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Addressing Present Challenges, Inspiring Future Possibilities

An Evaluation of “La-bri’ut: To Our Health and Wellness”

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Introduction

Just over one year ago, the COVID-19 pandemic upended congregational Jewish education programs across the country. At a time when children of all ages faced unprecedented challenges to their mental well-being, they were suddenly unable to gather with peers or benefit from in-person supports from their synagogue communities. To address these challenges, in the summer of 2020 the Jewish Education Center of Cleveland (JEC) engaged in an intensive curriculum development project for synagogue/part-time educational programs. Led by Nachama Skolnik Moskowitz, Senior Director, Curriculum Resources and Early Childhood, a national team of educators created La-bri'ut: To Our Health and Wellness, an innovative K–6 curriculum designed to meet the needs of students and families navigating the pandemic. Funding for the project was provided by the Jewish Education Center of Cleveland and The Covenant Foundation.

La-bri'ut consists of five modules, each of which explores a different Jewish value: Sukkat Shalom (finding one's shelter of peace), Ometz Lev (tapping into one's inner strength when faced with big feelings), G'vurah (using one's power and strength for good), K'hillah (being in a reciprocal relationship with community), and Hesed (being kind in a way that goes beyond what would be expected). Through a mix of weekly cohort-based synchronous learning and individual home-based activities (designed to be completed mostly independently by students of all ages), La-bri'ut aims to help learners develop skills and tools to build resiliency, strengthen their emotional wellness, and help manage life's challenges. During the 2020–2021 school year, La-bri'ut was implemented throughout Cleveland and in over 200 congregations nationally.

While La-bri'ut was developed in response to the particular challenges of COVID-19, it also offers an opportunity to glean broader insights about the impacts of its uniquely designed program and curriculum. To do so, the JEC partnered with Rosov Consulting to conduct an assessment of La-bri'ut that would explore both how it was experienced by families, teachers, and Education Directors during its first six months and how these experiences might inform congregations' plans for Jewish learning programming moving forward. Data for the project were gathered through a national survey of participating families (completed by one parent per family), individual interviews with seven Education Directors in Cleveland and two outside of Cleveland, and group and individual interviews with seven Cleveland teachers using the La-bri'ut curriculum.¹ This report presents an analysis of, first, the insights shared by Education Directors and teachers, followed by the quantitative and qualitative data from the Parent Survey.

¹ Although the original goal was to hold two focus groups of 6–8 teachers each, recruitment proved more difficult than anticipated, even with repeated appeals by Education Directors and offers of financial incentives for participation.

Educator Feedback (Education Directors and Teachers)

Implementation of La-bri'ut

Motivations for Adopting La-bri'ut

All of the education directors interviewed said that their decision to use the La-bri'ut curriculum this year was driven primarily by the need to pivot to a virtual religious school experience, and that they would have been flexible about how exactly that happened. That being said, a number of education directors said that the content of the curriculum made the decision much easier, as they knew it would not be a “watered-down” version of a typical religious school program but one specifically designed for the circumstances children and families were facing. As one explained, *“The idea of tying into Jewish values that dealt with how kids could develop a sense of strength and resiliency and community during this pandemic was really, really important to me. And that they could have individualized learning taking place at home with siblings, family members, and friends. So the whole structure and the format I just thought was phenomenal.”* Other education directors highlighted their trust in La-bri'ut's designers, which helped further reduce the anxiety of having to make such a dramatic and unexpected shift:

“I just needed to do something—we're a very small school with very few resources. When I learned that this curriculum was coming out from the Jewish Education Center, and I saw who was spearheading the whole operation, I didn't even have to think twice. I knew that we were going to use this curriculum, no matter what they produced.”

Learning Cohorts

Although La-bri'ut offers the option for siblings of multiple ages to engage in the program as a family unit, the majority of congregations (according to survey data) structured their programs either by single grade level or combined grades. A number of education directors explained that it was easiest and least disruptive for families and teachers to keep the grade-level structure with which they were familiar. One said that she surveyed parents beforehand regarding their preference: *“We asked, would it be better if it was your entire family going at the same time, with both your kids together? And we heard that the priority for the parents was for the kids to be with their grade level and have smaller groups of kids interacting and getting to know each other better, along with making that relationship with the teacher. So that was a no-brainer.”*

Curriculum Adaptations

An interesting feature of La-bri'ut was that it provided both a full template for educators who wanted and needed more guidance and structure *and* a flexible framework for those who wished to add their own adaptations. An education director in the first category explained why having a “turn-key” curriculum was so valuable for her small religious school that relies on volunteer teachers:

I love that it's 100% written out lesson plans. That I could say to my inexperienced teachers, go for it. I'll review it with you, but you know what your set induction is going to be, you know what your essential questions are going to be, you know what the activities are going to be, and you know how you're going to conclude. It makes it much easier for them. They're not professional teachers, so they don't necessarily know how to write a lesson plan.

Most of the education directors and teachers we interviewed used the curriculum more flexibly, adding and adapting a range of creative materials and approaches to the La-bri'ut framework, such as videos (both self-made and from YouTube), favorite children's books, thematic links to the *Parashat ha-Shavua*, or simply allowing discussions to range beyond the specific prompts and questions in the curricular materials. The quotes below from education directors and teachers provide more details about both the reasons they felt the need to adapt or add to the curriculum and some of the particular modifications that were made:

The teachers were seeing the curriculum like the Torah and felt like they had to follow it to the letter of the law. So, I explained that it is actually like the Torah, and they can bring in Midrash and Mishna and all these other layers. Once they had that permission, that helped them to open up and feel more comfortable teaching. Also, for me, using it with the families on Saturday afternoons, I wanted to tie it in more to the Parsha. So, I switched up which texts I would bring in and added in my own personal things, allowing the at-home pieces to stand on their own. (Education director)

I love the fact that the rabbi and director have enough faith in me as an educator that they said, here is the blueprint, go for it. I was able to do the creativity stuff that I love. When we were doing the G'vurah unit, we came up with a list of modern-day mitzvah heroes and ranked them. It's not in the curriculum but definitely something 5th graders can do and brought in modern-day people. (Teacher)

We felt the need to create some more materials for ourselves. Some of the stories that they chose were great, but my teachers just needed more material. They needed to not always just be talking. So, I made several videos which I've ended up sharing with the whole community. It let the kids all have a shared experience—everybody got to hear me talk. It wasn't about my ego, more about a sense of consistency and community. (Education director)

The suggested class activities, sometimes I use them as a base and then bounce off of them to try to get to something else. Like the story where Abraham invites the strangers into his tent. I didn't know if the second graders were really going to love me reading that aloud, so I started googling videos. I just put "Abraham and his tent" into YouTube and there was the best cartoon, really cute and age appropriate. (Teacher)

Supports for La-bri'ut Implementation

Role of Education Directors

All of the education directors reported providing a range of supports for teachers to help them understand and implement the La-bri'ut curriculum, from initial orientations to ongoing check-ins to (for some) more intensive coaching or discussions about how to adapt the content to students' needs. One education director extensively described her comprehensive process, touching on a number of strategies shared by others such as pre-unit learning sessions, ongoing feedback and check-ins, observing Zoom sessions, and even teaching occasional classes:

We've spent a lot of time making sure that teachers understand how to implement the lessons and what the values mean so they really have a handle on it prior to teaching the classes. During the summer, even before we saw the final copy of the curriculum, I spent time talking about what we were going to be doing

broadly so teachers understood why we were doing it, and why was it important for them to be part of this to make this year successful.

