

# #ONWARDHEBREW TAKES OFF

A BASELINE SURVEY OF CURRENT IMPLEMENTATION  
Fall 2018



Photo: Jewish Education Center of Cleveland

**Executive summary – pages 3-4**

**Full report – pages 5-16**

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# #OnwardHebrew Takes Off

## Fall 2018 Survey - Executive Summary<sup>1</sup>

*"Almost everyone I have spoken to at our temple, thinks it is a phenomenal idea. Most comments (from them) include, 'Why did no one think of this before?'"*

Respondent, #OnwardHebrew 2018 survey

#OnwardHebrew burst onto the Jewish educational scene in the Fall of 2017 with the goal of radically transforming the decades-old, less-than-effective approach<sup>2</sup> to teaching Hebrew in part-time/congregational settings. In contrast to most students' current experiences - with years of less-than-inspiring Hebrew decoding practice - #OnwardHebrew advocates sound-to-print learning, paralleling the way children acquire their mother tongue, i.e., building an oral/aural foundation (i.e., hearing *sounds*) prior to learning to read (i.e., tackling *print*).

In its first year of existence, #OnwardHebrew quickly expanded beyond its initial leadership team of seven, to hundreds of Jewish educators and clergy who have participated in workshops, shared conversations and joined the initiative's Facebook group. On a formal level, almost 20 congregational education programs applied for and achieved "On-the-Way" or "All In" status with the four #OnwardHebrew elements (see *the textbox*).

The large interest and speedy adoption of the #OnwardHebrew principles across North America inspired the development of a Fall 2018 survey against which future progress will be measured. Reaching out to educator groups through Facebook and other social media, 86 valid surveys were attained, representing 86 different educational programs, most of which (but not all) had adopted one or more elements of #OnwardHebrew. The information from the respondents provide evidence of #OnwardHebrew's early impact, as well as potential trajectory.

Students in educational programs that are "All In" with #OnwardHebrew are immersed in rich Hebrew learning that expands beyond the walls of a typical classroom period. These students:

- Learn Hebrew via "Hebrew Through Movement" (HTM)
- Participate in regular Hebrew *t'fillah* (worship).
- Hear Jewish Life Vocabulary (JLV) intentionally infused in English sentences
- Learn to decode/read Hebrew *after* they have spent years learning Hebrew aurally/orally.

### SUMMARY OF FINDINGS:

1. *#OnwardHebrew is an initiative still in its infancy*, beginning to spread from a small group of initial "innovators" to a larger number of "early adopters."<sup>3</sup> Education directors who are intrigued with #OnwardHebrew have generally started with low-hanging fruit (e.g., Hebrew Through Movement, Jewish Life Vocabulary, and more frequent and intentional Hebrew worship opportunities).

<sup>1</sup> With thanks to Dr. Isa Aron for her assistance in editing both the Executive Summary and Full Report.

<sup>2</sup> Schachter, "Why Bonnie and Ronnie Can't Read (the Siddur)." *Journal of Jewish Education*, 71:2, pages 74-91. Moskowitz, "Maybe We Should Blame Guttenberg," <https://www.onwardhebrew.org/blog/maybe-we-should-blame-guttenberg>

<sup>3</sup> This language is based on E.M. Rogers's "Diffusion of Innovation" theory, offering five adopter categories: Innovators, Early Adopters, Early Majority, Late Majority, and Laggards. <http://sphweb.bumc.bu.edu/otlt/MPH-Modules/SB/BehavioralChangeTheories/BehavioralChangeTheories4.html>

