

SUMMARY

Sifriyat Pijama Evaluation Report 2011-2012 school year

Dr. Hagit Hacohen Wolf Dikla Mark

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Dr. Hagit Hacohen Wolf – Evaluation research, consultation and guidance 41/3 Even Shmuel, Jerusalem 97234 Tel. 050-7220880 Fax 02-5860617

Executive Summary

The Sifriyat Pijama program – Sifriyat Pijama is the Israeli version of the American PJ Library program developed by the Massachusetts-based Harold Grinspoon Foundation. Sifriyat Pijama seeks to promote a culture and habit of reading books in early childhood, fostering a love of reading at preschool and at home, while emphasizing good literature and imparting universal Jewish values. In its third year in Israel, the program was conducted in full cooperation with the Ministry of Education in 4,000 preschool classes in the Jewish sector – two-thirds in the state education system and about one-third in the state-religious education system, encompassing about 120,000 children in 97 communities throughout Israel. The preschools included both kindergarten, pre-kindergarten and mixed kindergarten-pre kindergarten classed serving diverse socio-economic-cultural populations. There was also variety in how long the program has operated in different schools, from one to three years.

The objective of this evaluation was to help the program developers and implementers in Israel to monitor satisfaction with the books chosen and of program delivery. The evaluation employed a mix of qualitative and quantitative research methods:

- (1) The program team: Interviews and meetings with the program team.
- (2) Teachers:
- Monthly feedback forms on 18 Sifriyat Pijama books in 2011-2012 (a sample of 200 kindergarten teachers and 200 pre-kindergarten teachers)
- Year-end questionnaires with responses from 2,112 teachers (56.6% of those in the program)
- In-depth interviews with four teachers who have three years of experience in the program.

The distribution of the characteristics of the preschools in the study sample is identical to the distribution of the total population participating in the program: about a third are kindergartens, about a third are pre-kindergartens and about a third are mixed preschools; about two-thirds of the preschools belong to the state education system and about one-third to the state religious system; in 60% of the schools, the program was operating for the first time in the 2011-2012 school year; for 35% of the schools, the program was operating for the second year, and for 5% it was operating for the third year.

During the 2011-2012 school year, Sifriyat Pijama delivered, on a monthly basis, nine high-quality children's books with a connection to values and Jewish culture to 120,000 families via preschools. Upon receiving each book, the preschool teacher presented it to the children and, in most cases, read the book to the children and conducted an activity related to it. Afterwards, each child was given a copy of the book to take home as a gift. The teachers interviewed reported that they adapted Sifriyat Pijama's books to the school's program of study, such as literacy and language, the school routine and the subject of the month.

Teacher assessment of Sifriyat Pijama's books in the 2011-2012 school year

The teachers were asked in the year-end questionnaires: "In general, how would you rate the books in the Sifriyat Pijama program this year?" A summary of their responses, presented in below (divided according to the appropriate list), indicates that more than 80% have a very positive view of the books.



Kindergarten teachers' assessments of the kindergarten book list

Pre-kindergarten teachers' assessments of the pre-kindergarten book list



Use of the Books in the Classroom

Some 83% of the teachers report that they read each of the Sifriyat Pijama books to the children at the preschool at least 2-4 times. The teachers also encourage the children to read the books on their own by giving positive reinforcement to those who read at home, by offering explanations to parents about the importance of bedtime stories, and by involving the parents in reading stories at preschool.





Most of the teachers report that they conduct activity related to the books (about one fourth on <u>each</u> of the books, and about two thirds on most or some of the books) in addition to reading the book. The preschool teachers describe very diverse activities related to the books. Some are based on suggestions by Sifriyat Pijama and some are developed independently by the teachers. About 70% of the teachers said that the book-related activities they conducted addressed the values suggested by Sifriyat Pijama. The activities include arts and crafts projects, acting out the story, action related to values expressed in the book, involvement of family members in activities, etc.





About 30% of the teachers said they learned something new about Jewish values from Sifriyat Pijama's suggestions.

