FAMILY MATTERS
Jewish Education in an Age of Choice
Edited by Jack Wertheimer
FAMILY MATTERS
Brandeis Series in American Jewish History, Culture, and Life
Jonathan D. Sarna, Editor
Sylvia Barack Fishman, Associate Editor

For a complete list of books in the series, visit www.upne.com and www.upne.com/series/BSAJ.html

Jack Wertheimer, editor · Family Matters: Jewish Education in an Age of Choice
Kirsten Fermaglich · American Dreams and Nazi Nightmares: Early Holocaust Consciousness and Liberal America, 1957–1965
Andrea Greenbaum, editor · Jews of South Florida
Sylvia Barack Fishman · Double or Nothing? Jewish Families and Mixed Marriage
George M. Goodwin and Ellen Smith, editors · The Jews of Rhode Island
Shulamit Reinharz and Mark A. Raider, editors · American Jewish Women and the Zionist Enterprise
Michael E. Staub, editor · The Jewish 1960s: An American Sourcebook
Judah M. Cohen · Through the Sands of Time: A History of the Jewish Community of St. Thomas, U.S. Virgin Islands
Naomi W. Cohen · The Americanization of Zionism, 1897–1948
Seth Farber · An American Orthodox Dreamer: Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik and Boston’s Maimonides School
Ava F. Kahn and Marc Dollinger, editors · California Jews
Amy L. Sales and Leonard Saxe · “How Goodly Are Thy Tents”: Summer Camps as Jewish Socializing Experiences
Ori Z. Soltes · Fixing the World: Jewish American Painters in the Twentieth Century
Gary P. Zola, editor · The Dynamics of American Jewish History: Jacob Rader Marcus’s Essays on American Jewry
David Zurawik · The Jews of Prime Time
Ranen Omer-Sherman · Diaspora and Zionism in American Jewish Literature: Lazarus, Syrkin, Reznikoff, and Roth
Ilana Abramovitch and Seán Galvin, editors · Jews of Brooklyn
Pamela S. Nadell and Jonathan D. Sarna, editors · Women and American Judaism: Historical Perspectives
Annelise Orleck, with photographs by Elizabeth Cooke · The Soviet Jewish Americans
Steven T. Rosenthal · Irreconcilable Differences: The Waning of the American Jewish Love Affair with Israel
Jonathan N. Barron and Eric Murphy Selinger, editors · Jewish American Poetry: Poems, Commentary, and Reflections
Barbara Kessel · Suddenly Jewish: Jews Raised as Gentiles
Naomi W. Cohen · Jacob H. Schiff: A Study in American Jewish Leadership
Roberta Rosenberg Farber and Chaim I. Waxman, editors · Jews in America: A Contemporary Reader
Family Matters

Jewish Education in an Age of Choice

Edited by

Jack Wertheimer

Brandeis University Press in association with The AVI CHAI Foundation

Waltham, Massachusetts

Published by University Press of New England · Hanover and London

p. cm. — (Brandeis series in american jewish history, culture, and life)  
Includes bibliographical references and index.  
BM103,F36 2007  
296.6'8 — dc22  
2006036258
Contents

Preface vii
Acknowledgments xi
Contributors xiii

I. Parental Choices

1. Family Formation, Educational Choice, and American Jewish Identity
   *Riv-Ellen Prell*
   3

2. The Differential Impact of Jewish Education on Adult Jewish Identity
   *Steven M. Cohen*
   34

II. Jewish Education as a Family Matter

   *Shaul Kelner*
   59

4. Why Jewish Parents Send Their Children to Day Schools
   *Steven M. Cohen and Shaul Kelner*
   80

5. Schools for Parents: What Parents Want and What They Get from Their Children’s Jewish Day School
   *Alex Pomson*
   101

   *Jeffrey S. Kress*
   143
7. Generating Jewish Connections: Conversations with Jewish Teenagers, Their Parents, and Jewish Educators and Thinkers
   Sylvia Barack Fishman

III. The Communal Dimension

8. Cultures of Jewish Education: How Communities Address Local Educational Needs
   Jack Wertheimer

9. Toward the Study of Community Effects on Jewish Engagement: The Case of Educational Enrollment
   Shaul Kelner and Steven M. Cohen

Conclusion

Index
Preface

Will Herberg’s classic analysis of religion and society in midcentury America continues to provide an invaluable context for understanding the nature of American Judaism in that era.² Herberg described the three major Judeo-Christian expressions as a “triple melting pot”: Americans of different religious backgrounds discharged many of their civic obligations through the medium of religious institutions. Membership in a church or synagogue was a critical feature of the “American way,” Herberg explained, and an expression of conformity. Indeed, this general context is crucial for understanding the explosive growth of synagogue membership and congregation-based Jewish education in the postwar years.²

After a period of heightened ethnic identification starting in the 1960s and continuing for some two decades, religion is once again central to American society in our own time, but religious adherence carries a completely different valence than it did at midcentury. It is not only that the size and fortunes of different religious groupings have changed but also that Americans conceive of religious identification differently in our own time. Americans, moreover, do not relate to one another or participate in civic culture the way they did in the postwar era. And they look to religious institutions to provide very different types of sustenance than did their 1950s counterparts.

Not surprisingly, Jewish identification has also undergone significant change during the same period. Like their neighbors, Jews have become self-conscious consumers of Jewish offerings. Choice has become a central preoccupation, as Jewish parents select a synagogue for their family and a school or camping experience for their children; individual Jews also seek the right fit for themselves before they join or give or volunteer. Questions of personal meaning and fulfillment have assumed far greater importance than they had at midcentury in how Jews decide to engage with Jewish life. This is particularly evident when it comes to Jewish educational choices.

• Midtwentieth-century sociological studies by researchers such as Marshall Sklare portrayed an environment where a vast population of parents came to the suburbs and enrolled their children in the nearest synagogue supplementary
Few other Jewish educational options were available to them, particularly in the suburbs. Over the past half-century, communities have developed multiple options. Day schools of various stripes are available, as are Jewish early childhood programs; teens have the opportunity to participate in youth groups, travel to Israel, and to attend overnight camps. The field of Jewish education has expanded quite dramatically in recent decades.

- Families think about Jewish education differently today. Neighbors, friends, and relatives play a far smaller role than they had in the past in placing pressure on families to provide a Jewish education for children. As the Jewish population decreasingly lives in densely concentrated “Jewish neighborhoods,” as the incidence of intermarriage rises, and as religious affiliation is far more diverse, external pressures have come to play a declining role in the educational decisions of families. Today parents are choosing Jewish education and are actively involved in ensuring the best possible fit between each child and the school they select. They do not hesitate to enroll each child in a different school, provided that the fit is right for each child.

- A few decades ago, observers of the Jewish community noted the “pediatric Judaism” promoted by synagogues. Congregational programming tended to focus on the needs of children in the years before bar and bat mitzvah, while far less attention and budget was lavished on adult education. Today synagogues and educational institutions think about Jewish learning as an enterprise for Jews of all ages. Family education programs seek to involve parents in their children’s schooling. But even this is giving way to more sustained and robust adult education curricula. Far more parents are engaged in serious Jewish study than was the case fifty years ago.

- Parents also feel a greater sense of responsibility to reinforce Jewish education than was the case in the past. When Marshall Sklare interviewed parents in “Lakeville,” he heard from many that the purpose of synagogue membership is to have a place to drop off the children for their religious schooling. Parents proudly announced their intention to avoid setting foot in the building, but rather to remain at the curb outside. Today’s parents speak a very different language. Some are motivated by a sense of empowerment—that is, they will not cede their parental responsibility to supervise every aspect of their children’s lives. Others, however, candidly declare their embarrassment when they cannot answer their children’s questions—and they seek answers by engaging with the school and with Jewish education for themselves.

- Teen education is receiving far more attention—and funding—today. Whereas the bar/bat mitzvah was once viewed as the culmination of Jewish education, educators today are developing creative programs to keep young people in Jewish educational environments through their teen years. Communities have invested in teen trips to Israel; congregations have upgraded their youth programming for teens; and summer camping now has higher priority too.

- Today’s educators also appreciate the need for a mix of educational formats—the formal and the informal, the cognitive and skill-building coupled with the affective forms of Jewish education. Rather than rely on one form of Jewish
education, educators seek to expose young people to multiple Jewish educational exposures, which reinforce each other.

As many of these new initiatives have been in place now for more than a decade, some assessment is in order. One way to think about the nature of contemporary Jewish education is to examine the actual learning process. How well are educational institutions doing? How effective are curricula, pedagogy, and educators? What is the current state of teacher recruitment and retention?

The current study has taken a different tack by examining the broader environment in which Jewish schools and educational programs function. The project therefore began with a series of questions about the recruitment of learners and the effects of Jewish education in order to comprehend what brings Jews to enter the portals of Jewish education, the short-term impact of their engagement, and the long-term effects of Jewish education on their lives afterward. By addressing these matters, we intend to situate the field of Jewish education within its larger familial, social, and communal contexts.

In regard to decision making, we asked: How do Jewish parents choose a Jewish educational setting for their children and themselves? What is on their minds when they make such decisions? And what kinds of language do they employ when they talk of Jewish education? What are some of the key variables of social differentiation that affect educational choices—such as denomination, gender, affluence, generation, community, and marital status? What are the factors that complicate the recruitment of learners for Jewish education?

Concerning the impact of Jewish education, we asked: To what extent is the family affected when a child is enrolled in a program of Jewish education? Conversely, what happens when children cease to be enrolled? Do different forms of education have specific effects on particular types of adult Jewish engagement? Are parents who participated in particular educational activities more likely to enroll their own children in those same activities? What, in short, are the cumulative impacts of various types of Jewish education?

These and other evolving questions were posed by a team of seven academic researchers, working under the auspices of the AVI CHAI Foundation, who employed both quantitative and qualitative methods to assess the nature of contemporary Jewish education. Members of the team were drawn from a variety of disciplines, ranging from sociology to education, from history to anthropology and social psychology. The study built on fresh analyses of the National Jewish Population Study of 2000–2001 and a specially designed new survey of parents who are members of Jewish Community Centers in five localities. Simultaneously, five researchers conducted interviews in a variety of communities. The research team collectively gathered data in ten localities across the United States. The team then analyzed the intersection of families, learners, various educational programs, and the communities in which they are situated.

Throughout the process of research and writing, members of the team met
frequently and collaborated so that the survey research informed the work of interviewers and vice versa. The research team also met frequently over a two and a half-year period to react to work in progress and align the various components. Our goal was to produce a set of studies that meshed with a larger whole. We also ultimately sought to identify some of the policy implications that flowed from our academic research. These implications are embedded in each chapter and then are drawn together in the book’s conclusion to stimulate readers who are concerned about strengthening Jewish education.

In the pages that follow, the educational choices of Jewish families and the calculus of decision making leading to Jewish engagement assume great importance. For today’s Jewish families, education is not a separate sphere of Jewish life; it is integral to how affiliated American Jews live today—in marked contrast to how Jewish education was experienced a generation ago, let alone at midcentury. Overlapping circles of learners, parents, members of extended families, fellow synagogue congregants, peer groups, educators, and communal leaders all are actors in the drama of Jewish living. Their new roles attest to a dramatic shift over the past half-century: Jewish educational settings and decisions are now central to the way affiliated American Jews construct their lives and communities today.