2. *Almost two-thirds of the education directors who responded to the survey, especially those connected to the Reform movement, expressed enthusiasm for the #OnwardHebrew learning approach.*
3. *Respondents indicated high student and teacher enthusiasm for key elements of #OnwardHebrew.* There is new energy for Hebrew learning in part-time settings.
4. *The biggest two challenges for those adopting #OnwardHebrew are convincing stakeholders that a) aural/oral literacy should be well-established* before introducing the skill of Hebrew decoding/reading and b) that *print is more efficiently taught in a one-on-one setting*, rather than in an all-class environment. The survey results illustrate that most responding educational programs have not moved their decoding instruction to a later grade, nor created one-on-one learning opportunities.
5. *The potential of #OnwardHebrew's reach is large.* Of the 86 survey respondents, 62 noted that their educational program had adopted Hebrew Through Movement (HTM). These 62 report a combined total of over 5,000 HTM students this Fall, alone. While 5000 sounds impressive, the number is undoubtedly low - the 62 HTM respondents represent less than 20% of the 350+ educational programs that have enrolled teachers in the JECC's online HTM seminar since its introduction six years ago.



Photo: Jewish Education Center of Cleveland

## **RECOMMENDATIONS:**

#OnwardHebrew is a new initiative that is standing “on the edge of possibility,” ready to transform a tired, decades old learning model in part-time/congregational educational programs. In the last year, the Jewish Education Center of Cleveland, with the input and direction of #OnwardHebrew’s leadership team, has provided a number of supports including a robust, resource-filled website and a “join-the-conversation” Facebook group. However, survey results hint at the need for more attention to supporting transformational change and more intentional involvement of stakeholder groups (clergy, parents, teachers). With almost a third of the survey’s respondents asking for someone to contact them regarding #OnwardHebrew, it is clear that more personal attention is needed to accelerate the initiative.

# #OnwardHebrew Takes Off

## Fall 2018 Survey - Full Report

### BACKGROUND

#OnwardHebrew is an initiative that champions a better Hebrew learning experience for pre Bar/Bat Mitzvah students in part-time/congregational settings. Supported by the Jewish Education Center of Cleveland and a North American leadership team of seven educators,<sup>4</sup> #OnwardHebrew officially launched in the fall of 2017. It advocates a **sound-to-print** language learning approach - only after years of acquiring the **sounds** of Hebrew are students introduced to the skill of decoding/reading **print**.

In the last year, almost 20 part-time/congregational education programs have formally been designated<sup>5</sup> as “On-the-Way” or “All In” with initiative’s four elements:

1. Learn Hebrew language via the highly engaging and successful curriculum, “Hebrew Through Movement” (HTM).
2. Participate in regular Hebrew *t’fillah* (worship).
3. Hear Jewish Life Vocabulary (JLV) intentionally infused in English sentences [e.g., “*Boker tov* (good morning) everyone! We’re excited to see Brian today – he’s back after a *r’fu-ah sh’leimah* (complete health-recovery).”] Ideally, students also take on the use of these words in their own direct communication.
4. Learn to decode/read Hebrew only after they have spent years learning Hebrew aurally/orally (e.g., via HTM, *t’fillah* and JLV). In informal #OnwardHebrew parlance, this has come to be known as “delaying decoding,” ideally in grade five or six.

In addition, in the nine months preceding the 2018 survey, members of the leadership team recorded over 500 “touches” with Jewish educators and clergy via workshops at conferences, webinars, face-to-face conversations and phone calls. A website was launched (<http://OnwardHebrew.org>) at the beginning of March, 2018; it has been averaging 1000 unique visits per month. A Facebook page was set up (search: Onward Hebrew) and at the time of the survey had over 300 members.

With the spark of energy that #OnwardHebrew has inserted into part-time Hebrew education, and the speed at which synagogue educational programs across North America have either jumped on board or joined the conversation, the #OnwardHebrew leadership team decided to take a snapshot of the initiative in the Fall of 2018 via an online survey. Education directors were invited to participate via email requests and Facebook postings in a number of Jewish educational groups.<sup>6</sup>

It is anticipated that the Fall 2018 survey will serve as a baseline for future studies of #OnwardHebrew’s progress.