Once the curriculum was written I created a professional development module for each value. So, a couple of weeks prior to beginning each new module, we have a learning session where we talk about the value and texts that relate to it, so they can understand how it's anchored in Jewish text and Jewish ideas. Then we actually practice so they know how it's implemented. We all give feedback on what works and what doesn't work, how we can adapt it, so that they're really comfortable with the values prior to teaching.

If there are questions about how to teach something or ideas they have, there's always constant feedback throughout the week, as well as on a Sunday morning. I'm always ready to jump in and teach a class, which I've done several times. I've taught the various age groups when needed; that's just how we are supportive of one another.

A number of teachers expressed their appreciation for the support of their Directors and other congregational leadership. One described getting *"little love emails and texts saying, 'Thanks for doing this.' They have so much enthusiasm themselves that it rubs off on us."* Another said that her rabbi and Director offered "phenomenal" support and engagement, often "popping in" on the Zoom lessons to join in discussions with the students.

Other Supports and Resources (Curriculum Guide, Website, Facebook Group)

Most of the education directors said that they appreciated having the website resources and Facebook group available, though there was a range in how much they reported using them. One who expressed particular appreciation of the JEC's supports said, *"The website is crucial. I could not have helped faculty with the curriculum if I only had the paper copy of it. I need to see someone demonstrate and explain. I love the videos that introduce each of the units; I think they're unbelievably well done."* Another was similarly impressed with the quality and extent of the resources provided: *"[The website] was so comprehensive in providing all the resources that I needed as a Director and that teachers needed—the links to the texts and materials. Even for getting the materials, that it took you to the Amazon link—it was amazing. It was just so well thought out."* About half of the education directors said they engaged regularly with the Facebook group, either posting themselves or reading posts from others, and had benefited from advice regarding where to find materials for the project boxes, ideas for lesson modifications, and creative contributions such as videos and music playlists, described by one education director as *"things that I wouldn't naturally have done, where people are like, 'Hey I put this together, would you like to use it?'"*

Education directors were less aware of how teachers were using other supports and resources available to them, though they did report that nearly all the teachers had participated in the August orientation webinar. One did share that she was *"pretty sure that the teachers have been using the website regularly. They're watching the videos and looking into how this project is done, or what the purpose is behind this module, and they're using the professional development tools ... as needed."* Most of the teachers confirmed this view, saying that they did often look at the curriculum guide and website. One reported, *"I read the curriculum each week and look up the TinyURL things. I look at everything in the packet. A lot of it is very useful. It would be hard to teach if they didn't*

give us any of that stuff.” Teachers also described serving as important supports for each other, sharing ideas and resources with both their colleagues and, for some, through the La-bri’ut Facebook group. One teacher who joined the Facebook group said she had found *“there’s a lot of teachers who post a lot of good ideas there, which has been helpful. They ask questions like, what are you doing, how is this working for you? It’s been helpful to see what other people in other congregations are doing.”*

Successes and Highlights

Focus on Values

Education directors and teachers were very pleased with La-bri’ut overall. Most expressed strong admiration and gratitude for the JEC’s ability to develop and distribute such a well-thought-out curriculum at a time of great uncertainty. In the words of one education director, *“The speed with which the JEC was able to create something of such high caliber, with the Jewish social–emotional content and creative content, I’m just blown away. There’s no way that I could have done that on my own, or even with a small group of colleagues.”* When asked to identify specific successes and highlights of La-bri’ut, other education directors and teachers also cited the focus on values, which they felt gave the learning experience a relevance that made students especially engaged. An education director explained:

Focusing on these core Jewish values that tie into these caregiving principles, it was a way to really help students think about how they could feel better about themselves, yet at the same time learning how that is more broadly connected to Jewish ideas. The response has been phenomenal. The attendance is amazing, the kids are interested in learning and they want to share, and they’re really, really learning and internalizing these values.

Other La-bri’ut elements that education directors and teachers found to be particularly valuable included interactive online activities such as games and scavenger hunts; sharing and discussing at-home projects as a class; discussion prompts for older students; the ability of parents to observe (or overhear) the Zoom lessons and thus be more aware of what their children are learning; and delivering packages of materials to families’ houses, which one education director described as “delivering love.”

Curricular Highlights

Among the curricular modules, Sukkat Shalom (“shelter of peace”) stood out for a number of people as especially well-received by and impactful for students (though they were only comparing it to the 1–2 other modules that had been completed by the time of the interviews). Reasons for this included the resonance of teaching the material right around Sukkot, themes that were especially accessible and meaningful for students, and the “family interview” activity:

I felt Sukkat Shalom unit resonated most with my kids. It was perfect because it was right around the holidays, which made it all fit together. They all got that idea of a safe space and comfort zone. They could all give examples of where they go when they’re upset at their house, so it worked well even for young students. (Teacher)

One little boy talked about his mother with so much pride. It was like he was interviewing her not as his mother, but as a person, and he just was so excited to talk about what makes her feel safe. (Teacher)

They had to understand what actually is shelter. They told me that they loved it and felt connected to that. Also, one of the activities was to interview their parents, about when they feel protected. I think the talk with the parents or grandparents, they really loved it and I felt the parents got more involved in that because it is something close to home. (Teacher)

I felt like the year started off super strong with Sukkat Shalom, maybe because it was an easier concept to grasp onto. Shelter and peace and comfort are very clear needs, and the ways that you get those things are very clear. So, I love that unit and I loved the activities that went along with it. I think that the kids really connected with that one. (Education director)