NOTES

5. Sklare and Greenblum, Jewish Identity, 190–93.
Acknowledgments

The research team expresses its appreciation to the AVI CHAI Foundation for entrusting us with this important and stimulating opportunity to study Jewish education in its social context. We have benefited directly and indirectly from the suggestions of members of the staff and board of the foundation. We are particularly grateful for the active role played by Marvin Schick at the outset of the project as the team coalesced and formulated its research agenda and key questions. Yossi Prager was an active partner throughout the research phase, and Deena Fuchs provided helpful guidance at crucial points in the project.

In the closing phase of our work, we met on several occasions for intensive consultations with Alisa Rubin Kurshan and Jacob Ukeles, who critiqued our work and helped us draw together the various strands. We also benefited from talking with other outside consultants throughout the project. At the outset, we met with a number of educators, communal leaders, and academics in order to identify and sharpen critical issues warranting research. These consultants included Steven Bayme, Steven Brown, Aryeh Davidson, Samuel Heilman, Barry Holz, Bethamie Horowitz, Carol Ingall, Leora Isaacs, Charles Kadushin, Jan Katzew, the late Charles Liebman, and David Marker.
Contributors


Sylvia Barack Fishman is Professor of Contemporary Jewish Life in the Near Eastern and Judaic Studies Department at Brandeis University and is also codirector of the Hadassah-Brandeis Institute. Her newest book, *Double or Nothing? Jewish Families and Mixed Marriage* (Brandeis University Press, 2004), has been the subject of lively discussion by scholars and Jewish communal professionals. Fishman is the author of numerous articles on Jewish education; the American Jewish family; changing roles of Jewish women; and American Jewish literature, film, and popular culture, as well as three other books: *Follow My Footprints: Changing Images of Women in American Jewish Fiction* (Brandeis University Press, 1992); *A Breath of Life: Feminism in the American Jewish Community* (New York Free Press, 1993); and *Jewish Life and American Culture* (State University of New York, 2000).

Shaul Kelner is Assistant Professor of Sociology and Jewish Studies at Vanderbilt University. Previously, he served as a senior research associate at Brandeis University’s Maurice and Marilyn Cohen Center for Modern Jewish Studies. His earlier work has addressed both informal and formal education, particularly Israel experience programs and Jewish day schools. In addition to the current project, Kelner recently completed an important study of the Jewish sector’s workforce, written with a team of Brandeis University researchers under his direction.
Jeffrey S. Kress is Assistant Professor of Jewish Education at the Jewish Theological Seminary, and a senior research associate of the William Davidson Graduate School of Jewish Education. He is a coauthor of *Building Learning Communities with Character: How to Integrate Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning* (Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 2002) and of the chapter titled “School-Based Social and Emotional Learning Programs” in the *Handbook of Child Psychology* (6th ed., Wiley, 2006).

Alex Pomson is Senior Lecturer at the Melton Centre for Jewish Education, the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. Prior to joining the Melton Centre faculty, he was Associate Professor and Koschitzky Family Chair of Jewish Teacher Education at York University, Toronto. Previously, he was the founding Head of Jewish Studies at the King Solomon High School, a community Jewish high school in London. His work has been published in numerous academic journals, including *Teachers College Record, Educational Research, Canadian Journal of Education*, and *Journal of Curriculum Studies*. He is coauthor, with Randal Schnoor, of *The School as Shul: Changing Relationships between Parents and Their Children’s Jewish Schools* (forthcoming, 2007).

Riv-Ellen Prell, an anthropologist, is Professor and Chair of American Studies at the University of Minnesota where she also teaches Jewish studies and women’s studies. She is the author of *Fighting to Become Americans: Jews, Gender and the Anxiety of Assimilation* (Beacon Press, 1999), and *Prayer and Community: The Havurah in American Judaism* (Wayne State University Press, 1989), as well as coeditor of *Interpreting Women’s Lives: Feminist Theory and Personal Narratives* (Indiana University Press, 1989). She has written more than seventy articles and essays on American Jewish life and has been awarded the National Jewish Book Award and a Critics Choice Award of the American Education Association. She has served as the editor of *Perspectives*, the newsletter of the Association for Jewish Studies. She is also a member of the board of directors of the Association for Jewish Studies and the academic advisory boards of the Center for Jewish History, the Jewish Women’s Archive, the American Jewish Historical Society, and many other scholarly organizations.

I  Parental Choices
Samuel H., a thirty-something professor, remarked that the entire American Orthodox community talks about their children’s schools over their tables on Shabbat—the teachers, the education the students receive, the quality of schools, and how to negotiate all of it. We were seated at his dining-room table on a spring evening in 2004 discussing Jewish families and their children’s educations. “Personally,” he commented, “the first conversation on this topic was enough for me.”

If Samuel was convinced that this was a unique problem facing Orthodox Jews alone, he would have certainly misjudged Jewish life in America. My interviews with thirty-six men and women of all Jewish denominations, who were members of twenty different Jewish households in Philadelphia and several of its suburbs, revealed that, with few exceptions, parents were preoccupied with their children’s educations, both secular and Jewish. For all of these parents, how to educate their children was often the key choice in a network of decisions that included where to live and ideally buy a home, the careers and positions parents’ pursued, how to envision the Judaism practiced by the family, and above all, what values and aspirations they held most dear for their children as Jews and Americans.

Parents’ educational decisions starkly reveal, as other Jewish practices may not do as readily, what parents wish to transmit to their children about Judaism and the best ways to do that. Like all measures of Jewish identity, how to educate one’s
children is of course bundled in with other practices and ideas. Nevertheless, the process by which educational choices are made, and often changed over a child's school career, provides a unique perspective on how parents envision creating and assuring the Jewishness of their children. Indeed, a 1997 study of the Greater Philadelphia Jewish community underlines how important Jewish education is to parents. Eighty-five percent of parents claimed that their children's receiving (or having received) a Jewish education was either very or somewhat important. The only more significant measure of Jewish self-identification was the importance to them of "being Jewish."

For families in the study of school choice that is the subject of this chapter, whether Judaism is an "activity" with a status akin to soccer or the central principle of their world view(s), the decisions made for a child's Jewish education places Judaism squarely within its members values and needs. Therefore, the study of educational choices for children provides both a perspective on the dynamics of Jewish identity within the family and the varieties of meanings of education for Jewish families.

The study of Jewish identity as a dynamic process over the life course has gained salience in the past decade. However, that research has focused on individual, adult experiences. The study of family educational choices reveals that selecting schools, and schooling itself have the potential to launch a whole series of commitments and behaviors, including some that might not have necessarily been anticipated. Therefore, identity formation may be understood over the life of the family. Indeed, the notion of a "child-centered" Judaism should include more nuanced ways in which to understand the child's education as a potential catalyst for the family's Judaism. This research provides an opportunity to link the scholarship on American Jewish identity and the scholarship on middle-class family formation. Sociologists of religion have recently noted how rarely religious involvement is studied within the context of the family. The notion that classical measures of identity can be studied apart from relationships and collectively held cultural meaning is increasingly difficult to claim. However, how to demonstrate those relationships remains a challenge.

This study reveals that family formations are closely linked to issues of values and cultural meanings. How parents divide responsibilities for the care and maintenance of the family is no longer determined either by social conventions or social class for the middle and affluent classes. Men and women consistently make those decisions not solely for instrumental reasons but as expressions of (often contradictory) values. Therefore, the domain of religious life is intertwined with work and the family economy. At the same time, attitudes and orientations toward women and work are not predictive of religious commitments. If the literature on American Christians suggests that religious "traditionalists" are less likely to encourage women to work outside the home, that is not the case for American Jews. Jewish attitudes toward women and work vary from the dominant culture.

This study was designed to ascertain if family formation shaped and was shaped
by the ways in which couples defined their Jewishness. The research demonstrates that Judaism was indeed integrated into critical choices and decisions made by families and that Jewish practice was a family decision. Though there are, of course, significant denominational differences in Jewish practice, the degree of Jewish commitment is not sufficient to explain a couple’s attitudes toward work or the division of labor. Similarly, women’s commitment to work did not limit their engagement in their children’s lives in general, or their Jewishness in particular. To the contrary: both parents were rarely equally involved in transmitting Judaism to their children in the elementary grade years. The Jewishness of children, in most cases, was overwhelmingly managed by the mother and functioned as a critical part of her portfolio as family manger, whether or not she worked, and whether or not she was even Jewish.

Situating the study of American Judaism within the formation of the family and shared decisions around education effectively demonstrates that Judaism is a family matter, both in its economic and social formation as well as within educational choices. Identity must be studied within the social context of the family, and the study of family formation must be located within the context of cultural values and the making of meaning. In order to understand how families made educational decisions for their children, I designed a study that would be broad enough to look across Jewish experience at the same time it would allow for greater depth. Inviting parents to talk in some detail about their choices for their children’s educations and the ways they made them provided rich insight into the integration of children’s educations into families’ values and outlooks.⁶

Greater Philadelphia

The Jewish community of Philadelphia is located in five different counties, which constitute the Greater Philadelphia Jewish community. In 1996, when the last community study was undertaken, there were 100,000 Jewish households consisting of 242,000 people. The population had declined over the past decades, but in 2001 it was the fifth-largest Jewish community in the United States.⁷ The fastest-growing Jewish population resides in the counties most distant from Philadelphia. At the same time, neighborhoods in closer-in suburbs are nearly as large as the Jewish communities of the new settlements. Philadelphia is one of the nation’s oldest Jewish communities and a historical center for the development of Jewish education. Currently, the majority of Jewish children are educated in synagogues, which reflects nationwide patterns. In the past five years about 77 percent of students enrolled in Jewish education attend synagogue schools. Several of the synagogue schools have more than one branch, usually one in the city and one in the suburbs. The small number of remaining community schools also have suburban branches as well. Philadelphia Jewish life is primarily synagogue- and school-based for families with children.
However, day schools capture a stable minority of Jewish children. Over the past decade day school enrollment has been fairly constant. Between 14 and 15 percent of students enrolled in Jewish schooling of any type are in day schools, which are either Conservative (four branches of the Perelman Day School, formerly Solomon Schechter) or Orthodox/traditional. Typically, Perelman Day School has about one hundred fewer students enrolled at the elementary school level than the three Orthodox/traditional elementary schools.⁸

Comparison between the findings of the 1996–97 community study and the 1990 National Jewish Population Survey places Philadelphia slightly below the norm of American Jews for day school education. In the 1990 NJPS, 74 percent of Jewish children enrolled in private schools attended day school. In Philadelphia, 67 percent of private school attendees are in day schools. The national survey found that 17 percent of children attended day school, and in Philadelphia 18 percent are enrolled in day school.⁹

Work, Family, and Jewish Life

In their early years children’s Jewish educations are determined by decisions made by their parents. This study expands the borders that normally determine how parental decisions are made by examining how households made decisions about work and about caring for children. Jewish education is deeply rooted in the formation of families. What emerged as particularly important in these decisions in both dual- and single-earner households was that men and women related to responsibilities for children differently and that women’s role as managers was particularly salient in their relationship to children’s educations. This finding is clearly congruent with a long-standing sociological literature that demonstrates that two-earner families do not equally share the responsibilities for either children or the management of the household.¹⁰

On the other hand, the research also suggests a strong sense of investment in the family by mothers and fathers. Whether parents had a traditional division of labor or a more egalitarian one, educational decision making was shared by virtually every couple. How they described those choices was frequently related to how they understood their role in the household and their relationship to work. In short, the transmission of Judaism is embedded in the family. What structures households—class, gender, work, and the use of time—shapes their Judaism.

