to meet either with groups or with individual sets of teachers to forward the goals of the Project. The TEC continued, however, to have phone conversations with the Judaic Studies head.
- In the fourth school, the TEC most often spent the morning of each day in conference with groups of one or two teachers helping those teachers develop their understanding of the project's work and/or lessons and assessments designed to go with the unwrapped benchmarks. During both afternoons, the TEC worked with the entire faculty. As a result, teachers and the Jewish Studies head had ample whole group and individually targeted work time with the coach.

This variation meant that some schools engaged their teachers in far more TaNaKH focused professional development than did others. There are different reasons for this situation. First, in three of the four schools, the presence of part-time TaNaKH teachers limited these teachers availability for professional development. Often, part-time teachers had other jobs that they could not leave to attend the TaNaKH professional development. Second, some schools faced serious “coverage” issues if they released teachers for two days of professional development. This was an issue in schools that had an “integrated” curriculum and, therefore, few specialists teaching Jewish Studies, and in schools where teachers, fundamentally, had no professional development periods during the day. Third, in one school it was never clear why so little time was available for the professional development and the TEC did not press the issue with the Jewish Studies head.

The variation also meant that the teachers had different kinds of opportunities to work with the TEC. Teachers in the fourth school described above, for example, had individual, focused conferences with the TEC in which one or two teachers at a time asked questions and got feedback on the work they were developing. In the second half of the year, such conferences focused on the development of units of study using the standards and developing performance assessments. These conferences were well-regarded by the teachers and they provided the TEC with first-hand knowledge of what the teachers did and did not understand about the work. With this knowledge, the TEC could adapt the whole-group professional development sessions to target teachers' learning needs.

Within this small sample of schools, it appears that this design, the targeted small-group/individual work with teachers coupled with whole group professional development, was most effective in helping teachers and the Jewish Studies heads become more proficient in their use of the standards.

The TECs' school-based work with the Jewish Studies head also varied but, for the most part, was quite limited. Jewish Studies heads might or might not attend all of the TEC-led professional development. When they attended, Jewish Studies heads made valuable

contributions to the conversations often helping the teachers understand how the Project work linked to the schools' goals for Jewish Studies and current curricular practices.

But while the Jewish Studies heads could certainly learn by observing the TECs and listening to teachers' responses, little TEC time was devoted explicitly to coaching them so they could carry on with the work of implementing the Project.⁹ For example, TEC's spent little time observing classrooms with or without the Jewish Studies head. This meant that they had scant opportunity to a) assess the quality of teaching and learning of TaNaKH, b) help the Jewish Studies heads hone their skills in classroom observation, and, c) develop classroom observation as an ongoing aspect of the TaNaKH project. Yet, it is important for TECs and Jewish Studies heads to understand the kinds of instructional practices in place in their schools in order for them to design their professional development work in light of extant practices. To the extent that the TEC can make connections between current practice and what the school hopes to accomplish by implementing the standards and benchmarks project, there is a greater likelihood that teachers will better understand the links between the professional development and their developing instructional practices. To continue the school-based work after the TEC is gone, needless to say, the Jewish Studies heads needs to develop the skills with which to gather and build on this kind of knowledge.

TECs provided direct support and professional development to the Jewish Studies heads during scheduled weekly phone conversations that focused on a) answering the Jewish Studies heads questions, b) discussing the progress of the work, c) designing and debriefing the biweekly meetings, and d) planning for the next on-site professional development session. Given the newness of the Project, advance planning was a challenge for both TECs and Jewish Studies heads because neither could not predict how quickly teachers would learn in the bi-weeklies and/or what might stymie progress. As a result, the TECs found themselves having to develop the agenda for their school-based visits shortly before those visits. This meant they had limited time in which to plan and limited opportunity to gain feedback from the Project Director.¹⁰

Achievement of Project Goals. Given this variation in the way the Project was implemented at each of the schools, what can be said about the extent to which the schools achieved the Project goals that are listed on page three of this report?

While none of the schools *developed clearly articulated school-wide curricular goals for the teaching of TaNaKH*, all of them made progress in this direction. The Project forced the teachers and Jewish Studies heads to consider what they were teaching and, more importantly, what they wanted students to know and be able to do as a result of the curriculum. Participating in the

⁹This is understandable, given that this was the first year of the TECs' work and TECs concentrated on honing their own knowledge and skills in order to work well with teachers.

¹⁰TECs learned that they could have been more assertive with the Jewish Studies heads with respect to finding time at least two weeks in advance to fully plan their two-day visits. This learning will inform their work with the second cohort of schools.

project, teachers reported, led to them ask themselves questions about the outcomes of their work that they had not considered previously. Jewish Studies heads reported that they would work on further curriculum development during the summer and expected to continue such work in the second year of the Project.