The other specific project cited as a highlight (by one teacher and one education director) was the Ometz Lev (“inner strength”) glitter jar. The education director, whose child participates in La-bri’ut, said that the jar had become an important family tool for managing emotions, so much so that she had even made one for herself. The teacher described a student’s response when she was asked about her favorite La-bri’ut activity: *“She told me her favorite project was the Ometz Lev glitter jar—that it’s on her dresser and every time she feels depressed or unhappy, she goes and shakes it. To me that was amazing. It meant so much that she made a project that is part of her life now.”*

Positive Impacts for Teachers

Finally, a few education directors noted that La-bri’ut had created positive impacts for teachers as well, such as increasing their skills and confidence with online teaching, expanding the range of content they can cover, and giving them opportunities to explore their own connections to the material. One shared, *“[My teachers] all are incredibly proud that they can teach online, because they never thought they could.”* Another described a teacher *“who has been teaching a sixth grade Exodus unit for the last several years, and now he’s teaching other things, so that’s been really great to watch.”* And a third said of the volunteer teachers in her program, *“I daresay think some of them are really enjoying it. I pop between the different groups and it’s amazing because we give them the space to take the conversation anywhere that the students lead, within reason, obviously. So when I pop into the conversation, I can see how they connect to their personal lives, and they have real world examples to share.”* Finally, a teacher who had been planning to retire, but was convinced to stay on one more year so she could bring her veteran knowledge to La-bri’ut, expressed the satisfaction of mastering one last teaching challenge, *“It’s been a very interesting way for me to end my religious school teaching career. I never thought I could do this, so it was something new for me and challenging, but very rewarding as well.”*

Challenges and Suggestions for Improvement

Lessons not Well-Matched to Students’ Ages

The most common challenge reported by teachers was content that didn’t quite fit the age groups it was intended for, which they felt necessitated the kinds of curricular adaptations described earlier. This went both ways: one education director shared that her teachers had said the lessons for older students felt “too young” for fifth and sixth graders, so she had rewritten some of the material and found additional resources.

Most of the teachers who were interviewed taught younger students, so they brought examples of content that seemed too mature or not engaging for kindergarteners through second graders. For instance, one noted that Michelle Obama was not a recognizable figure for her K–1 students. Another said that the lessons needed to be “more fun and interactive” in general to reach this age group. The lesson that prompted the strongest critiques in this regard was part of the Ometz Lev unit, exploring how one would use their Ometz Lev in response to an incident in a small town when a rock was thrown through a window during Hanukkah. During the focus group, three teachers shared that they felt uncomfortable addressing the concept of anti-Semitism with K–2 students (even though the lesson never explicitly defines the incident as anti-Semitic). One said that she *“didn’t know how to bring it up with five-year-olds who may not have heard of that concept. I didn’t want to be the one to tell them that some people might hate them for who they are.”* The other teachers agreed—saying they felt the same about their students in first and second grade. One further explained:

The story was about a little town where people didn’t know a lot of Jewish people, talking about how some neighbors were not nice to other neighbors, and how would you feel if someone was talking about you that way? And I thought, we don’t need to let them know that people are going to talk about them that way. ...So I skipped over those lessons.

Additional Challenges and Suggestions

A few other elements of La-bri’ut content or implementation were described as challenging by small numbers of education directors or teachers:

- **Zoom challenges:** Not surprisingly, the typical challenges that students and educators have encountered with Zoom over this past year also impacted La-bri’ut. These included poor audio/video connections, the “Zoom fatigue” of adding more screen time to a week already filled with online learning, and students being less engaged over Zoom (including turning off their videos). One education director commented on the last issue, *“I’m reminding myself that when the screen is off and we just see the kid’s name, it doesn’t mean that they’re not there; they are still getting something out of it and at least they’re logged in. The teachers will now remind the students, ‘I would love to see your faces if it’s possible,’ without pushing them too much.”*
- **Not enough Jewish text/history:** While they appreciated La-bri’ut’s social/emotional focus, some educators thought it sometimes left too little room to cover other “Jewish content” included in their usual curriculum. In one education director’s words, *“While the overall structure is based on Jewish principles and Jewish values, some of the lessons are a little stronger in terms of Jewish content than others. I think it was created very well, but if we were to do this model in the future, that’s something that I might like to see added.”*
- **Modules that are too long and/or repetitive:** For some education directors and teachers, the Sukkat Shalom module in particular felt like one or two lessons too many. A few of the congregations proactively shortened the module, or decided afterwards to trim the following ones, as one education director explained: *“It became a five-week unit on Sukkot. It was much too long and everybody—teachers, kids (especially the older kids), and even me—thought, this is just getting boring and*

repetitive. We made the decision after that to shorten each unit to four weeks, so we eliminated one session from every unit.” A teacher from a different congregation similarly reported that after Sukkat Shalom, she reduced the Ometz Lev module to three lessons.

- **More on-screen interactive activities:** A few education directors and teachers suggested that students would be easier to engage online if there were more games and other interactive activities. Some created such activities on their own but wished more had been built into the curriculum. One education director shared, *“I know that my teachers struggle with the kids who don’t engage in conversation because they’re tuning out. They like anything they can mess with on their screen. They even like typing things into chat, but you can only ask them to do that so many times before they get bored of it. So, it would have been helpful to have more interactive on-screen activity ideas.”*
- **Cost of materials:** Finally, one education director of a smaller program shared that while she thought the home activities were a highly valuable part of La-bri’ut, the expense of providing materials to families was a strain on her program budget: *“The only challenge is that it’s been really expensive. I think it’s pretty fair to say I’ve blown my budget twofold this year, which I feel justified in doing because I think that everyone’s had a really positive experience.”*

Impacts on Future Learning Programs

Nearly all of the education directors—and a few of the teachers—said that their experience with La-bri’ut had given them new perspectives or insights that they expected would inform their approaches to Jewish learning in the “new normal.” The potential changes fell into two categories: more values-based and social–emotional-focused content, and experimentation with hybrid approaches that combine virtual with in-person and/or home-based with synagogue-based learning.

Values-Based and Social–Emotional Content

Three education directors reported that they were considering how to redesign their curricula to incorporate more of the values-based and social–emotional learning that defines La-bri’ut. One noted that this approach to teaching Judaic content is “much more valuable for students,” particularly in an era when purely factual knowledge is at everyone’s fingertips:

If a student wants to know what Sukkot is, they can look it up on the Internet. But if they want to know what Sukkat Shalom is, they need to be able to discuss it, to ask, what does that mean to me? What could it mean for all of us? So, I would love to see us be more focused on values and use that as our framework, rather than, this year the younger kids learn Genesis and the older kids are going to learn Exodus and everyone will learn each holiday.