About a third (35%) of the teachers report that they conduct activity related to some of the books together with the parents. But some of the teachers noted that the activities for parents are sometimes limited due to the parents' lack of interest in many activities. About a quarter of the teachers to the end-of-year questionnaire referred to the feedback they received from parents about the program and reported that an absolute majority of parents welcomed the program, cooperated with the children and with teacher in activities related to Sifriyat Pijama and re-read the Sifriyat Pijama books at home.

Additional Responses from Teachers:

Teachers were asked about various other aspects of the program. It emerged that about 60% of them use the program website, and of those who use the site, 90% access it to look at suggestions for class activity on each book. Responses to questions regarding parent and teacher suggestions are shown in the following diagram.



The interviewed teachers also noted that they would wholeheartedly recommend the program to their colleagues. As one put it: "This is the most wonderful gift my preschool has received. No program or project comes close to the Sifriyat Pijama program, and I have experience of 20 years. I love each of the Sifriyat Pijama books and return each year to the books from the previous years."

It is interesting to note that despite the fact that the same books were sent to state preschools and state religious preschools (which maintain different programs of study) there were no conspicuous differences between teachers from the two education tracks in regard to their views on the values relayed in the various books. This finding is an achievement for Sifriyat Pijama, which seeks to find common ground among a highly diverse population with often divergent views on Jewish matters.

In the monthly feedback for each particular book, most of the teachers (70% in kindergartens and 66% in pre-kindergartens) noted that Sifriyat Pijama's suggestions helped them in planning book-related activities. The teachers mentioned a very wide range of activity they conducted related to the books and their subjects:

- Various creative activity at the preschool (one main activity or an activity with several stations) – arts and crafts, play in movement, a cooking or baking corner (preparing vegetable soup, baking cookies), writing or painting a different ending to the story, etc.
- Dramatizing the story and reenacting it One of the preschoolers tells the story to his or her friend, using expressions and words from the story, putting makeup on the children, dramatization with accessories/costumes, dramatization by the parents with a theater set.
- Value-oriented action related to the book (for example, visiting the sick at home and in the hospital, preparing chocolate balls and get-well cards, caring for animals at the preschool).
- Involving family members in the activities The children are assigned tasks to do at home with parents, activities with grandmothers at preschool, preparing a book of recipes sent from parents, each parent writes about something his or her child does well, preparing models of children's homes and displaying them in an exhibit at the preschool, and more.
- Sharing personal experiences The children tell about the members of their family in the context of the book (special language, siblings starting to talk); photographing children in different situations and a conversation about the emotions expressed in the photographs.

The impact of Sifriyat Pijama from the teachers' perspective

At the end of the year, the teachers reported on four main aspects of Sifriyat Pijama's impact:

<u>Strengthening literacy</u> – Increasing the children's love of listening to stories and "reading" books; improving and enriching the linguistic level; expanding vocabulary, sayings and idioms; developing and strengthening reading and reading comprehension skills; promoting orientation in texts. Many teachers noted in the Comments section of the end-of-year questionnaire that they think Sifriyat Pijama made an impact on the reading habits of the children and parents, exposing them to books, writers and content that they would not have been exposed to if they had not participated in the program.

<u>Fostering the Jewish-moral development of the children</u> – Raising awareness of Jewish values among the children and developing a Jewish vocabulary; stimulating conversation and activity in the preschool in general and about Jewish values in particular; in the teachers' assessment, the children understand the various values in each of the books and express these values in their behavior.

<u>Strengthening connections between parents and children</u> – The bedtime "ritual" has changed as a result of Sifriyat Pijama. Children go to sleep with a book instead of a television program. The reading of stories to the children by parents strengthens the connection between parents and their children.