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<sup>4</sup> Dr. Isa Aron, Brad Cohen, Rabbi Nicki Greninger, Nachama Skolnik Moskowitz, Rabbi Stacy Rigler, Rabbi Stacy Schlein, Dr. Kathy Schwartz

<sup>5</sup> The updated list is at the bottom of the initiative’s homepage, <http://OnwardHebrew.org>. “On-the-Way” designees have adopted three of the four elements, whereas “All In” programs have tackled all four.

<sup>6</sup> Email was sent to directors with at least one teacher registered in the Hebrew Through Movement online seminar, as well as others known to members of the leadership team. Facebook postings were made in these groups: OnwardHebrew, Hebrew Through Movement, JEDLAB and the Association for Reform Jewish Educators.

## RESPONDENTS

Eighty-six distinct (non-duplicated) educational programs are represented in the results.

- Most programs (63%) are on the east coast (New Hampshire to Florida), followed by the west coast (21%), midwest (11%), and southwest (5%, identified as Texas and Colorado).
- The responding programs affiliate as follows:
  - Reform: 67%
  - Conservative: 23%
  - Reconstructionist: 5%
  - Unaffiliated/independent: 5%

No responding programs affiliated as Renewal or Orthodox.

- In the vast majority of cases, the director of the educational program was the one who responded to the survey.

## CONVERSATIONS WITH STAKEHOLDERS

Almost 80% of the respondents indicated that they participated in at least one #OnwardHebrew conversation with others in their educational program.

Currently, most of the #OnwardHebrew conversations have been with staff (directors, clergy and Hebrew teachers) and less so with volunteer leadership or parents.

**Table 1: “With whom have #OnwardHebrew conversations taken place in your educational setting or host institution?”** Reconstructionist (n=4) and Unaffiliated/Independent (n=4) responses are only reflected in the Total, below, among the n=86).

	Total respondents n=86	Reform Respondents n=58	Conservative Respondents n=20
Education director	78%	85%	65%
Clergy (rabbi and/or cantor)	69%	79%	40%
Hebrew teachers	70%	72%	60%
Education committee chair	34%	36%	35%
Education committee	33%	38%	25%
Board of Trustees	19%	28%	0
Parents	39%	42%	30%

This chart supports suppositions drawn from anecdotal conversations with educational directors affiliated with the Conservative (USCJ) movement – that their synagogues are currently less ready to engage with #OnwardHebrew than their Reform-affiliated colleagues.

The comments (n=42) that accompanied the question shared in Table 1 show a wide range of responses. Below is a sample:

- Enthusiastic<sup>7</sup>
  - "... a lot of energy and excitement around Onward Hebrew"
  - "The children are like sponges soaking up every bit of Hebrew they get. Then they go home and squeeze it out on their siblings and friends."
  - "Almost everyone I have spoken to at our Temple thinks it is a phenomenal idea. Most comments include, "What did no one think of this before?"
  - "Everyone is intrigued by the idea and believes it makes sense."
  
- Skepticism or nervousness
  - "Our rabbi believes it's a great match for our youngest students, but that it's inappropriate for kids to only learn to decode near their bar/bat mitzvah age. It's an ongoing conversation between the two of us, and something we're considering bringing to our Limudim committee."
  - "... others are hesitant about moving away from what they know."
  - "Clergy is excited, teachers are very nervous and do not want to change the format of any Hebrew learning. Most of them have been teaching Hebrew at the synagogue in the same format for many (15+) years."
  
- Not supportive (especially with introducing decoding at a later age).
  - "There is a general feeling the children should start learning Hebrew as young as possible, and that that should include letter recognition and decoding. We have a parent unhappy that we don't have decoding expectations until 3<sup>rd</sup> grade, she wants her kindergartener reading prayers in Hebrew."
  - "... When delayed decoding has been mentioned there has been a shocked, mostly negative reaction."
  - "They are supportive of HTM, Hebrew vocabulary and Hebrew in Tefillah, but not of delaying decoding."