Other education directors described similar shifts in perspective even more dramatically, with one saying that after La-bri’ut she was:

... blowing up everything that I ever thought about Jewish education. Five years ago, I would have questioned the role of social–emotional learning in a Jewish context, and now I think it should be central. The approach of, in third grade we’re going to learn about Israel and in fourth grade you start Hebrew

and in seventh grade we're going to learn about the Holocaust, and every grade is something different. I'm very comfortable saying that doesn't work and shouldn't work anymore.

A third succinctly summed up the way that, for her, La-bri'ut had completely pivoted the meaning and purpose of Jewish learning from content-centered to learner-centered: *"One of the results of having the kids' needs come first and the content come through the response to their needs has been a really profound change in my head in terms of what Jewish education might be. Instead of asking the question 'what do our children need to learn?' we're asking the question 'what do our children need?' This is a huge shift, and it's opened that up for me."*

Finally, a few teachers, when asked what elements of La-bri'ut they hoped might be incorporated into future programs, said that they thought all of the lessons could and should be adapted to in-person learning in order to continue the values-based approach. One said that she hoped the congregation would continue with the modules they didn't get to this year. Another shared ideas for how the curriculum could be enacted in a synagogue space: *"With Sukkat Shalom you could take them to the sanctuary and show them how that could be a safe space for you. For Kehilla, you have them meet with different groups of the Temple and they can see all the different communities within your synagogue. I think there's a lot of room to add the in-person element and build on this for the following year."*

Hybrid Models (In-Person/Virtual, Synagogue/Home)

Other education directors focused less on the "what" of La-bri'ut than the "how," saying they are now more likely to embrace "out of the classroom" learning opportunities. A few noted that attendance had improved from previous years, which they attributed in part to the ease of virtual learning. One expected that therefore *"some families might really push to continue virtual learning even once we're back in a class setting, because there's always been some families who struggle to make it on Tuesday afternoons, or miss weeks because the kid is playing basketball or in a dance group."* For these families, a hybrid of in-person Sundays and virtual weekdays might be an ideal option. Another similarly said that after seeing the "almost perfect attendance" achieved by La-bri'ut, she was looking at instituting *"more of a hybrid of video learning and in-person, and also independent study, if we can get a commitment and pull it off with our parents."* A third education director was inspired by the family engagement promoted by the at-home projects and is pondering ways to balance this with the desire of families and students to be back together in the synagogue:

I think Jewish learning can take place in any number of places; I've always thought that. I would like to see more individualized and project-based learning. I think the kids did amazing things at home with their siblings and family, and I'd like to see that continue. The feedback I've gotten from parents, especially of our younger kids, is that they'd like to be back in person because it's better for them socially. So I've thought about maybe shorter periods of time in the classroom on a Sunday morning and more taking place at home—or in different environments, or within family groups—and doing some challenges at home, maybe not every week, but maybe a few times a month.

Seeking A Return to Normalcy

Finally, two education directors shared that as much as they appreciated what La-bri'ut had brought to their community this year, their most important goal for the year ahead was a "return to normal." Both felt that their programs had been working well before the pandemic, they were pleased with their curricula overall,

and being back in person would be best for the students. In the words of one, *“We really feel like this has been a great year for our families, but families really want that sense of normal again. I know lots of my colleagues are using this as an opportunity to blow up their programs, but I like my program a lot. I was proud of it, and I want to keep, I would say, 85% of it.”*

Parent Experience and Feedback

A total of 311 families responded to the Parent Survey, 102 in Cleveland² and 209 throughout the rest of the country. Slightly more than half of respondents (54%) have one child participating in La-bri’ut this year, 42% have two children, and 4% have three or more. Learners are split fairly evenly between older and younger cohorts: 75% of families have a K–3 student participating, while 68% have one in grades 4–7.

Family Experience with La-bri’ut

Parents indicated the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with a number of statements describing the La-bri’ut experience and the program’s intended impacts on families. Parents agreed most often that they were receiving “the support we need from teachers/education directors for our La-bri’ut participation,” with half saying that they “strongly agreed” with this statement and about a quarter that they “somewhat agreed.” Close behind were “La-bri’ut content is relevant for our family” and “I feel aware of what my children are doing with La-bri’ut,” each of which received strong agreement from about a third of parents, and moderate agreement from another third. At the other end of the spectrum was the statement that “La-bri’ut has given me a new perspective on the relevance of Jewish values and ideas to my family,” to which only one-fifth of parents strongly agreed and about one-quarter somewhat agreed. The table below shows the full range of statements and levels of agreement/disagreement with each:

Exhibit 1: La Bri’ut Family Experience

	Strongly Agree	Somewhat Agree	Neutral	Somewhat Disagree	Strongly Disagree
My family receives the support we need from teachers/education directors for our La-bri’ut participation	50%	26%	11%	8%	3%
La-bri’ut content is relevant for our family	39%	33%	17%	5%	3%
I feel aware of what my children are doing with La’briut	32%	36%	14%	11%	7%
I understand what La-bri’ut’s goals are	24%	40%	15%	14%	6%
My child(ren) complete the at-home activities relatively regularly	27%	34%	8%	17%	13%

² Cleveland responses by congregation: The Temple - Tifereth Israel – 36; Beth Israel – The West Temple – 17; Anshe Chesed Fairmount Temple – 13; Temple Beth Shalom – 11; Kol Halev – 10; Temple Emanu El – 8; Congregation Shaarey Tikvah – 7; B’nai Jeshurun Congregation - 0

La-bri'ut content has been part of our family's conversations	16%	37%	17%	18%	11%
La-bri'ut has given me a new perspective on the relevance of Jewish values and ideas to my family	20%	27%	27%	13%	10%

Comparing the responses of Cleveland parents to those from elsewhere reveals an interesting pattern. Cleveland parents were more likely to agree with all of the statements, by a range of 1–8 percentage points, with the exception of “My child(ren) complete the at-home activities relatively regularly,” which garnered slightly more agreement outside of Cleveland. The largest gap (8 points) was “I understand what La-bri'ut’s goals are,” followed by “La-bri'ut content is relevant for our family.” While the survey data don’t reveal an explanation for this difference, it is certainly plausible that education directors and teachers from Cleveland were more likely to make use of resources and supports provided by the JEC, which helped them to better convey the program’s goals and relevance to participating families.