<u>Impact on the everyday life of the preschool</u> – This impact derives from the influences mentioned above on literacy and moral development. Most of the teachers reported that after reading the books, the values addressed by the books came into expression in activities at the preschool; changes could be seen in the children's behavior regarding the values conveyed in the program – for example, more patience and courtesy, an ability to compromise, share, take care of a friend, focus on the subject of giving, and the use of idioms, sayings and words from the books. This was echoed by the teachers who were interviewed. For example: "Sifriyat Pijama and its values are

present in the preschool on a daily basis. There is constant learning and experiencing of values at the preschool. In the group discussions, on the playground, in the various activity corners, I hear the children's language, I identify small behaviors – and it is clear to me where this originates. The ability to compromise, share, care for a friend – all this stems from Sifriyat Pijama." Another example: "In our preschool, we address the topic of giving every day. Giving is a central value that is reinforced through the encounter with Sifriyat Pijama."

The perceptions of the teachers from the two educational tracks (state and state religious) vis-à-vis the program's impact on the children, parents and preschool were compared. In most aspects on which they were questioned, no salient differences were found and there was a consensus about the positive impact of the books.



Sifriyat Pijama's impact on the preschool – various aspects, from the teachers' perspective

Encouraging reading

The teachers who were interviewed noted several channels for encouraging the preschool children to read:

- (1) Via the children The teacher asks who has read the book at home, and those who answer affirmatively receive a medal;
- (2) Via a parents' meeting The teacher explains to the parents that Sifriyat Pijama can play an important role in the child's bedtime routine (instead of watching television);
- (3) Via a parent project The parents come to the preschool and read books to the children that the children have selected;
- (4) Via the public library The teacher encourages the children to go to the public library.

The impact of Sifriyat Pijama on understanding and applying values, from the teachers' perspective

Most of the teachers (81%) who responded to the monthly feedback forms reported that after reading the books, the values the books addressed were expressed in the preschool's activities. The following diagram displays the extent to which the children understand various values¹ they learned in each of the books or express them in their behavior, according to the teachers (on a scale where 5 = a very great extent; 1 = not at all).





¹ For details on the values on which the teachers were questioned vis-à-vis the books – see Appendix 4. 8

It is important to note that these findings relate to the extent to which the books' values were applied in practice and not just the popularity of the books. The correlation between these two variables is not necessarily complete and uniform. That is, values from books that are less popular might be applied more widely relative to books that are more well-liked and vice versa – the application of morals from a beloved book might be relatively low.

Aspects of the program that require improvement from the teachers' perspective

The teachers were asked in the end-of-year questionnaires to write comments and feedback on the Sifriyat Pijama books. Comments were received from about 1,000 teachers. Most of the responses are enthusiastic about the program and support it. In addition, respondents noted several areas in which they believe the program needs improvement and offered suggestions to improve Sifriyat Pijama. The most common criticism -- from 13% of teachers -- was that the books were too advanced and were unsuitable for the age of the children in their class. Sifriyat Pijama allows teachers receiving books for older children to switch to the younger-children's list when books are available to accommodate individual classes.

Conclusion

The findings of the evaluation indicate that the Sifriyat Pijama program has achieved great success in the preschools in which it operates and is very enthusiastically received by the children, the teachers and the parents. The teachers express great satisfaction with the selection of books and with the organizational and educational framework accompanying the books' arrival at the preschool. They report a wide range of book-related activity with both the preschoolers and their parents.

Despite the program's significant expansion during the 2011-2012 school year and its broad scope of operation throughout Israel, Sifriyat Pijama has won praise from all of the involved parties from an organizational-logistical perspective. The findings clearly show the program's impact on the educational work of the teachers and the life of the preschool from a pedagogical, moral and social perspective. It is important to continue to pursue various ways of examining the program's diverse effects on the children and on their families, and to focus particularly on the program's impact on the children's homes, after preschool hours.

Appendixes

Appendix 1 – Characteristics of the study's population

The data is based on end-of-year questionnaires for the teachers.

The end-of-year questionnaire was sent to 3,738 teachers: 1,868 kindergarten teachers and 1,870 pre-kindergarten teachers.

The percentage of respondents to the questionnaire was 56.5% (2,112 teachers). The percentage of kindergarten teachers who responded was 57.9% (1,082 teachers) and the percentage of pre-kindergarten teachers who responded was 55% (1,030 teachers).