The long-standing patterns that characterized American Jewish families involved a family economy that emphasized maximizing the earning potential of the father while the mother cared for the needs of the family. Jewish women timed their careers to those familial needs.¹¹ Second-wave feminism of the 1970s radically altered women’s ideas about work and family and resulted, particularly for American Jewish women, in greater aspirations for education and careers opportunities. Hence, the Jewish family economy has changed since the 1970s. This study offers a snapshot of how those changes have shaped some families’ Jewish lives.
Occupations Education, and Gender

The sixteen men and sixteen women in this study are, on the whole, highly educated. Half of the men in the study have postbaccalaureate degrees, and only two men did not complete their college degrees. Though several have changed positions, only one man changed careers. One-third of the men are self-employed in businesses, though a few more had been self-employed at some time in their careers. About half of the women in the study have postbaccalaureate degrees; only one woman did not complete her college degree. Two of the women are self-employed. Both men and women have M.D., L.L.B./J.D. and Ph.D. degrees. Despite the near parity in education in the participants in the study, employment and occupations differ for men and women.

All the men we interviewed work full time. Nine of them are the primary or sole support of families with either two or three children. In contrast, about half of the women work full time. The other half of the women either work part time (four) or do not work (five). All of the women had worked at some point in their lives, and some who work full time had worked part time or taken maternity leave previously.

Women and Work: Full Time versus Part Time

No issue more effectively demonstrated the complexity of family formation, work, and the division of labor than how to define full- or part-time work for women. Women, more than men, adjust their work schedules and career interests to the timing of children and the needs of their families. Their time “investment” in the family and the relationship to their work that results is critical to how each parent participates in the household. Clearly, the making of a Jewish life, as some of our interviewees suggest, became part of his or her differing investment in family and household.

For example, Rae G. runs her own event-planning business with a partner who is also a mother of young children. Rae has an office at home as well as a business office. She describes the number of hours that she works as, “changing incrementally with the amount of time my daughter is at school, or goes to school. During the summer I work less. I vary my time according to her needs.” Her responsibilities include taking and getting her daughter from the bus every day, which she rides to Perelman Day School. She also picks her up after school once a week because her child works with a reading tutor. When she is at school she talks to teachers about her daughter’s progress and defines herself as her daughter’s advocate at the school because of her need for extra support in reading. Her business is demanding enough that she cannot volunteer as readily for school activities as she once did. The family is shomer Shabbat, and Rae has responsibility for all the preparations for Shabbat. They entertain frequently. They often disagree about “who does more” for the family. She also notes that “I’m not really sure that I have a clear delineation
to know what is personal time and what isn’t.” She explains that the week prior to the interview she and her business partner realized that they had a stretch of time one morning with no meetings, and they decided to go grocery shopping.

Cheri M., an attorney, works full time. She has chosen a type of law because it interests her, but primarily because it is compatible with having children. She works on death penalty appeals, which keeps her in the library rather than the courtroom and gives her a degree of flexibility. That “flexibility” is evident in Cheri’s schedule. She explains, “The first hour is theirs.” She then works from 8 A.M. to 6:30 P.M. and is available to her children until 11:30 P.M. “I sneak an hour in the evening to work more,” she added. Weekends belong to the family, and much of Sunday morning is spent at Hebrew school with her children. Cheri’s full-time work is less flexible than Rae’s, but it remains structured by the needs of her children. It would be a mistake to imagine that women do not highly value their work even if they describe it in terms of flexibility or compatibility with parenting. Cheri finds it easier to do research than to be in the courtroom, but she also talks about how well this work suits her personality and her commitment to social justice.

Similarly, Jane M., a divorced mother, works as a professional manager for a non-profit environmental group. She describes herself as “lucky” to have a “rewarding career that is intellectually challenging and I get paid for it.” She reflects on her years as both mother and professional: “I tried everything. Not working a short time; part time for big chunks of time; I worked full time and had flexible schedules. I always tried to have flexible schedules to work until 3:00. But it’s always been a little bit of a pull from one side or the other. I am satisfied with my life and better adjusted because I like my work. I am also happy to give my son and daughter a model about having a career and a family.” Virtually all of the women interviewed for this study, who work in sales, nursing, law, and business, expressed these sentiments.

Women “Outside” the Work Force

If women who work full time structure work around children, then what of women who do not work? There are a variety of reasons that women who have professional degrees and work histories are not employed. One woman in the sample stopped working when she, her husband, and even her extended family became concerned about the stress she was experiencing as a result of a special-needs child whose care she managed. Her husband, an internist, then had to take on a greater financial obligation and far less flexible hours in order for her to stay at home.

The other women in the sample who are not compensated for their work, or do not work full time, in general make the choice to devote themselves to the needs of their families. They often describe themselves as the family “managers.” Some of these couples came to the decision to have the mother stop working when the first or second child was born. Some women returned to work after the birth of children and the couple later reassessed their lives and decided to have the wife give up work. Some women describe this decision as straightforward. “This is how my
parents did it and I always assumed I would." One woman explained that her job as an administrator for a large company, which had once been very important to her, no longer was after the birth of her second child. “It was a great company to work for, but of course, after she was born I was like, hmpf. What’s the big deal?”

Although virtually all of the women we interviewed saw themselves as the primary manager of the family, it was only women who were not compensated for work who defined their children as their “career,” including women who had worked in other fields previously. One stay-at-home mother quipped, “I should be paid for what I do.” In the realm of mother as manager her attention to children’s education is paramount; it is one of her key portfolios. Particularly in the elementary years when there is far better access to teachers, these women are not only active volunteers, but they clearly understand their volunteering as critical to their ability to observe the schools, teachers, and their children’s classroom experiences. The stay-at-home mothers are more active volunteers in the schools than working mothers. In this sense, motherhood truly is a career because of the strong link in their minds between helping at school and helping to manage their children’s educations.

Sara D’s husband describes how she manages the children’s educations. “She is very focused and on top of it. She knows the kids’ needs and has spotted learning disability issues. She has made it possible for our son to be in the learning disability program and the gifted program at the same time because of his IQ.” An Orthodox mother, who has a part-time practice as a psychologist, expressed frustration that at Torah Academy, the Orthodox day school, parents are not allowed into the classroom, so she is unable to find out precisely what happens there. Her hope to have access to their learning environment as a person who spends time in the building was foiled by this policy.

Studies of American families consistently demonstrate these same patterns. The “total demands” on employed women are higher than on employed men. Married men are more likely to have a partner who takes care of daily tasks at home, including everything from meal planning to maintaining contact with extended family. Women are, not surprisingly, more likely to adapt their schedules to the needs of the family.15

In summary, women play a central role in the management of their families. Mothers’ concerns for the uniqueness of children and their educational needs require them to adapt their lives to their children, whether or not they work. Even families with nannies (three) or babysitters, still wish to be present and active in their children’s lives, and hence must be flexible. Women assume responsibilities for children and family that make them key to any understanding of how the family’s Jewishness is shaped and how children are educated.

Men and Work

Over and above how husbands and wives think about managing family responsibilities, it is worth considering if husbands and fathers understand their relationship to
work or their family roles precisely as mothers do. The research suggests they do not. When asked how the birth of children affected them, it is only fathers who say that they feel more responsibility to support the family financially. Even full-time working mothers do not suggest that they feel greater pressure or responsibility for earning money for the family.

Irv N. opened his own business after the birth of his third child and is conscious of the risk. Hal V., a father of three, expresses similar sentiments: “Having more children gives you more a sense of responsibility. As my business grew I had to work more. I never changed my work schedule because of kids. The more children the more expenses. My job is to produce income and my wife as a stay-at-home mom has the burden of taking care of them, transporting them, and making sure everything is done.”

One father commented on the relationship between work and family in discussing the importance of day school education: “Sending him to day school is also a motivator for working. We both need to work to afford these things. I’m already motivated by doing a good job, but it puts a seed in your brain of working for something for a future. You’re living for something else now, not just for yourself.”

Even in families where both parents work, men and women sometimes think about careers differently. David H., the father of three children under four, is married to an academic physician for whom the demands to win grants creates great stress. In contrast, he describes his own career in different terms. “I enjoy and think about it a lot even outside of work. My boss defines my position as sixty to eighty hours a week. I have a grant, and I need to publish.” In contrast, his wife “wanted more time for children. This means instead of working a hundred hours she is working sixty.” David views himself as efficient and willing to forgo socializing at work to get home to his family. He does not believe, however, that having children affects his work.

Rick J. explains that he really could not be happy as a person who worked from 7:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. and who was home with his kids. My wife “feels it’s an undue burden of having to be a mother and lawyer at the same time. There’s no conflict for me.” Several men, however, did change their schedules as a result of the birth of their children. Robert B., a physician, realized that “if I got home at 8:00 I would never eat dinner with my kids, who eat earlier. So if you want to have family time, you have to work harder to control your time and structure your schedule.” This realization allowed him to make some changes in the way he thought about his career as a physician. Ironically, he notes that it was his divorce and not the birth of his children that finally affected his work schedule. “My work got shoved into a smaller amount of time; my number one priority is my kids.” The majority of men in the study have not substantially changed the way that they work in order to accommodate children.

All the fathers we interviewed see themselves having “careers” rather than jobs, which certainly reflects their high levels of education and occupations. Physicians and businessmen describe their work in terms of what they “created” and what they
“built”; a judge described his work as “service.” Their language is proactive. Only the one academic in the sample expressed frustration that he could not “work” more, but he also notes that he spends almost two hours a day engaged in prayer and study as part of his commitment to Judaism. Men rarely use the language of compromise in the ways that women do. They also note that they could not be as available to their families as they would have liked.

A 1996 study of the General Social Survey examined how women and men felt about success and work-family balance. The authors concluded that the findings were “complex.” Gender did not predict the success that people felt. However, they did discover what this research demonstrates. “The combination of full-time employment and young children for women is imbalancing [sic].” Women have both more demands related to their children and high expectations for interacting with their children. Employed fathers of children in this age group feel successful because they see their primary obligation as “providing income.”

The Management of the Family

Management by no means falls exclusively to nonworking mothers. Ronda R. describes herself as the “family manager” in her paid career as the senior paralegal in an international company. Similarly, Karen M. works more than sixty hours a week and “pulls in a big salary” as salesperson. She is willing to shoulder the majority of responsibility in the house. She explains that “it is deciding whatever schedule has to work. If we are both available, then typically I do it because I don’t care.” Where husbands and wives both agree to share responsibility for children and pursue careers, there is often, though not always, conflict between spouses. Lines of responsibility are rarely self-evident in dual-earning couples, and the need for negotiation is constant. Who “does more” is something that couples agree is regularly contested. That conflict is not necessarily perceived as a negative or a bad thing.

Neither do clear lines of responsibility imply an absence of conflict. For example, Allen L. works, as he puts it, “all the time.” He believes he has never been home for his son’s birthday because of how extensively he travels. He reports: “I value my family the most. But I understand that when you have an ambition to support your family in a way that they’re accustomed to, you have to take care of that. Hopefully during high school I’ll spend more time with my kids.” He adds that the best thing about becoming shomer Shabbat is that “I don’t work on Shabbat.” In turn, his wife says: “He’s always been the breadwinner and been a hard worker, and long hours and I’m the very lucky one who gets to do the house stuff.”