### **HEBREW THROUGH MOVEMENT**

Almost 80% (n=67) of the programs who responded to the #OnwardHebrew survey utilize Hebrew Through Movement (HTM) in at least one grade, kindergarten through grade six.<sup>8</sup> In the 2018-2019 school year, the 67 respondents indicate that over 5000 students are involved in this learning model at least once a week. More than half of these programs (52%) average 15-19 minutes per week of HTM learning, a quarter of them schedule 10-14 minutes weekly, and 14% learn for 20-24 minutes weekly.

- Hebrew Through Movement is most popularly taught in first and/or second grade (86% of programs using HTM), PreK and/or K (80%), and third and/or fourth grade (72%).
  - While there is a drop in usage in the upper grades, some of this difference may be related to movement-affiliation:

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<sup>7</sup> Almost two-thirds of the responses fit this category.

<sup>8</sup> Overall, slightly fewer Reform respondents (78%) use HTM than Conservative ones (85%).

**Table 2: “In what grades are students learning with HTM?” (partial responses)**

	All respondents	Reform-affiliated respondents	Conservative-affiliated respondents
Fifth Grade	40%	48%	31%
Sixth Grade	23%	30%	13%

Four educational programs noted that they use HTM in seventh grade, as well (this was not one of the options on the survey).

- In a few of the comments, directors noted that they were still “growing” the use of HTM in their program, meaning that it will be introduced in more upper grades over time.
- Almost all of the responding programs (98%) focus on the HTM foundational words that enable students to move throughout the learning space – run, sit, spin, jump, point. Slightly more than half (54%) introduce the holiday units and 40% use HTM to support Jewish Life Vocabulary (see below, page 8). Less than 20% of the total respondents use it to introduce either *t’fillot*/prayer vocabulary or print literacy reinforcement. Interestingly, no Conservative congregations use HTM to introduce prayer vocabulary, whereas almost 30% of the Reform respondents utilize it for this purpose.



Photo: Jewish Education Center of Cleveland

- Respondents were asked to choose one of three response-descriptors to Hebrew Through Movement for students and teachers: “They are responding positively,” “they are neutral (neither positively or negatively),” or “they are responding negatively.” These three answers were weighted, with 3.0 being correlated as fully positive:
  - Students in their first year of HTM = 2.91 weighted average
  - More experienced HTM students = 2.86
  - HTM teachers = 2.83

Below is a sampling from the 17 comments that were offered as part of the teacher-related question (“On average, what is the response of your Hebrew Through Movement teacher(s) to HTM?). Interestingly, the comments below might have predicted a lower weighted teacher average than 2.83.

- “In some (ways) many embracing and positive, in other ways resistant.”
- “My teacher did it for five years – she burned out ☹️ “
- “Our HTM teacher is 100% on board and positive. Classroom teachers are Neutral.”
- “They are finding such joy in teaching their students.”
- “Some love it, some hate it... One teacher is fabulous, the other isn’t a great fit so that skews the results. The Religious School teachers either love it or they hate it.”
- “We have one teacher who does not teach HTM but observes. She is very put off by it because it is not how people actually speak in Israel”
- “I struggled to convince my teachers, so I personally teach HTM to all classes.”

## JEWISH LIFE VOCABULARY

While it is quite natural for Jewish educators and clergy to intersperse Hebrew into their English sentences, a recent study of Hebrew at Jewish summer camps<sup>9</sup> highlighted the power of intentionally infusing Hebrew vocabulary into English speech.<sup>10</sup> Temple Isaiah (Lafayette, CA) has had a formal program for introducing Hebrew words for a number of years. Its director of learning, Rabbi Nicki Greninger, introduced the research on this learning model to the #OnwardHebrew leadership team who then chose to adopt it as one of its foundational pillars when the initiative launched in early winter 2017. By August 2018 the Jewish Education Center of Cleveland (JECC) shared a variety of free and easily accessible curricular supports for what has come to be called Jewish Life Vocabulary (JLV).<sup>11</sup>

Half of the survey's respondents indicated that they introduced Jewish Life Vocabulary to their learners; the percentage is almost the same for Reform and Conservative affiliated programs. The data, below, are based on the 39 respondents (45% of the total) who are using JLV this year:

- The structure for introducing JLV varies among those who have adopted this learning model.