Teachers at three of the four schools in the evaluation sample *demonstrated their understanding of the project by creating between two and four appropriate learning activities, performance-based assessments and accompanying scoring guides*. In three of the four schools, most teachers, with the guidance of the TEC and the Jewish Studies head developed small units of study that included performance assessments and rudimentary scoring guides. In addition, they taught the lessons and brought the associated student work to a bi-weekly meeting and/or to the next professional development session with their TECS. A few teachers from the schools reported surprising results from their use of standards-based lessons. Most significant among them: several teachers noted that students who produced mediocre work on traditional tests demonstrated much deeper knowledge of the curricular content as a result of the standards-based lessons and assessments. These teachers were surprised and pleased by this finding.

In one school, all TaNaKH teachers as well as the Jewish Studies head who had teaching as part of his/her schedule participated in a unique learning experiment. They developed and taught the same standards-based unit during the same time period as a strategy to provide them with a shared basis for conversation about standards-based teaching and learning. This innovative approach provided benefits to teachers who otherwise do not teach the same content and it placed the Jewish Studies head in the role of colleague to the teachers. The experience of being a teacher-learner enabled the Jewish Studies head to experience some of the challenges as well as benefits of working within the standards-based framework.

Although Jewish Studies heads reported that they learned a great deal from their TECs and from all aspects of the project, based on observation and interview data, the Project did not yet *educate key Judaic Studies personnel so that they have the knowledge and ability to mentor faculty in the process of using standards to improve teaching and learning based on reports from the TECs and the Project Director*. In truth, the TECs were in the first phase of learning to do this work. Although they supported the Jewish Studies heads in learning some aspects of this support role, one year was not enough time for anyone to learn this complex work. Without question, Jewish Studies heads need more opportunities to learn from their TECs how to lead the standards-based work.

The last Project goal identified in the funded proposal referred to the development of an *established a collaborative culture in which faculty can continue to work together to refine and improve their use of Standards and Benchmarks after the project is over*. This kind of collaborative culture developed in two of the four schools in the evaluation sample. In the two others, competing demands on teachers' time, school schedules and teachers' assignment load, and/or the leadership style of the Jewish Studies head worked against the development of a collaborative culture. In the two schools that developed collaborative cultures, teachers reported that they valued their opportunities to work together and reported not having had much of this

opportunity in the past. They pointed to the value of a) learning the new process in collaboration with one another as well as to the importance of b) better understanding the scope and sequence of TaNaKH being taught in their schools. The experience led the teachers, the Jewish Studies heads, and other school administrators to make a commitment to TaNaKH curriculum development and protected teaching time in the next school year. The other two schools have also determined that they will schedule more time for teachers to work together on the Project.

Additional Project Outcomes and Impacts. In addition to the Project's success in making considerable progress in achieving its formal goals at the schools, there are other Project outcomes and impacts that are worth mentioning.

- Jewish Studies heads and teachers said that, as a result of the Project they had a better understanding of a) the need for a school-wide scope and sequence, and b) why they needed to know what other teachers were teaching.
- Jewish Studies heads felt supported in their work by a colleague, the TEC, who served as a sounding board for ideas and issues related to Jewish Studies that extended beyond the formal Project;
- By the end of the school year, teachers who were concerned that the Project would demand more work from them and would provide little benefit had changed their minds reporting that they could see the benefits associated with the work. These included:
 - ▶ More focus on the goals of their units and lessons;
 - ▶ Increased understanding of why assessment was important even if the school did not want to “grade” students’ work;
 - ▶ A re-thinking of assessment as something other than or in addition to traditional tests and essays;
 - ▶ An opportunity to articulate needs at the school with respect to the teaching of TaNaKH; and,
 - ▶ Tools with which to identify goals, organize materials, and assess learning.
- Jewish Studies heads and teachers reported that they intended to continue the Standards and Benchmarks work so that they could become proficient with it and develop higher quality units of instruction and their associated performance standards and scoring guides.

Taken together, these outcomes and impacts indicate that the first year of Phase II of this important and complicated project got off to a strong start. And, most important for its eventual impact, schools report that they intend to continue the work.

Challenges. The mid-year report identified a number of challenges not yet mentioned in this report that arose during the first few months of implementation. These included, *at the schools*, a) instances of scant teacher knowledge of TaNaKH; b) a tendency to try to fit the

standards into the extant content being taught even if that content did not constitute a scope and sequence, c) difficulty understanding the concepts associated with the Project work, and, d) new knowledge, skill, and activities required of the Jewish Studies heads. *For the TECs, challenges were associated with,* a) having no prior experience with this new role in Jewish education, b) teaching material – the processes associated with the Project – that they had just learned and that they had never tried as teachers, c) needing to coach the Jewish Studies heads without having had any focused professional development on how to do this work, and e) implementing their roles in schools whose standard operating procedures, norms, and extant cultures were not well known to them.