Family management is complicated by what can only be understood for some women as their ambivalence about their roles. Ellen J., an attorney, is not atypical in describing her ambivalence: “Sometimes I get angry and say ‘I do everything.’ He says, ‘Well, I’ll do some things.’ But the truth is, I don’t want him to do those things. I want to do them. He’ll do what I ask him to do, but he won’t think of doing it. Men don’t do those things.” Her husband refers to her “amazing maternal instinct”
to explain her management style. He notes that she sometimes complains, “I have to do all this stuff and worry about the kids’ schedule.” “Well,” he adds, “she would worry about the schedule regardless of whether I would worry or not.” Research clearly bears out that women’s feelings about how to be mothers and wives differ from their husbands’ and increase the self-expectations that these women clearly voice.¹⁷

Our research assessed the relationship between gender, work, and family in one other way. Each person interviewed for the study was asked to estimate the percentage of time he or she spent on work, family, and personal time weekly. Respondents decided for themselves what was meant by personal time. These estimations are clearly matters of self-perception rather than accurate accounts of time that might be recorded in time diaries used in research. Perception is, however, an important measure of how people understand their experience.

A self-employed businessman claimed to work eighty hours per week, or 80 percent of his waking hours. That claim was the highest estimate of work time we heard from our interviewees. The lowest estimate was working about 40 percent of the week, the equivalent of about a forty-hour work week. About two-thirds of those interviewed who worked believed that they spent more than half of their time working. Estimates about how much time they spent with their families ranged for working parents from as little as 20 percent to about half their time. Most stay-at-home mothers estimated spending 70 to 80 percent of their time with the family or managing it. One businessman counted as family time lying next to his sleeping children when he came home from work or a community meeting.

Parents felt that they had very little personal time. Three families claimed to have no personal time with their spouses. Many parents commented that they spent no time apart from their children on weekends. Mothers counted taking showers, food and clothing shopping, and commuting time to work as “personal time.” A few parents talked about their involvement as volunteers in the Jewish community as personal time. Some men who mentioned involvement in the synagogue and community did not count it in any category when asked to describe how they spent their time.

When asked if they believed that the way they allocated their time reflected their values, the majority of respondents said no. Many fathers would have agreed with the parent who explained: “I value my family more than work, but I have to work.” A few parents responded “absolutely” to the question about the congruence of time and values. Time is a great concern to the families in this study, as it is to the vast majority of American families today. Our questions emphasized the relationship between time pressures and values. Given certain commitments, how did families manage those tensions and assure that their children engaged in what mattered most to parents? How did Judaism shape the relationship to time as a limited resource? In part these questions were answered by comparing other generations of Jewish households’ approaches.
Family, Educational Choice, and Jewish Identity

A New Generation

Sociologists Moshe and Harriet Hartman analyzed the 1990 National Jewish Population Survey with an eye to questions about gender, occupation, education, and equality in Jewish families. They found that the life course and generation had considerable impact on women's education and workforce participation. Younger Jewish women were still lagging behind in graduate education but had closed the gap for college degrees. Their occupations were less prestigious than those held by Jewish men.

When women married, they were more likely to leave the workforce with the birth of preschool-aged children and stay out of it for longer, but then return. Jewish men remained in the workforce. The youngest married Jewish women in the study followed markedly different patterns from their mothers, whose educational attainment was lower and who remained out of the workforce for a longer period of time. The mothers of the baby boom supported families—children and husbands—as primary caretaker further into their children's school years. These mothers engaged in a pattern that maximized the earning ability of the higher-paid husband. The study of Philadelphia Jewish families bears out what the Hartmans anticipated would occur. Jewish women born in the 1960s have pursued longer educations and more professionalization. Like the older members of the baby boom cohort, their children's ages have a greater effect on their workforce participation than other factors.

There are some shifts in the ways that families manage children and economic success. Most important, variation typifies American Jewish families in the twenty-first century, just as a near-uniform pattern of middle-class family formation in the 1950s once did. However, this study of young Jewish families finds that fundamental changes have not occurred among Jewish women and men in other significant ways. Jewish women are advancing in secular achievement, but that has not reduced their role conflict, nor their investment in their children. Congruent with other studies of American families with young children, women, no matter what their degree of professionalization, continue to experience more role conflict and a greater sense of emotional responsibility for their families. Because of their investment, and the ways investment is expressed, mothers are linked to the Jewishness of their children as well. All parents in this study express deep engagement with their children. However, the ways of thinking about family and work appear to be gendered.

Women's relationship to career and work has clearly changed. Those women who pursue professional careers, and that is the majority of working women in the study, may use the language of adaptation and flexibility more than men, but they do value the two roles of work and parenting. A recent longitudinal study comparing the baby boom and Generation X cohorts draws a similar conclusion, but from the point of view of the children rather than the parents. Bengston et al. concluded that maternal investment has not changed over the generations. Education
correlates strongly with mothers’ investment in their children. Work does not seem to detract from either attachment or investment. Surprisingly, perhaps, Generation X children are being brought up with more self-esteem and higher aspirations than the previous generation.19 However, even when men parent less actively than their wives, they perceive themselves as being more involved in their children’s lives than were their own fathers, and many of the fathers in the study believe that they spend from 30 to 40 percent of their time with their families.

At least at a cultural and discursive level, the vocabulary of work and the vocabulary of investment in children overlap in interesting ways. That congruence may in part explain the high degree of mutuality in decision making about school as well as religious life by parents described above. None of the studies cited uses religion or religious commitment as a variable in the study of household division of labor or investment in children. This research suggests that religion is not only embedded in family and household, but is an important element in decision making.

**Decision Making, Family, and Jewish Life**

For the most part, fathers are “episodic” participants in their children’s lives. They attend events, help with homework when they are home, and sometimes transport their children. Mothers, employed or not, tend to provide constant maintenance and management. However, decisions are made mutually by both parents. When one parent feels more strongly about something relating to the child—religious upbringing and private schools were the two most frequent examples—partners yielded to the more committed parent. Not all parents had the same “story” about decisions or about children when interviewed separately. However, the congruence was for the most part quite impressive. Parents choose schools together, although mothers, particularly nonworking mothers, are more likely to be the face of the family to the school. In turn, mothers’ perceptions of the school will clearly influence how the family may respond to children’s educational needs.

Looking at the world of family and religion through the eyes of this cohort, we can see a high level of investment in children, the centrality of the mother to the maintenance of the family, and the shared process of decision making largely put into practice by the mother. Even in the twenty-first century with dual-earner families, family life is gendered.

**Jewish Parenting**

The families in this study go about their Jewish practice quite differently from one another because they affiliate with different denominations, because they have made different choices for their children’s educations, and because their own personal observance varies as well. Is there any overlap between the way they form their families economically and Jewishly?

In superficial ways there is not, and that is a critical finding of this study. The
most highly educated woman in this study who works the most hours is an Orthodox Jew who, to her mind, unambiguously values her children over her career. There are two-career families across the denominations and the obverse as well. There are divorced families who send their children to day school and supplementary school. Just as no form of investment in children is predicted by whether or not both parents work, no form of Jewish commitment is predicted by the family economy of any family in the study.

Nevertheless, how men and women think about work and about family shapes the way they describe their Judaism. When asked how they act as Jewish parents to their children, what respondents said often revealed how they formed families and thought about work. Parents talk about both what they want their children to know, feel, and sometimes believe about Judaism. Some also focus on how they want their children to experience Judaism. Belief and practice are the modes through which they define their Jewishness.

Families, almost always with two Jewish-born adults, in response to the question “How do you act as a Jewish parent?” describe and even list the activities and rituals in which they engaged. For them, the emphasis is on “practice,” even when observance is anything but extensive. One Reform stay-at-home mother phrases her approach succinctly. “I am making Jewish memories.” Emily N. explains: “By being a role model I’m a Jewish parent. I always make latkes for Hanukah, and I even make doughnuts so they’ll think ‘mom made doughnuts for Hanukah.’ Generally we have a big Sukkah party every year. We get babysitters and have everyone bring kids. By helping them to build memories around Jewish holidays and events I’m a role model.”

Robert B., a divorced father, explains that he functions as a Jewish parent “by teaching by example, that this Friday night business is important to me.” He encourages his children to bring as many friends as they want to Shabbat dinner. He cooks “a nice Shabbat dinner,” and he makes sure that they sing lots of Shabbat songs. He encourages them to join him for Shabbat dinner, even on the weekends that they are living with their mother.

Rachel C., another mother who is at home full time, is an observant Conservative Jew. She describes many of the same approaches to creating a Jewish family as Emily does: “We keep a kosher home; we always have Shabbat. We observe all the holidays. With the kids we do a lot of cooking. We do a lot of things around the seders. We decorate the house like a big tent, and we made palm trees and table decorations.”

Sarah P. is a well-educated Conservative Jew. Her domestic Jewish practice does not primarily define her Judaism. However, the association of Jewish practice with special food is increasingly understood as a form of what scholars call “domestic Judaism.” The vast majority of parents in this study list the holidays that they observe, with family and friends, as their major form of participation in Jewish life, and with it, a critical way they create Jewish families and serve as Jewish parents. Judaism, then, is closely linked to the home and especially the synagogue, and becomes
part of the allocation of “personal time,” and the management of the family. Not surprisingly, it often falls to mothers to plan and make time for a Jewish life.

Adults describe a less predictable way that they act as “Jewish parents”; they talk about values that they define as Jewish. Sarah, for example, comments: “We are a very verbal family. We talk about God, or about something we saw that isn’t right. Our values are Jewish values. Our involvement in the synagogue community is an expression of that.” An intermarried Reform mother remarks: “My children would say they have a very Jewish mom. I talk a lot about being Jewish; I talk about Israel.” Frieda P., an Orthodox mother, said that she and her young sons “talk about mitzvot. We talk about helping people in a Jewish context.” Her husband, an observant Jew, talks to his son about things Jewish by taking a conversation as “a teaching moment.”

Values talk is related for many of these adults to their understanding of themselves as role models, particularly in the Orthodox community. Both mothers and fathers engage in talking as a form of Jewish parenting. Talking is an activity that both working parents and stay-at-home mothers consider critical to Jewish parenting. Parenting by talking, teaching, reflecting, and framing certainly mark these families as educated and members of the middle and upper middle classes. Parents perceive “talking values” as consistent with other ways that they negotiate their lives. In addition, talking cuts across denominations and levels of observance in some cases. Values talk varies from “I told my children that Howard Dean’s children were Jewish,” to “mitzvot.”

For most of the intermarried families in the study, and for some of the least observant, simply going to synagogue and, more important, sending their children to religious school constituted the way they acted as Jewish parents. The synagogue was a Jewish space where they found meaning and “comfort,” and where they saw their children becoming Jewish. They appeared to be less self-conscious about their Judaism than other parents, but they invested time and resources in their children because they saw themselves as Jewish parents.

Several fathers we interviewed found this question perplexing and difficult to answer. Two fathers really had no idea what made them “Jewish” parents. One wondered if what he did as a father was any different from how his non-Jewish neighbor parented his children. Two fathers felt that their deepest values, commitments to social justice in one case, and ethical behavior in the other, might well be thought of as Jewish. Finally, one father felt that every question he had answered was the outcome of his life as a Jewish parent. Tzedaka, morality, the “inner spark” of Jewish life were, for him, inseparable from any aspect of his life.

Jewish parenting, then, is linked to many of the other findings of the study. It is often gendered and lends itself to a gendered discourse. Some men talked about Jewish parenting differently from women, who were often more detailed and expressive about their approach. Obviously, this was less the case for the small number of Orthodox Jews to whom we spoke. Non-Jewish parents were also asked how they functioned as the parent of Jewish children. Virtually all of them saw themselves
facilitating their children’s relationship with God, spirituality, or moral and ethical issues, which will be discussed at greater length below.