Stage of education	Kindergarten	Pre-kindergarten	Kindergarten and pre-kindergarten	Three-year preschool
	30.9%	33.8%	17.5%	9.3%
Education system	State	State religious	State TALI	
	59.1%	35.9%	1.1%	
Number of years participating in the program	First year	Second year	Third year	
	60.1%	34.8%	5.1%	
Families with difficulty reading Hebrew	no such families known	1-4 families	5-7 families	8 or more families
	52.8%	34.6%	6.3%	6.2%

Appendix 2 – Monthly feedback questionnaire on the book for teachers

Sifriyat Pijama, 2011-2012 school year Feedback questionnaire on the book: ______

Dear teacher,

During the 2011-2012 school year, the Sifriyat Pijama program is operating in your preschool as part of a nationwide program that is now in its third year in Israel. It is important for the program's administrators to receive information that will help to improve and advance Sifriyat Pijama's activities. Therefore, they have decided to monitor the project with an evaluation by an external and independent team of evaluators.

We ask for your help in evaluating the program by filling in the questionnaire that can be accessed via the attached link.

The goal of the questionnaire is to receive feedback from you on the book ______ and the related activities conducted with the children and their parents.

When you finish filling in the questionnaire, please click on the Submit button to send your responses to us. If you encounter any technical problem while filling in the Internet questionnaire, please contact Dikla Mark at 054-7787915 or via email: <u>dmilim@netvision.net.il</u>

Thank you very much for your cooperation, The program evaluation team

A. Background information

A.1. Name of preschool principal (first and last names)

A.2. Name of preschool
A.3. Name of locality where preschool is located
A.4. The preschool's affiliated education system
C State
C State religious
C State TALI
Other:
A.5. The preschool is a:
C Kindergarten

Pre-kindergarten
C Kindergarten and pre-kindergarten
C Three-year preschool
Other:
A.6. How many years has the preschool participated in Sifriyat Pijama?
C First year
Second year
C Third year
A.7. Are there families in the preschool that have difficulty reading Hebrew?
o such families known
O 1-4 families
5-7 families
8 or more families
A.8. How long have you been teaching? (please enter the number of years)
A.9 How would you describe your lifestyle?
Religious
Traditional
Secular
Other:

B. The book

What is your assessment of the following components of the book?

	Excellent	Good	Okay	Not very good	Poor
The book's plot					
The language					
The illustrations					
Age-appropriateness for the children					
Value-related messages					

	Excellent	Good	Okay	Not very good	Poor
The children's enthusiasm about the book					
The book in general					

C. Reading the book and book-related activity

C1. How many times did you read the book to the children at the preschool (to all or some of them)?



C2. Select the appropriate answer:

	Yes	No
I conducted book-related activity with the children in addition to reading it (without parents)	0	0
I conducted book-related activity with the children and their parents in addition to reading it	0	0
Sifriyat Pijama's suggestions helped in planning activities	0	0
I learned something new about Jewish values from the suggestions for parents	0	0
The activities addressed the values presented in Sifriyat Pijama's suggestions	0	0
The activities addressed other values raised in the book	0	0

C3. If you answered "Yes" to the previous question, please cite which additional values the activities addressed



C4. Please describe the most successful book-related activity you conducted



C5. Did the value(s) the book address(es) find expression in the preschool's activities?

0	No
0	Yes

C6. If yes, how?

- A.				
	Ŧ			-

C7. How would you rate the children's understanding of the following expressions or sayings after they become familiar with the book?

Concept / expression	Excellent	Good	Okay	Not very good	Poor

- D. Encouraging reading at home
- D1. Did you encourage the children to read at home during the past month?
 - No
 Yes

D2. If you answered "Yes" to the previous question, please specify how you encouraged reading at home



D3. Select the appropriate answer:

	Yes	No
I recommended a particular activity to the parents from among the book's suggestions for parents	0	0
I asked the parents to carry out an activity from the suggestions for parents, which we continued in the preschool	0	0

D4. If there are families that have difficulty with Hebrew, did you initiate any activity to encourage reading with their children?



D5. If so, how?