There was no way the Project could have avoided these challenges or several others that arose during the second half of the school year. What matters is that, as they arose, TECs, the Jewish Studies heads, and the Project Director did their best to deal with them. They remain significant, however, because some, at least, are likely to occur in the second cohort of schools. Therefore, we note them next with suggestions for how they might be addressed a) by TECs who continue to work with Cohort I schools, and b) TECs who work with Cohort II schools.

- *Jewish Studies heads, for the most part, did not have sufficient knowledge and skill about a) using standards and benchmarks, b) assessing the quality of teaching, c) leading school change, d) and/or the planning capacity to develop a set of bi-weeklies and plan for the next visit with the TEC several weeks in advance.* While the TECs will have gained knowledge about the pace of learning and progress in this Project, Jewish Studies heads will, once again, be new at their work. Therefore, challenges related to their knowledge and ability to plan ahead will likely arise again. TECs, with the guidance of the Project Director, may need to develop some strategies for insuring that planning for the school-based visits, at least, is completed no later than two weeks in advance of the visit.

With respect to insuring that the TECs' and Jewish Studies heads' work includes classroom observations, the Project will need to make this requirement clear to both the Jewish Studies heads and the TECs and perhaps provide TECs with a standards-based TaNaKH classroom observation form they can use with the Jewish Studies heads, and which the Jewish Studies heads can use on their own to assess classroom instruction over the course of the school year. Without a support of this sort, it is doubtful that the observation of teaching will become a part of this Project.

- *TECs will need professional development targeted at the work of coaching the Jewish Studies heads.* If the Project is to succeed in providing Jewish Studies heads with coaching that increases their capacity in the areas identified above, then the TECs' role will need to expand and TECs will need to acquire the requisite knowledge and skill with which to successfully coach the Jewish Studies heads. Such coaching will be challenging for a number of reasons. First, the TECs might judge that they do not have the positional authority to engage in this work. They are not the Jewish Studies heads' supervisors and they may not feel it appropriate to try and change the Jewish Studies heads' job

description if, for example, it does not include an emphasis on classroom observation as the basis for teacher evaluation. Second, TECs might not know how to carve out real time for this role. And, third, they may not have had relevant experience to draw on in beginning this new aspect of their roles. Therefore, it will be necessary for the Project Director, perhaps in collaboration with the TECs and a professional developer with expertise in coaching individuals in similar roles, to detail what the coaching work might entail and then provide TECs with appropriate professional development. In addition, it might be useful to include the Heads of School in conversations about this aspect of the Project.

- *At the end of the school year, teachers across the schools and regardless of their knowledge of TaNaKH varied in what they understood to be the purpose of the TaNaKH Standards and Benchmarks Project even when they invested a great deal of time and effort in the project's work.* In one school, for example, teachers reported that the goal of the project was to insure that all of the day schools in the United States and Canada were teaching the same content to students. They felt that the project, by and large, was developed to insure a common curriculum. Teachers in other schools stressed the importance of a common curriculum within their schools. Almost no one in the teacher sample from these schools identified student learning as the central goal of the Project. Needless to say, this Project goal should be emphasized throughout the TECs' and Jewish Studies heads' work with the teachers.
- *The Jewish Day schools in this evaluation sample, for the most part, do not regularly assess student achievement in TaNaKH. Indeed, formal assessment in Jewish Studies in some schools is counter-cultural.* Therefore, the teachers and Jewish Studies heads in these schools found it challenging to be asked to develop formal assessments and scoring guides. While they could see the value of identifying outcomes for student learning, they objected to the requirement to formally assess students learning. Indeed, issues of teacher and student accountability were challenging at such schools.
- *Jewish Day schools exhibit a wide variety of school-based conditions that can challenge the high quality implementation of any instructional program. They are important and likely to arise in any cohort of schools no matter how carefully those schools are chosen.* The conditions include a) unstable/changing leadership, b) high teacher turnover, c) weak teacher knowledge of TaNaKH, d) weak leadership and/or pedagogical and/or curriculum development knowledge by the Jewish Studies head, and e) organizational factors such as too little time allocated for TaNaKH study and competing priorities that take time allocated for TaNaKH. The Standards and Benchmarks Project can and does attempt to screen schools out of the project if they exhibit particularly challenging conditions. But it is important to note that screening cannot focus on the future. Two of the heads of Cohort I schools in the evaluation sample changed at the end of the last school year. The school that had seven new TaNaKH teachers this past school year will have three new teachers in the coming year. Jewish Studies heads with deep knowledge of TaNaKH may

have little prior knowledge of schools, school organization, and the improvement of teaching.