Issues of investment, work, and values are profoundly related to educational choices made by parents for their children. Just as family formation shapes the ways in which families are Jewish, so those same issues will be traced through understanding the meaning of educational choice for those households.

Educational Choices and Children

The Philadelphia families that we interviewed took very seriously the educational decisions and choices that they made for their children. When asked if couples had talked about how they would educate their future children during their courtship and engagement, the vast majority responded that they did not. Some discussed a commitment to a Jewish education, but rarely in any detail. In cases of intermarriage, and the marriage of an Orthodox Jewish man with a non-Orthodox Jewish woman, the couples did discuss, if not always resolve, the issue of children’s religious education.

However, during pregnancy and with the arrival of children, education became an important topic for parents and one that engaged a host of issues for them. Therefore, educational decision making itself is a rich vein to mine to understand how couples make Jewish families, to whom they turn in making those decisions, and what the decisions reveal about their view of themselves as Americans as well. In addition, because educational choices are linked to the development of a child, the decisions are often made and remade over the school years with many opportunities to reassess those values and commitments. These decisions are made within the context of the relationship between the parental couple, even following divorce. Therefore, that decision reflects the link between family formation and Judaism.

Choice was the word used most frequently by those in the study to describe their educational decision making. Most parents understood themselves to be exercising important choices by selecting a school for a child. They emphasized the values that they promoted in choosing neighborhoods and schools for their children to attend. Parents uniformly sought out “good neighborhoods” where schools had excellent reputations, though they rarely explained what an excellent school was. Many parents emphasized their commitments to diversity, especially racial diversity, as critical to their choice of schools. So too parents in the study who chose day schools held ideas about Judaism that shaped their decisions. However, several families we interviewed who attended synagogue regularly and felt that they made “Jewish educational choices” did not choose day schools for their children.

Some in the study saw themselves as “having no choice,” which meant that only one type of school was appropriate or possible for them. Others revealed that they had not realized that they had choices for their children’s educations only to discover that they did, such as selecting a private school or a day school. For example,
Emily N., a Reform, suburban mother who is not employed, describes just this process:

Twelve years ago when we moved here we met all of these people who sent their children to private school, and my husband and I looked at each other and said, “I don’t get it. Don’t they know we live in an amazing township, in a great school district? Why would you spend money to send your kids to private school?” If all of my kids were all cut out of the “Allen [their middle child] cookie cutter” I would still feel that way. But if you have a kid like Sean you realize that kids have different needs and that we are lucky we have choices.

Emily’s story of realizing unanticipated choices in some interesting ways parallels the choice made by Ellen and Rick J., who assumed that they would send their children to public schools until they visited the Perelman Day School. Both described being deeply moved by what they saw—Hebrew language instruction, happy children in a Jewish environment—and they chose the day school. Their choice was driven by the values that they wanted to shape their children’s experiences.

The Unique Child

Parents have increasingly come to see the family as “consumers” of children’s education who choose among a variety of options that are linked to a specific understanding of children and their needs. Children are constituted as unique selves for the families in this study. What makes them unique is central to how parents choose schools. The child’s “personhood” is constituted by parents’ values, which aim to shape the child, and by the child’s personality which in turn can reshape parents’ outlooks on education. These values are expressed within community and influenced by friends and relatives. However, fundamentally parents see themselves as the final arbiters of the choices made for their children.

Families in this study explain their educational choices in part by describing their children’s uniqueness—the challenge of dealing with children who were passive as well as competitive, ones with learning disabilities or borderline learning disabilities, children with “remarkable interests in rabbis,” and those who soaked up knowledge like sponges. Parents highly prized and were concerned about their children’s unique qualities, their needs, and their self-esteem, and thus they expected the school to respond to those concerns. They were not hesitant to challenge authority, and many of them were emboldened to make changes in their children’s educations when they felt the school failed to serve them. Some parents were willing to have their children in two or even three different schools if each institution fit the needs of their children more adequately.

Sara D., for example, describes her educational choices for her children: “Even before kindergarten, the synagogue nursery school was too small for my daughter. It is just her personality was too big for the school. We chose to send her to a Friends
School because it requires independence.” Her middle son is in public school because he is less independent than his sister. Her youngest son is at the synagogue preschool, which “is a good fit for him.” They have not decided where he will go to school next. “Each child,” she explains, “is an individual.” An Orthodox mother of a preschooler contemplating the choice between a Conservative and Orthodox day school shares that point of view. “Every child has different needs,” she says, “so I would not entirely rule out the Conservative school.” She weighed her decision in relationship to her child’s uniqueness.

Educational choices have figured into the lives of American Jewish families since the 1970s with the boom in day schools, as well as private and other forms of alternative education. Nevertheless, one can argue that the trend has grown exponentially, that the vocabulary of choice and uniqueness has magnified, and that it is part of a cultural constellation that shapes Americans and American Jews as consumers.

My focus on key words and underlying ideas about children is grounded in an understanding of how culture operates. Most American Jews live centrally within American culture, which shapes their ideas and expectations. A discursive analysis of how parents think and talk about children and their educations uncovers some of the deeper cultural assumptions that guide their choices. How Judaism operates in their lives and what educational choices follow from that are the focus of this analysis.

Paradoxically, the centrality of choice has the potential both to support and undermine decisions about Judaism and Jewish education. As a culture committed to the citizen as consumer, the right to choose identities, alternative forms of education, and to facilitate uniqueness, Americans increasingly create an acceptable cultural space for the practice of Judaism within the United States. However, that higher tolerance for choice equally undermines the sense of obligation that is equally central to Jewish commitment.

Beyond this fairly standard understanding of the complexity of Jewish life in a pluralist, liberal nation, the focus on key symbols and meanings allows us to understand why choice is so powerfully connected to education. For example, one non-American-born parent says he does not care about his children’s secular education. “We were more interested in the Jewish side,” he explains. “We didn’t look at it like Americans look at it. People are really very focused and selective on the schools here. We’re not that kind of person.” What he most likely meant is that his family does not value education in the same way—as the critical avenue to becoming a person, to success, and to achievement. He values, he says, sports and Judaism for his children. For the American middle class the importance of choice and of children’s uniqueness is inextricably linked to the ideal of children’s autonomy, their well roundedness, economic success, and ability to maintain a certain economic standing.

Since American Jews are closely bound up with the culture of both the middle and upper middle classes, that which besets these classes besets Jews. Ideas about
childrearing have been in the hands of “experts” since the 1920s, and they emphasized the necessity to teach children the discipline and denial that is the hallmark of educational success. Education led to professionalization, and knowledge became critical capital for the middle class. However, since the postwar period, the middle class has also been expected to facilitate children’s creativity and uniqueness, to eschew the narrow disciplines of a less forgiving culture. Hence, the middle-class family became a world of contradictory impulses, leaving its children often in protest against the demands of success.

Although not the focus of this study, it is impossible to miss the key themes of the middle class in parents’ discussions of their children’s uniqueness and the importance of choice to maximize their children’s development. At the same time it is essential to link these concerns to critical issues in family formation discussed above. Those interviewed often see themselves as exercising choices about how to structure work and how to relate work to family time and values. The regular negotiations over responsibility and time that mark so many of the concerns of most of those interviewed underlines both the value placed on choices and the desire to maximize opportunities for children.

Just as Jews are made within the family so are consumers. At the same time, however, this generation of parents that largely came of age in the 1970s introduces a broader range of concerns. Identity, diversity, moral responsibility, and a relationship to God underscore the fact that for them school choices are far more complex than the reproduction of social class. These key concepts will be unpacked in this study in light of how educational choices are exercised within Jewish families.

Choosing and Not Choosing Day School

More American Jewish families are choosing day school as an option than in previous generations. Studies indicate that the day school is a highly effective means of assuring Jewish commitment. As noted, the Greater Philadelphia Jewish community maintains a consistent enrollment in a variety of day schools—a number that has nearly doubled since 1980–81. The total number of pupils has risen to just over two thousand in the past few years. In the elementary school years those children are enrolled in schools nearly evenly divided between Conservative and traditional/Orthodox.

Nevertheless, the majority of parents in this study do not choose a day school education for their children. Few have considered the option. Therefore, it is important to examine how parents articulate their ideas about day school and why they do or do not see it as one of several “choices” for their children’s education.

Parents offered several reasons for their lack of interest in a Jewish day school, and some even remarked that they were not sure why they had not considered it. However, at some point in the interview their reasons did emerge. Marsha W., a Reform Jew, is typical: “We were on the public school track from the beginning.
Jewish education would be from home and synagogue. The secular education would be with the public school. Also cost was a reason, and the diversity factor. We wanted him to be as grounded as he could in a mixed community of people. You could argue that’s not so much the case here [in a suburb], but it is more diverse if we put him into the public school.”

A few parents who briefly considered day schools expressed concern that they, or a spouse, would be uncomfortable because of their lack of Judaic knowledge. A Conservative father raised as a Reform Jew in the South said he was certain that all the other day school parents would be much more competent Jews than he was, and that it would be difficult for him to feel comfortable at the school. However, he added that he was surprised how many parents of day school children at his synagogue were by no means any more Jewishly competent than he was.

However, the overwhelming reason given by parents for not sending their children to a day school was their belief that it would interfere with their normal American development. Amos D., a Conservative Jew, said he knew that people at his synagogue sent their children to day school, but he added: “I spoke to someone whose kid went to [a community] day school, and he went to Israel and became very religious. Now just to be close to their child and his friends the parents joined an Orthodox synagogue, even though they live very far away.

Even if they were not afraid of their children’s becoming “too religious,” many parents feared that they would not know how to function in a diverse group of peers in high school after a day school elementary education. Some believed it was simply un-American to attend a day school. The value of what adults labeled “diversity” was the most widely cited reason for not selecting a day school. Ruth D., a Reform and intermarried Jew, had seriously considered day school. She visited Perelman and looked into a scholarship. She felt it was not a good choice and explains why: “It’s just not enough diversity, and it’s just too much Judaism at once. When you have a public school and a Hebrew school, I think it’s a nice mix.”

A few parents said that they lacked funds. A few others said that the Conservative day school was too distant from their homes to make it possible even to consider. Most simply reiterated their satisfaction with supplementary schools for their children’s religious educations. Almost all the adults interviewed for this study did not consider day school among their “choices” for education.

On the other hand, those few, particularly non-Orthodox parents, who did choose day school are hard to categorize. For example, another family who also assumed that public school was the natural route for their children nevertheless did select a day school in the end. The couple was encouraged to consider a day school by a family friend. Ellen J.’s response to that visit surprised her. She was raised as a Reform Jew, and her husband as a Conservative Jew. They were “both looking for something more.” She explains that “when I walked into that school, I just couldn’t stop crying. I wanted my kids to know more than I know.” When they decided to send their son to the day school, the family withdrew their deposit on a house in a more distant suburb in order to live in the school’s neighborhood.
They experienced real opprobrium from their Jewish friends. Day school kids were thought of as “nebishy.” Friends warned that the J. children would never play sports, “would not know how to dribble a basketball,” that they were wasting money, and would be “sucked into it.”

Ellen J. finds none of this to be true. She reiterates that “they don’t daven up and down the halls.” At the same time, she thinks that the day school provides a far better secular education than her children would have found at the public school. She realizes that she did have a choice beyond the public school, and in selecting a day school for her son addressed her own wish to create a different type of Jewish home.

The Orthodox participants in the study actively choose a religious education for their children. However, several of the parents are deeply concerned about the quality of the secular education that their children receive. One mother found making the decision between a Conservative and Orthodox school challenging. She explains that “it was a very hard decision. It was made based on our being more observant.” Both parents were swayed by what they describe as the most persuasive argument: “Make sure,” the school head told them, “that your children know what they are rejecting if they do not want to be Orthodox.”