100000000000000000000000000000000000000			

E. Visiting Sifriyat Pijama's website

E1. Did you visit Sifriyat Pijama's website during the past month?

No (If you answer "No" – please skip to the last question: F. Additional comments)
 Yes

E2. If you visited the website, what was the purpose of using it?

	Yes	No
To read suggestions for teachers about book-related activities	0	0
To download files (forms for parents, suggestions for parents' activities in Russian, etc.)	0	0
To solve problems, such as a lack or surplus of books	0	0
To look at the gallery of pictures or send documentation about preschool activities	0	0

E3. If you used the website for other purposes, please cite them



E4. How helpful was the website? Excellent Good	Okay	Not very good	Poor	
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F. Additional comments

We would be happy to hear your additional comments or significant feedback that you received from the parents or children.



Thank you very much for your cooperation!

Appendix 3 – End-of-year questionnaire for teachers

Sifriyat Pijama 2011-2012 / 5772 school year

End-of-year questionnaire for teachers

Dear teacher,

During the 5772 (2011-2012) school year, the Sifriyat Pijama program operated in your preschool. The program is being reviewed by a team of external and independent evaluators in order to provide the program's administrators with information that will help them to improve and advance the activities of Sifriyat Pijama.

At the end of the 5772 school year, we ask for your help in evaluating the program over the past year by filling in the questionnaire via the attached link. The questionnaire will take about 5 minutes to answer. We would be very appreciative if you take the time to provide us with feedback, which is extremely important to us.

After filling in the questionnaire, click on the arrow button pointing to the left. Your responses to the questionnaire will be then be forwarded to us and the system will send you a confirmation message. If you encounter a technical problem while filling in the Internet questionnaire, please contact Dikla Mark at 0554-7787915 or via email at <u>dmilim@netvision.net.il</u>

Thank you very much for your cooperation,

The research team

A. Background information

A.1 Name of preschool principal (first and last names)

A.2 Name of preschool

A.3. Name of locality where preschool is located

A.4. The preschool's affiliated education system

O State

State religious

State TALI

Other: ____

A.5. The preschool is a:

C

C Kindergarten

Pre-kindergarten

0	Kindergarten and pre-kindergarten
0	Three-year preschool
	Other:
A.6. How ma	ny years has the preschool participated in Sifriyat Pijama?
0	First year
0	Second year
0	Third year
A.7. Are ther	e families in the preschool that have difficulty reading Hebrew?
0	no such families known
0	1-4 families
0	5-7 families
0	8 or more families
A.8 How wo	uld you describe your lifestyle?
0	Religious
0	Traditional
0	Secular
0	Other:

Other: _____

B. The books

What is your overall assessment of the books included in the Sifriyat Pijama program this year?

		Excellent	Good	Okay	Not very good	Poor	Not included in my preschool
1	Names of the books by stage of education (kindergarten / pre-kindergarten)						
2							
3							
4							
5							
6							
7							
8							

	Excellent	Good	Okay	Not very good	Poor	Not included in my preschool
9						

C. The program's contributions

To what extent did Sifriyat Pijama have an impact on the preschool in the following aspects?

	As a result of Sifriyat Pijama:	To a very great extent	To a great extent	To a moderate extent	To a slight extent	Not at all	Don't know
1	My (the teacher's) connection to the parents of the preschool children grew stronger						
2	I learned about books and authors I was unfamiliar with						
3	The children like to listen to stories more						
4	The children like to "read" stories more						
5	The children's spoken language became richer						
6	The children borrow more books from the preschool library to take home						
7	The parents read more books to the children at home						
8	The connection between the children and their parents grew stronger						
9	The children visit the municipal library more often						
10	The books stimulated conversation about values at the preschool						
11	The books stimulated conversation and activities on Jewish values at the preschool						
12	The children use a "Jewish vocabulary" they received from the books						
13	The books and the related materials affected the behaviors						

As a result of Sifriyat Pijama:	To a very great extent	To a great extent	To a moderate extent	To a slight extent	Not at all	Don't know
and habits at the preschool						

D. Book-related activities

Did you conduct activities with the children in the preschool this year related to the books?