*Note that duplicate/multiple responses are represented, below:*

- Slightly more than half of the JLV respondents (54%) introduce vocabulary to their community on a weekly basis while 10% introduce words once a month.
- Almost half (44%) use community time (e.g., in *t'fillah* or an assembly) to introduce JLV, while 21% assign specific vocabulary to courses or grades with the expectation that teachers will take responsibility for introducing and consistently using the vocabulary.
- At least one JLV visual display can be found in the buildings of 39% of these respondents.
- The JLV list is shared with parents either in print or a newsletter (26%).



Photo: Temple Akiba, Culver City, CA

While most of the volunteered written responses to this question offered a few more details on the structure of JLV use (e.g., "The teachers are doing it individually in their classes ..."), one respondent offered this comment: "We just started this year and since 18 out of 20 teachers do not speak Hebrew, it's a struggle, but it is happening." The latter suggests the need for further implementation supports with directors.

<sup>9</sup> *Connection, Not Proficiency: Survey of Hebrew at North American Hebrew Summer Camps*, by Benor, Krasner, Avineri (2016) <https://www.brandeis.edu/mandel/pdfs/2016-Hebrew-in-Camp-Survey-Report.pdf>

<sup>10</sup> Dr. Sarah Bunin Benor coined the phrase, "Hebrew infusion" to describe this use of language. See <https://jewishstudies.washington.edu/global-judaism/sarah-benor-hebrew-infusion/>

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.onwardhebrew.org/jewish-life-vocabulary.html>

- Of those introducing JLV this year, over 70% are emphasizing:
  - words of greeting (e.g., *boker tov*) and exclamation (e.g., *kol hakavod*) – 80%
  - words used in *t'fillah* and ritual – 77%
  - holiday and/or calendar-related vocabulary – 74%

Jewish value words (*hesed*) and phrases (*bikkur holim*) are introduced by 59% of JLV-users. Less than a quarter of the educational programs are introducing people (*hazzan, madrich*), classroom objects, or textual words (*B'reishit, Talmud*).

- While JLV had only been in use nationally for a couple of months, the survey asked the average response of students and teachers to JLV, with the choices being “positively,” “neutral – neither positively or negatively” and “negatively.” The most positive response is 3.0.
  - The weighted average for students was 2.46
  - The weighted average for teachers was 2.56

Seven of the ten student-response-question comments volunteered by respondents indicated it was too early to tell. Only three out of the eight comments related to the teacher response were of a similar vein, and the rest were more reflective, for example:

- “Some are more adept at incorporating this into their classrooms than others, though they are all on board with the concept.”
- “We need more consistent follow through.”
- “Almost too well. Trying too hard to squeeze too many JLV words in.”

## HEBREW T'FILLAH

Building the sounds of Hebrew prayers and blessings is key to a sound-to-print learning approach for programs with a goal of comfort in Jewish worship. A large majority (85%) of survey respondents indicated that at least some students/grades participate in Hebrew *t'fillah* as part of their educational program. The analysis, below, is based on those who include Hebrew *t'fillah* (n=67).