Another Orthodox mother, a physician and researcher, though frustrated with the quality of the school’s secular studies, wanted a “fundamental, deeply rooted faith” for her children. A Conservative day school would offer a better education and modern Hebrew, but the family did not want their children to be invited to birthday parties on Shabbat or to be taught by teachers who were not observant. The husband’s philosophy clearly guided their decision: “The school has a great influence on who your child becomes. Speaking metaphorically, kids end up with the accents of the kids around them, not their parents’ accent. The ideal is consistency between school and family.”

Allen L., an Orthodox man whose family has become increasingly observant, comments on the relationship between their growing observance and the impact of their children’s attendance at day school: “We were becoming more observant ourselves, so I think that it was not that the children were having an influence on us, but our changes were influencing our decisions on their lives.”

The families in the study whose children attend day schools are remarkably different from one another. Nevertheless, what all of the parents share is the desire for their children, to cite an Orthodox father, “to feel Jewish in their kishkes.” One Conservative father describes the importance of school and the family’s Shabbat observance to “make Judaism natural.” “I wanted her to get a natural feeling from Jewish life, that it’s not something that has a separate system and a separate calendar that you have to consult. It’s part of your everyday existence.”

Day school is a “choice” for some families and not for others because of the centrality of Judaism and Jewishness. The number of parents interviewed is small, but it is striking that they speak about their values more than their children’s needs. Certainly children leave or change day schools for the same reasons that parents
in this study move their children from secular to private schools or vice versa. However, overall, the choice for day school hews closely to values parents hold or discover they want for their children. It is also noteworthy that parents were drawn to day schools because of the interventions and insistence of people in their network. In the case of Orthodox families who were choosing among day schools, the principal’s ability to frame the experience (“he will know what he is rejecting”) was also central.

Secular Education

The other parents we interviewed sought explicitly to educate their children in secular, or more accurately non-Jewish schools. Their decisions are shaped by several factors. Even a brief conversation about how parents select schools for their children leads to the realization that families embed the decision about schooling their children in issues that define who a family is, and what shapes its priorities. Key among them is where parents either lived at the time of their pregnancy or where they planned to live as their child or children reached school age. In Greater Philadelphia that is first a question about living in the city or in suburbs, and then in which suburbs. The question of school is further integrated into the issue of the location of the workplace. For example, working mothers in particular note the proximity of their workplace in order to “drop by,” the child’s school as an important factor in school choice.

Most parents consistently mention the importance of the diversity of a child’s school as a value in their children’s socialization. Diversity means many things to parents. First and foremost it means racial diversity. Sometimes parents refer to social-class differences, and less often it simply means the presence of non-Jews. Jane M., a divorced mother, moved from the suburbs to the center city area of Philadelphia when her child was ready for kindergarten. She explains: “We wanted to live in center city more than a suburb. We were completely the anomaly. We wanted a good academic school but also a diverse school. Suburban schools had grass and playgrounds. Center city had more poor kids and black kids. We wanted them there. It turned out fine. We are fantastically happy to be living here. We wanted our kids to learn to get along with other kids and to adapt to different circumstances, to understand the diversity of the world.”

Cheri M., whose family moved from the city to a close-in suburb, talks about school choice in slightly different terms. “We came to this community with the expectation of putting her in public school. The choice was the community to live in. It is a mix of financial levels and races. The quality of education was important. We would not have come to a diverse community if the education was bad.”

The choice to live in the city did not predict parents’ choices for schooling. Two urban families send their children to the Conservative Day School. Another Conservative family sends children to an urban Friends school. Three of the families’
children are enrolled in public “magnet” schools. One of these families undertook the financial burden to enroll one of their children in a Friends school in order to give her the additional skills that she required to allow her to score higher on the entrance exam for the “magnet” school that she had previously failed. Another family has one of their children in a magnet school and another in an intensive language school in a suburb near where the father works.

Suburban parents, who constitute the greater part of this study, choose different options from the public schools to meet their children’s needs. Reasons cited were poor teachers, children’s low academic performance, or their inability to make friends. When a parent disagreed with a spouse about their child’s private education, it was most often fathers and it related to cost.

Philadelphia and its suburbs have a wide variety of private preparatory schools, many of long standing. Why the parents in this study exclusively choose Friends schools is unclear. There is a widely held view, though no accurate data, that suggests that a high percentage of Friends’ schools enrollees are Jews. One parent who has many relatives in Israel and goes there at least yearly did suggest the potential for tension he might feel over the stands taken by Quakers on the Middle East conflict and his own views, but he finds no evidence of those attitudes in his children’s schools. What is interesting about this choice is that Jewish parents perceive the school as “religiously neutral.” One father explains that he and his wife compromised on their children’s school by sending them not to the Conservative day school but to Friends. He described Friends as “touchy-feely in socialization but religiously neutral.” A mother, Susan D., explains that the Friends’ school her child attends is a good choice because “it shares very similar values to Judaic values—nonviolence, inner peace, and others.” Another mother notes that the school would not disrupt the family’s Judaism.

School choices reflect parents’ commitments and values. School choice appears to drive parents’ decisions about where to live, for example. At the same time, those decisions are often reshaped by children’s needs. Nowhere is that clearer than in the number of parents who have moved children into private schools. Parents in the study seem attuned to their children’s ability to succeed socially and academically in the elementary school years.

Supplementary Schools

Parents approach Jewish educational institutions differently from their children’s secular schooling. As ample studies have demonstrated among non-Orthodox Jews, the decision to join a synagogue is overwhelmingly tied to a child’s Jewish education and the plan for the child to become bar or bat mitzvah.

Parents do not express as much concern about their children’s Jewish education as they do the secular one. However, there are some similarities. For example, the location of the synagogue, and with that the supplementary school, is an impor-
Family, Educational Choice, and Jewish Identity

Parents also speak of “comfort levels” for themselves and their children. Certainly among the intermarried, the comfort of the non-Jewish spouse is often the litmus test for membership. More than a few Jewish spouses echoed what one man told me: “I won’t stand for my [Catholic] wife being excluded from anything at the temple.”

Nineteen of the twenty households in the study belong to synagogues. One single mother whose daughter was in the Conservative day school did not belong to a synagogue but planned to join at some point. Few had switched synagogues since the birth of their children. Many joined a synagogue because of the nursery school. Schooling accounted for a few households’ moving from one denomination to another.

Parents have a variety of responses to the question “What do you want your child to learn in Hebrew school?” Conservative and Reform parents differ somewhat. The majority of parents look to the supplementary school to provide feelings and attitudes toward Judaism. Irv N., a businessman and Reform Jew, explains, “I wanted my sons to know who you are, how hard it is to be Jewish and how special it is.” He focuses on how Jewish education provides his sons a “general outlook” on life, and he is typical in not connecting that view to a specific curriculum or even skills.

Barbara K., a divorced mother who has primary responsibility for deciding about her daughter’s Jewish education, is more explicit about what she wants her daughter to learn: “The basics: holidays, what Judaism is, traditions, Torah, women’s place in Judaism, learning to read and write Hebrew, family celebrations, about other religions and what they observe.” Barbara was raised as a Conservative Jew, although she ultimately joined a Reform synagogue because she liked the preschool and liked that her daughter would have friends at their synagogue. In general, Jews raised within Conservative Judaism or practicing it were far more concrete about what they wanted their children to learn. Rachel C., a Conservative Jew who attended Hebrew high school and Jewish camps, and who spent time in Israel, clearly articulates her educational goals for her children: “I wanted them to begin to learn Hebrew, Bible stories, and basic history. They will go on to Hebrew high school. It is not a question. When I lived in Israel, I learned to read and write Hebrew, and it helped me so much. I want the kids to have Hebrew skills and to keep them.”

Questions about supplementary school often result in parents’ expressing their dissatisfaction with their children’s experiences. Several parents see this as an inevitable dilemma—how to make children enjoy and learn in a meaningful way. Many parents are confronted with their children’s refusal to continue their Jewish educations, despite the parents’ commitment to confirmation or Hebrew high school. At the same time, they blame the school for failing to really teach their children.

Robert B., who did not send his children to a day school because his then-wife, a convert to Judaism, feared she would be uncomfortable, draws on his own memories to describe what he wanted for his children’s Jewish education: “I wanted her to get to my comfort level with reading Hebrew, some amount of conversational
Hebrew, understanding how the services are structured, what the prayers are. More than that to have a warm, fuzzy feeling about being in synagogue, doing the cultural things—dancing, bonfires and sleepovers—all the those things I have fond memories of.” However, Robert had attended day school for three years, went to Camp Ramah, and was active in a youth group. His children had none of these experiences. In part, he faulted their Jewish educations for being unable to give his daughters the same fluency he had as a Jew. He participated in the synagogue’s committee, which created a comprehensive curriculum. But it did not seem to succeed. Robert’s children claimed that they learned the same thing every year.

Steve M. was raised as a Conservative Jew. Because of his intermarriage, he joined a Reform synagogue. His response to questions about what he hopes his son would take away from his Jewish education is instructive about parental attitudes. On the one hand, he describes as “must-do things for every Jewish parent,” having “their kid be Bar Mitzvahed, and go to Hebrew school.” On the other hand, he expresses concern about pressuring his child, especially because “being an only child we don’t want to put too much on him.” In addition, Steve also emphasizes how “inadequate teachers are today” because his son received “barely any Hebrew homework.” “Education,” he opines, “has to be fun and keep them interested and wanting to come back.”

Many parents express concern over the lack of meaningful Hebrew instruction. One Reform and one Conservative mother that we interviewed had attempted to intensify Hebrew study by organizing an extra class session in the school for enrichment. Neither effort succeeded. One mother explains, “It became another after-school program like gymnastics, karate, art, and it was presented as an extra day of Hebrew school and that was that.”

These parents appear to approach Jewish and secular education differently. These activist and engaged parents who change their children’s schools and meet often with teachers and administrators have a different relationship to supplementary school. They may serve on committees and take firm stands on their children’s continuing on to confirmation or Hebrew high school, but they seem resigned to the fact that the schools fall short of their expectations, and they are frustrated that their children do not have a positive experience. Steve M. speaks for many, though by no means all of these parents, when he summarizes the Jewish educational cycle: “Hebrew education takes a back seat after bar mitzvah, and then you get married and have kids, and then what do you know, you’re back at the synagogue again. That’s the cycle. Education needs to be more exciting.”

Non-Jewish Parents of Jewish Children

One of the most interesting findings of this study resulted from interviewing non-Jewish parents of Jewish children, as well as conversionary parents. Though not surprising, it is certainly worth noting that they bring a strikingly different religious
vocabulary from that of Jewish parents to the way they think about their children’s “religious” educations. There were literally two different discourses operating.

Christian or non-Jewish parents play a role in raising Jewish children in America today. An analysis of the 2000–2001 NJPS reveals that in Reform synagogues 21 percent of families with children up to age seventeen are being raised by a non-Jewish parent. In Conservative synagogues, just under 10 percent of children are being raised by a non-Jewish parent and about 0.5 percent of members of Orthodox synagogues.

In this study, the Christian parents’ and converts’ rationale for giving their children a Jewish education is strikingly different from the way Jewish parents frame their decision. Those raised outside of Judaism anticipate that their children’s Jewish education will provide them with a relationship with God and offer them guidance for their lives. Cheri N., who was raised as a Catholic but stopped going to church in high school, responds to a question about what she wants her children to learn in supplementary school: “I wanted their school to be the place where they would be thinking about the bigger issues, the ethics, the morals, and the values. I wish there was more of it in religious school. They get more of a sense of community, ethics, and social action than about this idea of God and spirituality.”