Exhibit 2: La Bri'ut Family Experience - Cleveland vs. Elsewhere

	Cleveland Somewhat/ Strongly agree	Non-Cleveland Somewhat/ Strongly agree
My family receives the support we need from teachers/education directors for our La-bri'ut participation	82%	76%
La-bri'ut content is relevant for our family	79%	72%
I feel aware about what my children are doing with La'briut	71%	67%
I understand what La-bri'ut's goals are	70%	62%
My child(ren) complete the at-home activities relatively regularly	60%	62%
La-bri'ut content has been part of our family's conversations	57%	52%
La-bri'ut has given me a new perspective on the relevance of Jewish values and ideas to my family	49%	48%

Learner Experience with La-bri'ut

The survey also asked parents to respond to a number of statements about their child’s (or children’s) learning experience.³ Parents agreed most strongly that La-bri'ut is age-appropriate and teaches meaningful Jewish content and were least likely to agree that their children could complete activities and challenges independently. The table below shows the full range of parents’ responses for children across all grades:

³ Parents with more than one child participating in La-bri'ut were prompted to repeat their responses for each child.

Exhibit 3: La Bri'ut Learner Experience

	Strongly Agree	Somewhat Agree	Neutral	Somewhat Disagree	Strongly Disagree
The La-bri'ut content is age-appropriate for my child	51%	28%	12%	3%	4%
La-bri'ut teaches my child meaningful Jewish content	43%	33%	13%	5%	5%
My child has a positive attitude towards participating in La-bri'ut each week	35%	30%	17%	11%	6%
La-bri'ut gives my child tools and strategies to help them build resilience	28%	33%	25%	7%	5%
The Jewish values taught in La-bri'ut help my child address challenges they have been facing over the last year	25%	31%	27%	10%	5%
La-bri'ut helps my child connect with other children	23%	31%	25%	13%	7%
My child is able to complete at home activities and/or challenges independently of adult (or teen) support	24%	27%	16%	19%	10%

While there were no statistically significant differences in these responses between Cleveland and elsewhere, there were notable variances by age group. Parents were more likely to agree with nearly all the statements for children in grades K–3 than 4–7 (with the exception of completing activities independently), with the biggest gaps for the content being age-appropriate and their child having a positive attitude toward participating in La-bri'ut.

Exhibit 4: La-Bri'ut Learner Experience – Younger vs. Older Children

	K-3 Somewhat/ Strongly agree	4-7 Somewhat/ Strongly agree
The La-bri'ut content is age-appropriate for my child	87%	76%
La-bri'ut teaches my child meaningful Jewish content	80%	76%
My child has a positive attitude towards participating in La-bri'ut each week	73%	58%
La-bri'ut gives my child tools and strategies to help them build resilience	65%	63%
The Jewish values taught in La-bri'ut help my child address challenges they have been facing over the last year	61%	57%
La-bri'ut helps my child connect with other children	58%	55%
My child is able to complete at home activities and/or challenges independently of adult (or teen) support.	51%	63%

Comments on Family and Learner Experiences

About half of the survey respondents provided further details in open-ended comments about their family's and children's experiences with La-bri'ut. Although the quantitative ratings showed much more agreement than disagreement with positive statements about La-bri'ut, comments were about equally divided between positive assessments, critiques, and expressions of being generally unaware of or disconnected from the program. Parents from outside of Cleveland expressed more criticism and/or disconnection than Clevelanders, most of whom shared appreciative and enthusiastic comments. Cleveland parents who did express displeasure with elements of La-bri'ut tended to be more constructive in their critiques than those from elsewhere. Below is a sampling of positive and negative comments from both groups (the critical comments presented are among the more constructive ones, rather than those that simply expressed disappointment with the curriculum not covering typical religious school content, or frustration about the additional Zoom time required of their children):

Positive Comments - Cleveland

- *I have been consistently impressed with how the kids are engaging with the curriculum, especially the hands-on projects. Even if they are reluctant to start with, by the end they have had a great time.*
- *It seems that the program is filled with positive Jewish educational goals and values. My kids both seem to be enjoying it and learning.*
- *Though being at home is a challenge, the lessons have been so relevant to the issues our family has faced over the last 12 months.*
- *This program has been absolutely amazing. My daughter and I look forward to Sunday School at home every weekend. She loves the crafts and the themes. She will reference the concepts throughout the week when she's working on school or another project. We could not be more pleased!*
- *This has truly been wonderful to have during the pandemic! Helping to recognize resilience and big feelings has been terrific.*

Positive Comments - Non-Cleveland

- *The activities give weight to conversations about Hebrew school. I love the social emotional connection and think it is brilliantly tied into my son's life. Thank you for your thoughtfulness in creating a curriculum that works well virtually, too!*
- *I was impressed with how relevant the themes have been to this school year, and the feelings we're all having about the pandemic. Really well done!*
- *Our twins actively engage right away with the ideas and projects in the curriculum. They tie to Torah stories they are learning, and they love showing off their projects in short videos. They also love having their own project boxes. The projects seem to tap into their crazy imagination but tied to basic Jewish values.*
- *The content my children have been learning has provided topics of conversations for many family dinners. It's been insightful and interesting.*

- *I do think the content has been a confidence booster for my child who has anxiety. It helps her feel more connected to her Jewishness and also to just have an understanding of what it's like to live on a community with others in interdependence.*

Critical Comments - Cleveland

- *Sometimes, I feel like the content tends to be more general focused instead of Jewish focused, and sometimes too much time is spent on the same thing, and the at-home assignments don't seem to be worthwhile.*
- *I really like the idea behind this program, but I thought the activities weren't challenging or thought provoking enough for my 5th grade sons.*
- *The homework, while good activities, are hard to complete during the week and separate from Sunday school. Wish the time frame for Sunday school was longer and kids could complete the art projects during class time while everyone online together.*
- *I like the core concepts of the program, but a lot of the content itself is made up of abstract thinking, which makes its relevance harder for younger children—they don't "get it" as easily. Some of the activities, especially earlier in the year, were really good. Some of the later activities have been less engaging or the lessons absorbed by younger students.*

Critical Comments - Non-Cleveland

- *My fourth grader is probably developmentally more suited to the younger activities. He finds the activities too abstract (maybe not the right word here but at least not hands-on enough).*
- *Some assignments were too repetitive—beating a dead horse. Some assignments were too difficult, too abstract, for my child, so it was homework for me and my husband, and not appreciated!*
- *From the perspective of a K learner's family, the content of the La-bri'ut values is both too vague, and too lofty to be usefully applicable to real world situations.*
- *My kindergartener is unable to do the activities independently. He needs an adult to scan the QR code and we watch the video together. Then he needs help to complete the project, since there are many different materials and multiple step directions.*

Comparison to Pre-Pandemic Jewish Learning

Parents were asked to compare La-bri'ut to their children's most recent pre-pandemic Jewish learning experiences on a scale of "Much worse" to "Much better." The largest group (46% in Cleveland and 40% elsewhere) said the experience was "about the same." Comments revealed that for many who chose this option, the sentiment they wished to convey was not that the two experiences were similar (as they were clearly not), but that given the unique benefits of each, the pluses and minuses averaged out as "about the same." In general, parents valued the in-person connection of pre-pandemic religious school and the engagement, convenience, and self-pacing of La-bri'ut.