The survey's grade level groupings (K-2, 3-4, 5-6) did not neatly fit everyone's patterns for *t'fillah* groupings. However, one can conclude that:

- In K-2, most of the students participate in *t'fillah* on a weekly basis with others participating twice a week, monthly, or less than once a month. Only 6% of the educational programs (n=4) never schedule *t'fillah* for any grades K-2.
- In Grades 3-4, almost 60% of the students participate in *t'fillah* once a week and almost 30% participate twice a week. Only one program indicated “never.”
- For Grades 5-6, the percentages were generally the same as grades 3-4; however no programs said that they never scheduled *t'fillah* for these pre-bar/bat mitzvah students.
- With the same rating system as previous questions, the weighted average response was 2.45 to the question, “On average, what is the response of students in Grades 5 and/or 6 to Hebrew *t'fillah* offered in your educational program?” [3.0 would be the most positive response] However, the comments (n=19) related to this question are quite mixed, with a key message that it “depends on the child.” Below is a sample:
  - “One of our favorite times of the day with them, for everyone.”
  - “It's a mix. Some kids respond positively, but quite a few fight going and/or are distracting during *tefillah*.”

- “We introduced a camp/NFTY-style *t’fillah* for grades 5, 6, and 7 last year and it has become very well-received.”
- “I’m not sure how to define the response as positive or negative. Many students are excited to be in Hebrew *T’fillah* and many of them are antsy, talking to friends, but this is not necessarily a negative response.”
- “Depends on the child. Some love it, some don’t want to have to learn it.”
- “They respond positively when they are the leaders of *T’fillah*. Students love to help lead these services for their peers.”

## TEACHING DECODING

There are three descriptors related to print literacy that #OnwardHebrew emphasizes:

*Reading* is gaining meaning from print. Someone looks at שלום, puts the letters together and understands that means peace, hello or goodbye.

*Decoding* is the stringing together of letters and vowels without understanding. Traditionally, most synagogue students have not had enough language learning to look at גבורות and read it with understanding; instead, they decode letters and vowel signs with no connection to the word or its meaning.



Photo: The Temple-Tifereth Israel, Cleveland, OH

Finally, *reciting* is being able to sing or recite a prayer, whether or not there is understanding. A great example is the four year old non-reader who attends Shabbat services regularly and is overheard singing to her dolls אין כאלהינו (Ain Keyloheinu, a song with repeating word patterns, often robustly sung at the end of a service).

One of the most interesting realizations of the #OnwardHebrew leadership team when meeting for the first time in October 2017, was that each of their educational programs utilized one-on-one groupings to teach decoding (this, as compared to all-class learning). They shared amongst themselves the power of this structure and so a survey question asked about the grouping in which students learned to decode/read.

- As a whole, 77% of respondents to this question (n=79) said that the main grouping in which their students first learn to decode/read Hebrew was in a classroom setting.

**Table 3: “What is the main grouping in which your students first learn to decode/read Hebrew?”**

	All respondents (n=79)	Reform-affiliated respondents (n=54)	Conservative-affiliated respondents (n=18)
In a classroom (this may include 1-on-1 or small group work)	77%	74%	89%
One-on-one only	6%	9%	0%
Small group of 2-3 only	5%	6%	6%
Small group of 4-5 only	15%	15%	11%

#OnwardHebrew strongly endorses changing the grade in which decoding/reading is first introduced in part-time/synagogue settings. It takes years for children to gain an aural/sound foundation of Hebrew, so #OnwardHebrew’s target for learning to decode is either in grade five or six.

- A survey question asked when students first learn to decode/read. Most children are learning this skill in third grade (37%), but the span is great.

**Table 4: In what grade do your students first learn to decode/read Hebrew? We are defining this as the year that students are taught to blend letters and vowel signs into words; i.e., the “primer year.”**

	All respondents (n=79)	Reform-affiliated respondents (n=54)	Conservative-affiliated respondents (n=18)
Grade 1	1%	0%	6%
Grade 2	20%	9%	61%
Grade 3	37%	37%	28%
Grade 4	20%	30%	0%
Grade 5	5%	9%	6%
Grade 6	6%	9%	0%
Other	13%	6%	0%

Four respondents in the “Other” category explained that they are in the process of changing the grade to a higher one; one noted that it depends on parent goals for a specific child. One noted that it depended on the timing of a child’s bar/bat mitzvah. And, a few noted a specific grade (e.g., 2 or 3) and added that if children enroll in their program at an older age, they start them at that time.