These and other conditions are the reality within which Jewish Day schools function. They pose challenges for the implementation of this and other Projects. But, it is incumbent upon those who directly support the Project and those who provide its funding to understand that there is not an alternate cohort of Jewish Day schools that would likely be different than the ones involved in the Project. The challenge, therefore, is to succeed with the schools that have chosen and have been chosen to be part of this important effort.

Implications for Work with the Second Cohort. A second cohort of schools has been selected and its leaders have already participated in a Project orientation session. As a result, these school leaders gained significant knowledge about Standards, Benchmarks, and Performance assessments before the end of the school year. They had an opportunity to meet the TEC with whom they would be working and to begin the process of “gearing up” for the Project prior to the September professional development. This earlier start than was available for Cohort I schools should benefit the schools and the Project.

In addition, given what has been learned from the pioneering work of all Project participants in the first year:

- *In the context of the additional start-up time, it might be useful to provide the TECs with a strategy for “taking stock” of TaNaKH teaching and learning and of the knowledge and skill of all participants and the use of curriculum materials at the outset.* For example, it could be helpful for a TEC to understand the challenges a school might face if it has the same teachers teaching general and Jewish studies, or if it has a Jewish Studies head who has not worked previously in a school setting. With such knowledge, and in consultation with the Project Director, the TEC and the Jewish Studies head might be able to develop a vision of what they want to accomplish by the end of the school year given a) their local context, and b) the project’s goals. With such a vision, the TEC could better design professional development sessions, assess progress during and after each session, and review with the Project Director and the Jewish Studies head how well the school is doing, what might be facilitating or hampering progress, and whether and how to make adjustments in the ongoing work.
- *It might be useful to consider that, by the end of a school’s involvement with the Standards and Benchmarks project, Jewish Studies heads should have mastered much of the knowledge and skill demonstrated by the TECs so that they can continue to lead the work at their schools.* If clear outcome goals could be established for the Jewish Studies heads, then it would be feasible to help the TECs a) take stock of the Jewish Studies heads’ knowledge and skill at the beginning of the project, b) develop a professional development plan for the Jewish Studies head, and c) establish performance assessments

for the Jewish Studies heads that would help them and the project take stock of their achievements.

- *In order for the TECs to provide on-site professional development to the Jewish Studies heads, it would be useful, as the year unfolds, for the Jewish Studies head to lead some portion of the professional development so that the TEC can observe and provide feedback.* Given the limited time available to the TEC, this may prove challenging. However, finding ways to include Jewish Studies heads in providing professional development during an on-site visit would enable TECs to better target their coaching work with these individuals.
- *It might be useful for the TECs to have sample standards-based units, performance assessments and scoring guides to share with Jewish Studies heads and teachers during the first on-site school visit.* Indeed, it would likely be valuable to include such an exemplar in the professional development provided to schools this coming September. Data from the first-year evaluation make it clear that the concepts and practices associated with this Project can be difficult to grasp. Teachers and Jewish Studies heads can become caught up in the processes and lose sight of the goal of their work. Therefore, including a standards-based TaNaKH unit in the professional development provided by Michelle LePatner, and using the same exemplar in the first visit to the schools could help focus the work on the Project's ultimate goal: improving the teaching of TaNaKH in order to greatly increase student learning.

Conclusion. The 2005-2006 school year was an exciting and important one for the TaNaKH Standards and Benchmarks Project. The Melton Center, with support from the AVI CHAI Foundation, hoped the Project would succeed and, thereby, advance the work of improving the teaching and learning of TaNaKH in Jewish Day schools. The schools, by agreeing to participate, took a risk in committing to an untested Project but anticipated that they would benefit from it. The TECs, by signing on to work in a new role, with schools they did not know, and on content that would be new also took a risk by stepping into the unknown. So did the Project Director who relied on her best judgment about how to design and implement the Project and demonstrated constant faith in the ability of the TECs to make it work at the schools.

The findings presented in this first-year report strongly suggest that the risk was worthwhile. A great deal was learned and accomplished. As a result, the TECs and a new set of schools are poised to begin their work. Several Cohort I schools either have or are in the process of engaging their TECs for continuing professional development. There is good reason to conclude that the second year of Phase II will continue the process of improving the teaching and learning of TaNaKH at the schools as well as the development of the TECs, thereby providing the field of Jewish education with significant new capacity for further school improvement.