- I conducted activity related to each of the books
- I conducted activity related to most of the books
- I conducted activity related to some of the books
- I did not conduct activity besides distributing the books to the children

Did you conduct activities with the children <u>and the parents</u> in the preschool this year related to the books?

- I conducted activity related to each of the books
- I conducted activity related to most of the books
- I conducted activity related to some of the books
- I did not conduct activity besides distributing the books to the children

If you conducted activity, please tell us about the most successful activity you conducted related to one of the books

E. Assessment of program components

How would you rate the following aspects of Sifriyat Pijama?

		Excellent	Good	Okay	Not very good	Poor
1	The selection of books					
2	The way the books arrive at the preschool (on time, directly to the preschool, an appropriate number, etc.) Response in the event of problems					
3	The suggestions for parents printed at the end of the book					

		Excellent	Good	Okay	Not very good	Poor
4	Ease of use of the program's Internet site					
5	Suggestions for activities on the Internet site					

F. Additional comments

We would be happy to hear if you have additional comments or significant feedback about the program (including feedback you heard from parents and children). We welcome any comment you deem relevant.

Your feedback is important and meaningful for advancing the program. Would you willing to be part of a sample group that will provide monthly assessments of the books the preschool receives next year?

- A) Yes, certainly
- B) Maybe
- C) I prefer not to

Thank you very much for your cooperation!

Appendix 4 – Values, by Sifriyat Pijama books (on which the teachers were questioned)

Kind	dergarten	Pre-kindergarten			
Book	Values	Book	Values		
Book 1 - Uri's Special Language	A. 'He will be a mouth for you' (Exodus 4:16)B. Mutual assistance between brothers	Book 1 - Augustus and His Smile	 A. 'Light is sweet and it pleases the eyes' (Ecclesiastes 11:7) B. The ability to find happiness within 		
Book 2 - Sick Day For Amos McGee	C. Visiting the sick D. A person is measured in the same way as he or she measures others	Book 2 - Yosi My Successful Boy	C. 'Train a child in the way he should go' (Proverbs 22:6) D. 'Give every person the benefit of the doubt' (Pirkei Avot 1:6)		
Book 3 - Ben Zion and the First Sivivon	E. The renaissance of the Hebrew language F. Eliezer Ben Yehuda	Book 3- Grandpa Cooked Soup	E. Welcoming guests F. 'A gift opens the way for the giver' (Proverbs 18:16)		
Book 4 – One Little Chicken	G. Returning a lost object H. Rabbi Hanina ben Dosa	Book 4 - The Patience of Hillel	 G. '[Be] difficult to anger and easily appeased' (Pirkei Avot 5:11) H. The character of Hillel the Elder 		
Book 5 - Bone Button Borscht	 I. 'So your brother may live with you' (Leviticus 25:36) J. 'If I am not for myself, who will be for me? But if I am only for myself, what am I?' (Pirkei Avot 1:14) 	Book 5 - Mummy and Me	I. Respect for parents		
Book 6 - The Chickens and the Fox	 K. 'There is no person who does not have his hour' (Pirkei Avot 4:3) L. Recognizing a person's strengths and weaknesses 	Book 6 - Grampa, Grandson and a Mule	J. Humor in general and Jewish humor in particular K. Plan ahead		
Book 7 - Tzila and Gila	 M. 'How good and pleasant it is when brothers live together in unity' (Psalm 133) N. It's all for the best 	Book 7- The Land of Preschool Children	L. Ingathering of the exiles M. The establishment of the State of Israel		
Book 8 – Isadora What a Day	O. 'Out of the strong, something sweet' (Judges 14: 14)	Book 8 - There's No Such Thing as a Dragon	N. 'Anxiety weighs down the heart' (Proverbs 12:25)		
Book 9 - The Treasure	P. 'Worked hard and found – believe' (Talmud) [Only those who try hard succeed]	Book 9 - The Mole and the Baby Bird	O. 'For every thing there is a time' (Ecclesiastes 3:1)		