- A few questions asked about “sound-to-print” (S2P) learning, a fundamental principle of #OnwardHebrew. Respondents could choose multiple answers:
  - 42% had never talked about S2P with their Hebrew teachers
  - 37% had a conversation with at least one Hebrew teacher on S2P principles.

- 20% shared a JECC-created S2P explanatory booklet<sup>12</sup> with their Hebrew teachers and 18% arranged at least one professional development session on the principles
- 13% said that they make sure that supervision in their education program supports teachers in developing the skills to teach S2P.
- 80% reported that most teachers are still in the early stages of learning about S2P principles

Respondents reported that 36% of teachers have embraced S2P as a teaching/learning philosophy, while 42% are neutral. Another 17% say that their teachers question its usefulness to learning or are either actively or passively rejecting it.

### HEBREW AS A BINDER-OF-COMMUNITY

A question on the survey asked, *“How strongly do you feel that your educational program participants see themselves as a community that embraces Hebrew learning? Dr Netta Avineri talks of this as a metalinguistic community, one that is pulled together by a common language. Think of the way Yiddish speakers are often connected – like that, but for Hebrew.”*

For the short length of time #OnwardHebrew has been on the scene, the strength reported in the responses to the question above were relatively surprising:

- Very strongly – 22%
- Strongly – 42%
- Weakly – 35%
- Very weakly – 1%



Photo: The Temple-Tifereth Israel, Cleveland, OH

<sup>12</sup> [https://www.onwardhebrew.org/uploads/1/0/6/1/10614651/sound-to-print\\_teacher\\_booklet.pdf](https://www.onwardhebrew.org/uploads/1/0/6/1/10614651/sound-to-print_teacher_booklet.pdf)

## CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#OnwardHebrew moves the teaching of Hebrew in part-time/congregational settings out of classroom learning blocks into the larger arena of Jewish life. #OnwardHebrew's approach of sound-to-print learning depends on regular Hebrew *t'fillot* (prayer services), the infusion of Jewish life vocabulary into English speech, and acquisitional language learning. It is impressive that this initiative has captured the imagination of Jewish professionals across North America and is creating new energy around Hebrew learning in part-time settings.

That said, the survey results suggest the following:

1. *#OnwardHebrew is an initiative still in its infancy*, beginning to spread from a small group of initial "innovators" to a larger number of "early adopters."<sup>13</sup> Education directors who are intrigued with #OnwardHebrew have generally started with low-hanging fruit (e.g., Hebrew Through Movement, Jewish Life Vocabulary, and more frequent and intentional Hebrew worship opportunities).

*Recommendations:*

- Network early adopters with each other so they can learn from each other's experiences, results and challenges.
- Encourage formal sharing of #OnwardHebrew efforts via printed articles, videos and social media.
- Offer workshops at a variety of conferences, as well as webinars whose recordings can be accessed by busy educators at their own convenience.

2. *Almost two-thirds of the education directors who responded to the survey, especially those connected to the Reform movement, expressed enthusiasm for the #OnwardHebrew learning approach* (i.e., sound-to-print) and its four foundational elements.

*Recommendations:*

- Focus supports on "early adopters"<sup>14</sup> of #OnwardHebrew who collectively may be able to offer stories of success helpful to the next group of adopters, known as the "early majority."<sup>14</sup>
- Reach out to USCJ-affiliated educational directors and professional associations with offers of workshops and support; this population may otherwise become part of the "late majority."<sup>14</sup>
- Expand the #OnwardHebrew leadership team to include some early adopters.

3. *Respondents indicated high student and teacher enthusiasm for key elements of #OnwardHebrew*. There is new energy for Hebrew learning in part-time settings.