A Reform mother, raised with virtually no religion at all, echoes the same sentiments when she says what she would like her children to learn: “Life, death, God, and morality. They get ethics from us and school and various places.” A father raised as a Catholic, who once thought of becoming a priest, says that what he wants for his children’s “religious training” in a Reform supplementary school is “being able to identify with some greater thing in the world.” “Faith” is what he wants for his children. He adds: “I don’t really look at the religious aspect of it from a Jewish standpoint. It’s just that is the faith we’ve decided to participate in.”

Karen M., a Presbyterian, says that “my main focus is to have a strong faith in God. And Judaism believes in God, so I’m down with that.” Rhonda R., a convert to Judaism, agrees with what other non-Jewish parents say: “It is good for children to have one religion.” When she began to attend synagogue with her husband-to-be, she thought about conversion. Her motivation, she notes, was how “in tune” she felt with the rabbi. “I joke,” she says, “that I converted for the rabbi and not for my husband. It was more for me.” Intermarried families speak far more about Judaism as ultimately being a choice for their children. None of these parents are certain what their children will choose in the end, but they want them to have Jewish educations, bar or bat mitzvahs, and certainly some sense of their connection to “the generations.”

The vocabulary of spirituality and God, in contrast to peoplehood, holidays, and history, is not alien to Judaism, particularly at this moment in time when a “religious” vocabulary is increasingly ubiquitous in American society. However, just how extreme the contrast might be is made evident in Karen M.’s interview. She chairs the Designated School Program committee, a three-year ad hoc committee whose purpose is to “determine what’s working within our religious school and
what’s not.” Karen comments: “For me the hardest part I have about understanding Judaism is the fact that there are cultural Jews (which for me is bs), and then there are religious Jews. Judaism is a religion to me, as an outsider looking in; it is a religion before it is anything else. A lot of people will argue that with me, including the rabbi and the head of the religious school.”

It is impossible to know what impact conflicting discourses have on the teaching and practice of Judaism. In the Reform families in which women are non-Jews or converts, they are the more active participants in their children’s educations. It is Cheri N., raised as a Catholic, who takes her children to religious school each Sunday and attends the morning service. In addition, Karen participated in parent-child class in her son’s first and second grades. Parents learn together with their children, and then for part of the session, separately from the children. Karen recalls that her husband “was very firm about it. ‘If you want to do this you can do it, but I went to Hebrew school, and I’m not going back.’” She adds that “I did it, and he went to the few classes that I had to miss.” However, by third grade she was too busy to continue to attend on Sunday, and what she describes as “the positive reinforcement given to kids,” was certainly not picked up by her Jewish husband.

Any understanding of Jewish education must take into account the presence of non-Jewish parents who are active participants in socializing Jewish children. Their vocabulary of faith and spirituality, as well as their view that their children will ultimately have to “choose” a religion is a marked contrast to parents who largely echo what one Conservative father says: “I believe very strongly in passing the torch. I educate the kids about what it is about and what it means to be Jewish.”

Conclusion

The parents we interviewed were selected, in part, for the educational choices they exercise. We met them largely at the end of their decision-making process. For these families, the selection of schools for their children, like many other decisions they make, is framed by statements of values. Exercising choice is articulating beliefs about one’s child and one’s world view. What these interviews clearly demonstrate is that educational decisions involve how one sees oneself as a citizen and a Jew, as a parent and a professional, as a member of a family and a community.

School choice has something important to teach us about how these families live their Jewishness. Living as Jews is, in part, expressed through how the parents invest value in their children, and their investment in children is articulated in the ways they live as Jews. Being Jewish and being parents, albeit on a rather lengthy continuum of commitment and observance, is central to the lives of these American Jews.

Studies of Jewish identity often focus on adult behaviors. They link that behavior to the activities of the prior generations. This study examines the ways in which individuals are shaped by social relationships, particularly within households and
families: how are decisions made that lead to Jewish behaviors? Households in this study are shaped by many features: generation, family economy, gender roles, and occupations, among others. Judaism is lived within the household and over the life course. This snapshot of families of young children demonstrates the ways in which all of these arrangements and self-definitions contribute to creating a Jewish identity for both the children and the families.

The household is located within American society and is fundamentally defined by social class. These dimensions are particularly significant in defining the child as the object of parental values and hopes. Schooling is a powerful lens through which to understand these processes; it is the medium for socializing the child outside of the family. As such, school choice provides a rich vocabulary for understanding how these American Jews communicate what and who children should be. The high parental investment in children is very closely tied to parents' feelings about Judaism, and for many the school is a central address for creating that relationship. At the same time, the ways that families are formed and family economies are created is equally critical to understanding choices and meanings for these families. The study of family decisions about schooling underlines the importance of a close understanding of the dynamics of the household and the cultural meaning of schooling.

**METHODOLOGICAL APPENDIX**

This research, conducted in 2004, was based on interviews with thirty-six adults in twenty households who had at least one child attending a Jewish supplementary or day school in Philadelphia and its suburbs in Bucks and Delaware Counties. The men in the study have a mean age of forty-eight and a median age of forty-five. The women have a mean and median age of forty-three.

Helen Tigay, who heads the Auerbach Central Agency for Jewish Education in Greater Philadelphia, identified synagogues that she believed would want to participate in the study. Seven of these Jewish educators provided me with family names for the study from five Reform and Conservative synagogues and one Conservative and one Orthodox day school. We interviewed each parent separately for forty-five minutes. In the case of divorce we interviewed only the parent living in the household contacted. Parents also filled in a written questionnaire about their background, education and employment. Fifteen households declined to be interviewed. The most common reason given was a lack of time.

I selected families that fell into basic social categories that roughly approximated the distribution of affiliated Jews defined by the findings of the National Jewish Population Survey 2000–2001. These families are members of three major denominations. Families who are intermarried and intramarried and divorced and nondivorced were selected to roughly reflect the percentage of Jews nationwide who are represented in these categories. Finally, families whose children attend day school were selected based on the proportion of day school attendees to families in NJPS 2000–2001.

We interviewed fourteen Reform Jews (including one self-identified convert) and four non-Jews who belong to ten Reform households. Two households include divorced women. All the Reform Jewish children in the study are enrolled in synagogue supplementary
schools. There is no Reform day school in Philadelphia. We interviewed twelve Conservative Jews. None are intermarried, but one converted to Judaism after her marriage. Two of the households have a single, divorced parent: one male and the other female. Two of these families send their children to day school; the remaining families send their children to synagogue supplementary school. We interviewed three married Orthodox couples. All school-age Orthodox children attend a day school.

All the men we interviewed are employed full time. Seven women in married households do not work at all. They comprise one Orthodox, three Conservative, and three Reform households.

The families in this study have in total forty-six children, thirty-six of whom were six or older. The oldest children were thirteen and the youngest was three months old. Of the thirty-six children enrolled in school, nineteen attend public school, ten attend private school, and seven attend day schools. All children enrolled in “secular” private schools attend one of several branches of Quaker schools known as “Friends Schools.” No parent to whom we spoke viewed Friends Schools as religious schools. The 1997 Jewish Population Study of Greater Philadelphia (see note 2 to this chapter) found that 9 percent of Jewish children between the ages of six to twelve attended non-Jewish private schools. The number in this study is considerably higher. It might reflect the fact that the families in the study live in areas that are both more affluent and more urban than two of the five counties of Greater Philadelphia.

Six of the families in the study live in the city of Philadelphia and fourteen live in a variety of first ring suburbs. All urban children enrolled in public schools attend academically enriched magnet schools, to which students are admitted by examination. Urban families also have children enrolled in day schools and Friends schools.

NOTES


Family, Educational Choice, and Jewish Identity


6. Interviews for this study were conducted by myself and two other researchers—Lauren Brody and Vanessa Grawjer. See the appendix to this chapter for a full description of the methodology.


12. Of the four non-Jews in the study, two had some college but no degree, and two had law degrees, though one had given up the practice of law.


14. Della Pergola notes that in 1990, 82 percent of Jewish women aged 45 to 49, the peak ages of working activity in the United States, were in the labor force. All but three women in this study are younger than these ages, most considerably so. We may anticipate their return to the workforce. “Jewish Women in Transition,” 212.


16. Ibid., 488. The General Social Survey is conducted by the National Opinion Research Committee. Since 1972 the survey has gathered data on contemporary American society to monitor behavior, attitudes, and attributes.

17. Penny Edgell Becker and Phyllis Moen studied one hundred dual-earner couples in upstate New York to examine their work-family strategies. They learned the majority of these couples engaged in “scaling back,” strategies that restructured the couple’s commitment to paid work. Of the three strategies that they identified, these families used only one, a one-job, one-career marriage, and it was the wives who did the scaling back. In the context of


20. It is possible that this phrase was actually taken from an educational or denominational “campaign.” It was used by Kerry Olitzky in his brief article “Welcoming the (Children of the) Stranger into Our Classroom,” Open Lion (Spring 2003), http://www.Behrmanhouse.com/about/openlion/2003sp/wtcots.shtml. He defined the purpose of Jewish education as “making Jewish memories.” I do not know if this respondent read or heard the phrase.


23. This view of culture is of course indebted to the work of Clifford Geertz, classically articulated in his Interpretation of Culture (New York: Basic Books, 1973). However, Geertz’s view of culture not only hails from an earlier time but envisions a more monolithic vision of culture. Sherry Ortner’s “Introduction” to The Fate of Culture: Geertz and Beyond (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999) underlines that any vision of culture must be alert to “contestation,” and to the realization that culture is now contested in a whole variety of contexts. My focus on culture in the context of class and my understanding of American Jews as makers of meaning within the context of the middle class therefore posits culture within social contexts. See Riv-Ellen Prell, “Response,” to Charles Liebman’s Sklare Lecture, Contemporary Jewry (2002): 122–25.


27. These intense expressions of emotions by one or both parents who choose to send their children to day schools is fairly common. Although there is no systematic study of the phenomenon, it is interesting to speculate about its causes. Does it evoke a sense of loss or absence for people seeking a more “Jewish” life for their children than they experienced? Its intensity is striking.

28. One is in preschool and day school bound.

29. A Friends School Web site (http://sidwell.edu/About/friends_school.htm) notes that “Quaker education does not seek to inculcate a particular set of beliefs or doctrines; it
seeks to nurture a particular sort of personhood . . . a person who . . . has first-hand experience of the reality and importance of the Spirit in life.” Nonetheless, Friends Schools require weekly worship in silence waiting upon “the Spirit.” Quaker language is religious language.

30. Sylvia Barack Fishman’s *Double or Nothing? Jewish Families and Mixed Marriage* (Waltham, Mass.: Brandeis University Press, 2004) is an important analysis of intermarriage in America, and it finds some parallel dynamics at work, particularly concerning gender.

31. Steven Cohen provided these figures.
The Differential Impact of Jewish Education on Adult Jewish Identity

STEVEN M. COHEN

Does Jewish education make a difference in the long run? More specifically, to what extent does Jewish education experienced in childhood and adolescence, in its many varieties, exert a long-term influence on Jewish identity in adulthood, in its many varieties? To what extent, and in which facets of Jewish identity, does it bring about a deeper Jewish commitment and greater tangible Jewish involvement in the years and decades following the time when individuals went to Jewish schools, youth groups, camps, and Israel? (To be clear, throughout this paper, the term Jewish education refers both to Jewish schooling and to so-called informal Jewish educational experiences.)