Exhibit 5: Comparison to Pre-Pandemic Jewish Learning

	Cleveland	Non-Cleveland
Much worse	3%	8%
Somewhat worse	21%	25%
About the same	46%	40%
Somewhat better	19%	17%
Much better	10%	10%

Below are a selection of comments from those who said La-bri'ut was somewhat or much better than prior learning, which offer a guide for determining which elements of La-bri'ut might be most valuable to incorporate into future Jewish learning programs:

Prefer La-bri'ut – Cleveland Parents

- *It's nice to have the flexibility to do the activity at our own pace and time.*
- *The program seems more structured compared to past Hebrew school learning.*
- *Previously my older one really did not enjoy Saturday school aside from being with friends, kiddush and any opportunities to be in plays. He now seems to enjoy the conversations he has in class online with his teacher and peers. A lot of this may have to do with his specific teacher, who he really likes. My younger one seems happy and interested when she is online in her classes. She enjoyed in person classes before, but her previous teachers gave me the impression they were pretty unengaged.*
- *The at home discussions and projects were topic specific and relatable.*
- *I like the way the teachers connect the Jewish meaning and morality to everyday experiences.*
- *Being able to learn from home has been amazing.*
- *I am overwhelmingly impressed with the hands-on resources and deep conversations and resources that are happening for my child and led by [her] teachers! Exemplar!*
- *While my daughter loved in person religious school, I have enjoyed participating in her program on the sidelines and seeing what she is learning.*
- *The weekday format (as opposed to Shabbat morning) lets him do more hands-on participation. Having an at-home component helps me connect to his learning.*
- *I think that this program has shown that a hybrid model—a combination of in-person learning, supported by technology outside of the classroom, can be an extremely valuable educational model moving forward. I would be interested, when things start approaching normal again, to see how this curriculum could be extended and adapted to a hybrid (in-person and online) model.*

Prefer La-bri'ut – Non-Cleveland Parents

- *They love the materials they work on in class and are very enthusiastic about learning even online. It's been wonderful to at least see their excitement and willingness. The teachers also make a huge difference.*
- *I think the curriculum is more updated and planned out than what we had before.*
- *They like being able to pick and choose activities, and they like being able to go at their own pace.*
- *My son feels more connected and more a part of his Jewish community!*
- *She's enjoyed the autonomy that comes along with this program.*
- *She can go at her own pace, she is included, she feels connected to our temple.*
- *Because the time frame is shorter, and there is more one-on-one interaction due to class size, I actually feel that it is better for my child emotionally and mentally.*
- *The content presentation and discussions have been meaningful and relevant to daily life.*
- *My 6th grader is very shy and introverted as well as has ADHD so being able to take his time independently during his course has been wonderful for him.*
- *It's a nice pace for my daughter—and 30 minutes after school compared to two hours after school is much healthier for her mind. The shortened class gives her enough time to review and learn content, but also ends in enough time to allow her to have a mental break after a full day of learning.*

Favorite Experiences and Applying Values

Parents were asked to share their family's favorite experiences with La-bri'ut, as well as examples of how their child had applied the values they learned in the program to something in their lives.⁴ At the time of the survey, most families had completed only the first two or three La-bri'ut units—Sukkat Shalom, Ometz Lev, and G'vurah—and thus focused on these concepts in their responses. About 20 parents each recalled the Sukkat Shalom and Ometz Lev projects as favorite experiences, while 10 selected G'vurah. In addition, 18 cited the hands-on projects generally, and 10 appreciated opportunities for family connection. Examples of applying values were also split between the three units, with the impact on ability to manage or express emotions a frequent theme. Below are selected quotes illustrating how families experienced and applied the La-bri'ut activities and values:

⁴ Most parents did not respond to these optional open-ended questions. Eighty shared a favorite experience, and 35 identified a way their child had applied a value (another 20 stated that they were not able to answer this question).

Sukkat Shalom

- *The shalom house was awesome!!! We loved the cardboard box we turned into a place of peace, and it sits by our front door. (Cleveland parent)*
- *My younger son (Pre-kindergarten) mentioned to some of his peers in his public school that his sukkot shalom was his bedroom, and he explained to them what it meant. (Cleveland parent)*
- *Talking to others about sukkot shalom and where they felt safe—child called her grandparents (my parents) and the responses from them and other relatives will become family treasures. (Non-Cleveland parent)*
- *The Sukkat shalom lessons really resonated with my kids. They still talk about what makes them feel safe and comfortable. (Non-Cleveland parent)*
- *When my super shy first grader didn't want to go to her regular school zoom meetings and would hide under the table (last fall) we started talking about making her a sukkat shalom, a little under the table fort that made her feel safer. She could then relax enough to listen to her meeting at least, and eventually worked her way back up to being on screen a little bit. Sometimes her sukkat shalom is sitting on her Grandpa's lap too. It's a great concept for a kid who feels especially anxious. (Non-Cleveland parent)*

Ometz Lev

- *The ometz lev jar was a big hit with the family, and our children will still use it on occasion. They were excited to share them with their class when they made them! (Cleveland parent)*
- *My son loved the ometz lev glitter jar and uses it often to help calm or refocus himself. (Cleveland parent)*
- *We have been working to use our Ometz Lev throughout the day. The kids love their fortune tellers and carry them around. (Cleveland parent)*
- *My daughter often talks about ometz lev and how she can use it when frustrated with her brother. (Cleveland parent)*
- *My daughter talks about using her ometz lev to finish schoolwork she doesn't want to do. Ha! (Cleveland parent)*
- *My first grader did a nice job with one of the ometz lev activities, where he did a video showing which strategies he used for different emojis that he felt. His teacher showed the video to the whole Sunday School and he was so proud! (Non-Cleveland parent)*
- *We love the sparkle jars and use them all the time still. They were fun to make, and especially useful in calming ourselves down. I even made one for myself that I use! (Non-Cleveland parent)*
- *My family really enjoyed the Family Schmooze #1 about Ometz Lev/inner strength. We talked about it as a family, and we pointed out each other's strengths and talked about how we can use those strengths to help others. (Non-Cleveland parent)*
- *The topics this year have been very timely for a first grader, i.e. dealing with "big" feelings. We talk about this often, as she navigates through friendships, school, and everyday life. Very helpful. (Non-Cleveland parent)*
- *The project where they acted out situations in which they experienced big feelings and then the ometz lev tools they engaged really resonated with my kids. They seemed to connect this activity really well with other socio-emotional tools we have introduced to them (taking some time to settle themselves in their peace corner, reading a slumberkins book, snuggling a stuffie, using their ometz lev glitter jar). (Non-Cleveland parent)*