*Recommendations:*

- Research student and teacher reactions, successes and challenges with the four #OnwardHebrew elements.
- Share information gained from students and teachers with parents, other Jewish professionals, funders, etc.

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<sup>13</sup> This language is based on E.M. Rogers's "Diffusion of Innovation" theory, offering five adopter categories: Innovators, Early Adopters, Early Majority, Late Majority, and Laggards. <http://sphweb.bumc.bu.edu/otlt/MPH-Modules/SB/BehavioralChangeTheories/BehavioralChangeTheories4.html>

4. *The biggest two challenges for those adopting #OnwardHebrew are convincing stakeholders (clergy, long-time teachers, parents, and educators) that a) aural/oral literacy should be well-established before introducing the skill of Hebrew decoding/reading and b) that print is more efficiently taught in a one-on-one setting*, rather than in an all-class environment. The survey results illustrate that most educational programs have not moved their decoding instruction to a later grade, nor created one-on-one learning opportunities.

*Recommendations:*

- Develop supports to help Jewish professionals engage stakeholders in introducing #OnwardHebrew and creating a change process.
- Bring teachers together to directly learn about the teaching implications of #OnwardHebrew's elements.



Photo: Jewish Education Center of Cleveland

Local community events and/or

NewCAJE may provide a good platform for these conversations.

- Research one-on-one learning models that are financially sustainable for part-time educational settings.
- Create opportunities for panels of stakeholders to share successes and challenges with each other, for example at the URJ Biennial, USCJ Convention, CCAR conference, a community's board of rabbis meeting, and of course, in a community's education director council or network.

5. *The potential of #OnwardHebrew's reach is large*. Of the 86 survey respondents, 62 noted that their educational program had adopted Hebrew Through Movement (HTM). These 62 report a combined total of over 5,000 HTM students this Fall, alone. While 5000 sounds impressive, the number is undoubtedly low - the 62 HTM respondents represent less than 20% of the 350+ educational programs that have enrolled teachers in the JECC's online HTM seminar since its introduction six years ago.

*Recommendations:*

- Celebrate!
- Provide opportunities for learners to see how others are enjoying the excitement of Hebrew learning, for example, create a Hebrew Through Movement (HTM) holiday video in Hebrew with many classes sharing their learning.
- Encourage others to offer complementary opportunities for Hebrew learning, e.g., clergy could use HTM commands during all-group worship, camps could adopt HTM as their Hebrew learning experience, youth group advisors could infuse Jewish Life Vocabulary.

In 2020 or 2021, it would be helpful to schedule another national education director survey, providing an updated snapshot of #OnwardHebrew. In addition to an adult-focused survey, data attained from students at that time would offer deeper understanding of the direct impact of #OnwardHebrew on the learners. Finally, national attention in the early 2020s to next-step Hebrew learning opportunities for middle school and high school learners would be appropriate since students impacted by #OnwardHebrew will (hopefully) be primed for further learning.

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#OnwardHebrew is a new initiative that is standing “on the edge of possibility,” ready to transform a tired, decades old learning model in part-time/congregational educational programs. In the last year, the Jewish Education Center of Cleveland, with the input and direction of #OnwardHebrew’s leadership team, has provided a number of supports including a robust, resource-filled website and a “join-the-conversation” Facebook group. However, survey results hint at the need for more attention to supporting transformational change and more intentional involvement of stakeholder groups (clergy, parents, teachers). With almost a third of the survey’s respondents asking for someone to contact them regarding #OnwardHebrew, it is clear that more personal attention is needed to accelerate the initiative.

### **#OnwardHebrew...join the conversation!**

**Website:** <http://OnwardHebrew.org>

**Facebook:** <https://www.facebook.com/groups/144174356227118/>

**Twitter:** #OnwardHebrew

**Instagram:** OnwardHebrew