G'vurah

- *My son was especially interested in the comic book exercise about G'vurah, and we discussed if each of us had a superpower what it would be. He was also excited to find out about the Jewish authors of Superman comics. He wanted to watch the Superman movie for our weekend movie night :) (Cleveland parent)*
- *The week that parents were encouraged to share an experience where we had observed our children exercising their strength of character was very meaningful. (Cleveland parent)*
- *To help our child come up with g'vurot for his superhero, both parents actively noticed and named positive behaviors he exhibited during a normal day. He loved hearing the justified praise, and I enjoyed taking time to notice these qualities in him. (Cleveland parent)*
- *She decided to write the strengths or powers of people she loves (such as her dad and grandma) to put in her box last week instead of just writing about her own. I think that brings to mind the previous unit because she was thinking about the qualities of her community. (Cleveland parent)*
- *Talking a lot about their superpowers for good with lots of pretend play activities they came up with. One child writing kind letters to neighbors. (Non-Cleveland parent)*
- *In the G'vurah unit there was an opportunity for my child to identify and articulate his ability to stand up for a peer; he internalized the lesson in a real and meaningful way. (Non-Cleveland parent)*

Projects/Family Involvement

- *We enjoyed the family time doing the projects—it sometimes felt less about the project and more about doing something together that was organized by somebody else (not parents!). Some of the concepts they understood better than others, but overall we love the idea of it! (Cleveland parent)*
- *Seeing my son excited about RS and the projects. He would almost immediately do the next project after class and be so proud of what he created. I can really see him connecting the themes to his everyday life. (Cleveland parent)*
- *Having both parents know what themes the children are learning about ... allowed us to integrate these themes into life outside of Sunday school, which has been nice. Both children were learning about the same theme in an age-appropriate way, which also made carrying the themes over nice for the whole family. (Cleveland parent)*
- *Family Schmooze at the table and in the car—nice chats with quality listen/shares among all ages :) (Non-Cleveland parent)*
- *We really enjoyed the crafts. It was a time for us to be together. (Non-Cleveland parent)*

Parent Engagement

About one-quarter of the respondents provided examples of how they had engaged with La-bri'ut. Most said they did so either through completing activities with their children and/or discussing the themes of the lessons (often at the same time). A smaller number said that they either observed or listened in on the Zoom sessions, which then helped them connect with their children around the content of the lessons. Below are selected quotes from parents describing their engagement:

Involvement in Activities

- *My children were often resistant to wanting to do the home projects and benefited from adult encouragement to initiate the assignment. We enjoyed working with them as it gave us a chance to learn about what they were working on. (Cleveland parent)*
- *I work with my child on each assignment. He'd rather be playing sports, so it helps me emphasize that this is an important part of his life too. (Cleveland parent)*
- *We can have informal conversations and complete projects as a family. (Cleveland parent)*
- *Watching activity instruction videos with our child, encouraging him to take steps to complete the activity and talking him through the concepts if needed, sitting in on the zoom session. (Cleveland parent)*
- *I'd help with activities. At the beginning of the second-grade year he needed more scaffolding and helping with projects, and now he's doing them all by himself. (Non-Cleveland parent)*
- *The kids are pretty independent with their projects, but they show them to me and we talk about them. (Non-Cleveland parent)*
- *It really does require me to pull out the material, but then I'm looking at it—I often had no idea what they were working on before. I appreciate that. (Non-Cleveland parent)*
- *Since my child is young, we watch the videos and do the activities together. It leads to good discussion and we can refer back to the big ideas throughout the week. (Non-Cleveland parent)*
- *Helping my son during his weekly assignments has brought us together working on his understanding of Jewish values. (Non-Cleveland parent)*

Family Discussions

- *We talked about the central ideas at dinner which was nice at times [to] connect as a family. (Cleveland parent)*
- *I like listening in and then subtly bringing up the content in future conversations. (Cleveland parent)*
- *As a Bubbe doing this with my granddaughter I can model learning and encourage her learning and sharing and thinking. (Cleveland parent)*
- *We've used some of the concepts to help our daughter with some inter-personal challenges at school and with her babysitter. (Non-Cleveland parent)*
- *I appreciate knowing what they are engaging in during Sunday School and being able to reference these concepts as they are related to experiences throughout the week. (Non-Cleveland parent)*
- *The Family Schmooze #2 My daughter and I made up a dance with the Debbie Friedman song Miriam song. We had a big discussion about big feeling and how music can make us feel better when we are having those big feelings. (Non-Cleveland parent)*
- *It's been great to talk to my kids about all of our anxieties and fears and talk through as a family how we can use these tools to cope with stress. (Non-Cleveland parent)*

Observing/Listening to Classes

- *I really enjoy sitting next to her during zoom and learning alongside her and the class. At times, she needs help with the activities or confidence in answering a question, so she seeks my support during that time. (Cleveland parent)*
- *I overhear much more than I ever have before during RS. Since they are learning in the same room or close by, I am able to really hear what the teachers are teaching. I feel more engaged with my younger child and the curriculum than I do my older child. (Cleveland parent)*
- *I enjoy peeking in on what my children are doing during religious school on zoom. This would not be as easy if class was in person. (Non-Cleveland parent)*
- *I have been present in the room so I can discuss content after session with my child. (Non-Cleveland parent)*

Challenges and Suggested Improvements

Parents shared the challenges they had encountered with La-bri’ut, selecting from a list of options, and offered comments regarding suggested improvements to the program. The most common challenge—selected by nearly half of Cleveland parents and 4 in 10 non-Cleveland parents—was the difficulty forming relationships with other children (an inevitable limitation of the virtual environment). One-third of Cleveland parents (and slightly more in other communities) said there were “too many stresses in our lives to do at home activities.” Other challenges selected by one-quarter or more of parents were “children not engaged with the content,” “too much Zoom time,” and “too much parental support needed for at home activities.” One in five Cleveland parents (and slightly fewer elsewhere) said they did not encounter any of the listed challenges with La-bri’ut.

Exhibit 6: Challenges Encountered with La-bri’ut

	Cleveland	Non-Cleveland
Difficult to form relationships with other children	47%	40%
Too many stresses in our lives to do at home activities	33%	39%
Child(ren) were not engaged with the content	30%	26%
Too much time on Zoom for my child(ren)	24%	30%
Too much parental support needed for at home activities	24%	25%
Lacking in breadth of traditional content (Torah stories, holidays, history)	20%	23%
The modules/values stretched on too long for my child(ren)	10%	6%
At home activities were too messy or complicated	7%	10%
Child(ren) were overwhelmed by elements of La-bri’ut	3%	5%
Difficult to navigate our family’s technology	3%	4%
None of the above	20%	17%

Parents' suggested improvements generally reflected the challenges cited most frequently: more opportunities for connections among peers or families, fewer at-home projects and less need for parent supervision, and more tools for parents to familiarize themselves with the La-bri'ut curriculum and materials.⁵ Below are selected comments in each category:

More Peer/Family Connections

- *More one on one kid interactions in breakout rooms. (Cleveland parent)*
- *I think in 4th grade, he could have the responsibility to call another child from his class and spend 5–10 minutes answering a question or collaborating on something. I think more than 5–10 minutes is a chore at that age. But, if he got to do that, each week or once per month with a different kid, it would plant the seedling of a possible friendship. (Cleveland parent)*
- *If students could complete the activities with the teacher and the other students, I think he would learn more and be more engaged (it would be fine if the class was slightly longer to accommodate this). (Cleveland parent)*
- *I wish there was a better way to connect with other families about the activities—it felt like some weeks our family program didn't even talk about the home activity. (Cleveland parent)*
- *Maybe I would have families match up from each grade level and class and have us do these Schmooze together family/friends schmooze :) (Non-Cleveland parent)*
- *In person socially distanced meet up once or twice a session. (Non-Cleveland parent)*

Fewer At-Home Projects/Less Parent Supervision

- *We just don't have the time or bandwidth to do anything outside the normal class hours. Would be better if projects were incorporated and done together in class. (Cleveland parent)*
- *I just think kids need less homework. She is in school all week, then zoom for an hour on Sunday morning, has homework during the week for school, then this homework, then she does dance. It honestly adds another level of stress to the week to have extra homework. I would prefer if it was completed during the Sunday school. (Cleveland parent)*
- *More time to do projects with teacher instead of with parents! (Non-Cleveland parent)*
- *Less at home learning activities that require parent supervision. (Non-Cleveland parent)*
- *If the craft is supposed to be truly independent, then it needs to be a craft that a child of that age level can do on their own. (Non-Cleveland parent)*

⁵ There were also some requests to focus on different content, though most of these seemed to be not so much suggestions for improving La-bri'ut as calls for replacing it.

Tools for Parents to Better Understand La-bri'ut

(Note: Most of the resources named below were developed and offered to synagogues by JEC. Education directors could utilize them in their programs or not at their discretion.)

- *I would like to have more of an umbrella's or overview understanding of the entire La-bri'ut program. I see the details but not the overall picture. (Cleveland parent)*
- *Many activities required parental support to locate the corresponding activities and materials within box. Maybe group together/label on which week or with which activity certain materials are used if they are used multiple weeks to help guide child to be independent. (Cleveland parent)*
- *It would be helpful to have a "parent" summary or a weekly email/text to tell parents what the kids are learning about. (Non-Cleveland parent)*
- *Maybe separate emails to parents with suggested activities that would complement what they are learning in class. (Non-Cleveland parent)*
- *A 5-minute video overview of the unit for parents at the start, so we know what is coming, and how the unit will unfold (since we have to help/guide the kids and discuss with them). Just a little more overview and guidance from the beginning of each unit so we - as parents - can talk about it and be prepared (not surprised). (Non-Cleveland parent)*

Future Learning

Finally, parents selected the elements that they wished to see incorporated into future Jewish learning opportunities for their children. "Focus on building relationships/community among children," was the most frequently selected (70% of respondents), which may well have been a reflection of what parents felt was most missing for their children during this past year. The other two elements selected by more than six in ten parents—"Jewish values focused learning" and "a focus on children's spiritual growth and development"—are highly aligned with the La-bri'ut experience. However, other features of La-bri'ut, such as "asynchronous learning opportunities," "all children in the family learning the same content," and "guided multi-week challenges" were much less popular, selected by less than 20% of parents as desirable in future Jewish learning. The table below shows the full range of elements and the percentage of Cleveland⁶ parents who indicated that they wish to see them incorporated into their children's Jewish learning.

⁶ The table focuses on Cleveland parents as the population most relevant for the JEC. Responses from parents outside of Cleveland were generally similar, with small variances in some percentages.

Exhibit 7: Desired Elements of Future Jewish Learning Programs (Cleveland only)

Focus on building relationships/community among children	70%
Jewish values focused learning (e.g., each of the themes like Sukkat Shalom or Ometz Lev)	62%
A focus on children’s social-emotional needs within a Jewish context	61%
A focus on children’s spiritual growth and development	49%
Support for children to pursue personal Jewish learning interests	48%
Family learning activities	42%
Learning in a cohort of ten or less children	37%
Support for informal family conversations outside of learning time (“Family schmooze”)	28%
Virtual learning format (e.g., Zoom)	28%
Multi-age/grade projects	27%
Multiple learning option times during the week	22%
At-home activities or challenges	20%
Guided multi-week challenges	19%
All children in the family learning the same content	16%
Longer learning sessions to allow for in-depth projects	15%
Asynchronous learning opportunities (completed in your child(ren)’s own time)	14%
Concentrated learning time (and childcare) during winter or spring break	14%

Conclusion

Though it had some road bumps, as is true of most pilot programs, overall La-bri'ut provided a highly positive and meaningful Jewish learning experience for both families and educators. Most were deeply appreciative that the JEC had given students the opportunity to remain engaged with Jewish learning and their congregational communities despite the limitations imposed by the pandemic. A majority of respondents felt that La-bri'ut's values-based content was relevant and age appropriate, and that it helped their children build resilience and address the challenges of a difficult year. A number of parents described how La-bri'ut's concepts and projects helped their children explore, express, and manage their emotions, for example by envisioning or creating a Sukkat Shalom, or finding calm through a glitter-filled Ometz Lev jar. More than six in ten participating Cleveland parents would like to see their children's future Jewish learning continue to focus on Jewish values and social-emotional needs in a Jewish context, and nearly half say that spiritual growth and personal learning interests should be prioritized. Education directors and teachers who implemented La-bri'ut shared similarly positive reflections regarding the impacts of the values-based and social-emotional focus, and a number described how they could imagine incorporating such content into future programs and/or continuing to experiment with blended virtual and in-person learning modalities. All of this represents a dramatic change from the way congregational schools have typically functioned, opening up exciting opportunities for the JEC to continue to design and deliver innovative content and approaches that meets the needs of Jewish learners in 2021 and the decades to follow.



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