Parents, practitioners, and policymakers all have their reasons for more than idle curiosity about the extent to which, and the manner in which, Jewish education works to bestow higher levels of Jewish involvement many years down the road. Significantly, charitable bodies have invested considerable sums, and parents have placed significant hopes, in a Jewish educational system thought by many to promote in-marriage specifically, and stronger Jewish identity generally. Are these hopes well-founded?

Research can go only so far in answering this key question. Ideally, we would want research that could accurately forecast the long-term impact of current Jewish educational experience on the Jewish identity of today’s children thirty or so years from now. The only way to ascertain this is to collect data for thirty years.
And even if feasible, such research may be of dubious value. Knowing the long-term effectiveness of certain types of Jewish education being conducted today may not accurately predict effectiveness of the same sorts of Jewish education in thirty years, when contexts will have certainly changed. By similar reasoning, learning of the long-term effectiveness of Jewish education experienced in the 1970s or 1980s is of limited value in assessing the eventual impact of similar types of Jewish education now under way.

Because we can only approximate the ideal study from a policy point of view, we can draw inferences as to future effectiveness from two alternative models of research. One approach focuses on the short-term consequences of Jewish education. Such studies seek to understand the immediate, or near-immediate, impact of Jewish educational experiences on their youthful students, campers, members, or participants. Of course, these short-term studies, by their very nature, are incapable of determining long-range impact, except by way of speculative extrapolation: presumably, experiences that generate great enthusiasm or impart significant skills in the short run may well produce a noticeable contribution to Jewish identity, however conceived, in the long run. But that inference rests on an untested, albeit plausible, assumption.

The other category of research looks at the long-term impact of Jewish education, but does so in a retrospective fashion. Surveys ask adults today to report on their educational and other relevant experiences in their childhood and adolescent years. Researchers then analyze how education conducted decades ago influences the Jewish identity of today’s adults. Such studies, of which there are at least a few dozen or more of various sorts, date back over thirty years, if not more. The earliest, to my knowledge, include my first social scientific article (1974); doctoral dissertations by Bock (1976, 1977) and Himmelfarb (1974); and extend to more recent analyses of the 1990 and 2000 National Jewish Population Surveys (NJPS) (Fishman and Goldstein 1993; Rimor and Katz 1993; Cohen and Kotler-Berkowitz 2004). (For reviews of this literature, see Fishman 1987; Dashefsky 1992; and Dashefsky and Lebson 2002.)

All such studies are modeled (directly or indirectly) on Greeley and Rossi’s (1966) The Education of Catholic Americans, a pioneering work that explored the impact of different forms of Catholic schooling in childhood on Catholic religious identity and practice in adulthood. Parallel to that study, the ensuing social scientific quantitative research tradition on Jews invariably jointly examines three components:

1. Current adult Jewish identity, measured along a variety of dimensions (e.g., ritual observance, communal affiliation, etc.)
2. Educational experiences (which kind of schools or programs? how many hours, years, etc.?)
3. Possibly confounding factors, most prominently, Jewish upbringing, parents’ identities, sociodemographic characteristics, and others
The essential task of this research is to determine not just the simple association between Jewish education in childhood and Jewish identity in adulthood but rather the net impact of the former on the latter. Doing so demands that the analysis successfully controls for the most influential confounding factors, of which parental religiosity is among the most important. Simply put, those receiving more intensive and extensive Jewish educational experiences also “benefit” from strong Jewish socialization experiences in their homes, resulting in a process of “self-selection.”

Failure to parcel out the confounding factors—to, in effect, statistically remove the self-selection process—would produce artificially exaggerated estimates of the impact of Jewish education. Studies reporting simple bivariate relationships between Jewish education and adult Jewish identity cannot produce estimates of educational impact per se. The 1990 NJPS lacked adequate questions on parental Jewish identity, severely limiting the usefulness of the analyses emanating from that data set (see Fishman and Goldstein; Rimor and Katz).

At the same time, enough analyses of more comprehensive data sets over the years have generated an accumulation of usable evidence as follows:

1. **More intensive education** (particularly day schools) does indeed exert a positive impact on Jewish identity.
2. **Education of longer duration** (in terms of years or number of hours) exerts a greater impact than that with shorter duration.
3. **More Jewishly engaged homes** produce more participants in more intensive and longer-lasting Jewish educational settings.
4. The research is somewhat divided regarding “part-time” supplementary schools (they go by such names as Hebrew schools, Talmud Torahs, or religious schools, among others, and meet more than once a week). Earlier analyses (Bock; Himmelfarb) argued that most alumni of part-time schools in their childhood years displayed no measurable signs of impact in their adult years, owing to the large number of classroom hours required before a measurable effect emerges (a threshold effect). However, students who experienced an extraordinary number of hours of such schooling did show some impact, even in the pioneering Bock and Himmelfarb analyses that both argued for a high threshold of hours before impact could be observed. Other research (Cohen; Cohen and Kotler-Berkowitz) discerned evidence of impact of part-time supplementary schools, albeit somewhat limited.
5. The research is also somewhat divided regarding the impact of Sunday schools, or other schooling limited to one day a week. The impact may be somewhat positive, negligible, or even somewhat negative. That is, net of all other factors, former students in Sunday schools (and in no other school) report lower scores on some key measures of adult Jewish identity than do comparable adults reporting no Jewish schooling experiences. For example, according to the most recent analysis of the 2000 NJPS data, all things being equal, Sunday school alumni who attended no other form of Jewish education report somewhat lower rates of in-marriage (that
is, higher rates of intermarriage) than did comparable individuals with no Jewish schooling experience, a circumstance that also accounted for diminished levels of other Jewish identity indicators.

6. Only a very limited literature has examined the impact of Jewish youth groups. One study, of a very intensive and elaborated form of the phenomenon (Young Judaeas), suggested some fairly powerful long-term effects (Cohen and Ganapol 1998). Other work, measuring participation in less educationally intensive sorts of youth groups, found far more modest effects (Cohen and Kotler-Berkowitz 2004).

7. The sparse literature on Jewish camping suggests fairly robust effects of the more educationally intensive forms of overnight Jewish camping (Cohen 2000; Sales and Saxe 2003). (As is explained below, the available measure of Jewish camping in this study refers to the variety of camps at all levels of Jewish educational content.)

8. Israel trips generally seem to exert a very strong near-term effect and undoubtedly produce long-term consequences for Jewish identity, possibly second only to day schools in terms of overall impact. However, some disagreement does surround estimates of the impact of Israel travel on adult Jewish identity. The large part of research on Israel youth trips has focused on immediate reactions (Cohen and Cohen 2000) or relatively short-term impact (Saxe et al. 2004). These studies point to both intensive (and generally positive) immediate reactions to Israel experiences; they also report some measure of declining impact and enthusiasm as time elapses after return from Israel, leaving open the question of the duration of impact.

With all this said, the literature on Jewish educational impact remains inconclusive in several areas and has left uninvestigated several critical issues. The research heretofore conveys a general impression of the effectiveness of various forms of Jewish education, with day school at the top of the list, Sunday Schools at the bottom (even as a negative factor), and other instrumentalities arrayed somewhere between these two poles.

But even concerning day schools, questions remain. As noted, taken in their totality, studies have been inconclusive concerning the magnitude of impact of all forms of Jewish education, with the possible exception of day schools, where the evidence uniformly demonstrates significant long-term effects. Owing to limited sample sizes in the past, as well as the small number of non-Orthodox day school students, previous studies also could not address the specific question concerning the impact on non-Orthodox youngsters in day schools, a phenomenon that has increased in magnitude just over the past twenty years. Thus, whereas previous research could testify to the powerful impact of day schools, given earlier enrollment patterns, these findings could apply almost exclusively to Orthodox students in Orthodox day schools. No major study has, as yet, focused specifically upon non-Orthodox students in day schools, whatever their denomination.

Beyond the differences over the magnitude of impact, analysts have largely left
unexplored questions concerning the nature of impact associated with each instrument of Jewish education. That is, for what aspects of Jewish identity do schools, Israel travel and other forms of Jewish education make a difference? Accordingly, the matter of measuring the “impact of Jewish education on Jewish identity” requires taking into account the multidimensionality and diversity of Jewish identity.

These considerations generate the following research questions that this study will address:

1. What is the magnitude of impact on adult Jewish identity associated with each of the major instruments of childhood and adolescent Jewish education, net of confounding factors such as parental Jewish identity?
2. Which types of Jewish education affect which particular dimensions of adult Jewish identity? Are particular types of education especially effective with respect to certain aspects of being Jewish, or are effects fairly uniform and undifferentiated across the various features of Jewish involvement?

The Data, Sample, and Measures

This analysis draws on the National Jewish Population Survey of 2000–2001 (NJPS), a nationwide study administered by telephone and sponsored by the United Jewish Communities (see http://www.ujc.org/njps for documentation). One advantage of this study is its very large sample size (4,523 Jewish households) that permitted the extraction of a policy-relevant subsample specially designed to shed light on the question concerning the impact of Jewish education in recent years on adult Jewish identity. Another advantage entails the number and range of questions asked in each of the three main conceptual domains (Jewish educational experience, Jewish identity, and Jewish socialization in one’s childhood or teen years).

The analysis was restricted to what may be regarded as a policy-relevant subsample circumscribed in four ways:

- Those raised Jewish, as converts to Judaism are unlikely to have undergone Jewish education in their youth
- Those born in the United States, as the foreign born may well exhibit peculiar relationships between Jewish identity and adult Jewish engagement
- Those under the age of fifty-five (born between 1946 and 1982), owing to the more limited relevance of educational experiences among those born earlier in the century
- Those raised other than Orthodox, in light of the more keen policy interest in those outside of Orthodoxy
The subsample to which these restrictions applied consisted of 2,093 cases (un-weighted) of the 4,523 Jewish households in the full NJPS data file.

Measuring Jewish Education

The survey contains numerous questions on the major Jewish educational experiences, both “formal” (schools) and “informal” (other than schools). The informal experiences included the following:

- “Regular” participation “in an organized Jewish youth group” (generally, such as those associated with synagogues, Zionist youth movements, or B’nai B’rith)
- Jewish summer camp attendance (both day and overnight)
- Israel travel

The measure of Jewish schooling classified respondents in terms of the most intensive form of Jewish schooling they ever received, ranging, in descending order, from day school, to part-time school, to Sunday school. Preliminary analysis demonstrated the importance of years of schooling. Accordingly, respondents in part-time and Sunday school were further divided into those with six or fewer and those with seven or more years of education. (The sample size for day school students was too small to support further division of this group). The Jewish school variable, then, is distributed as follows: day school (5 percent); part-time (or “Hebrew”) school, seven or more years (16 percent); Hebrew school, one to six years (22 percent); Sunday school, seven or more years (9 percent); Sunday school, one to six years (13 percent); and none (36 percent).

With respect to informal Jewish education (youth groups, Israel travel, and overnight Jewish summer camp), the analysis used a summative scale ranging from zero to three experiences. The informal education scale is distributed as follows: three experiences (5 percent); two (15 percent); one (25 percent); and none (55 percent).

Current Jewish Identity

With respect to current levels of Jewish engagement, the survey contains a very rich and broad array of items, which themselves are but a sampling of the wide variety of ways in which Jewish engagement can be, and is, conceived. The analysis addressed the following measures.

In-marriage An in-marriage was defined as the marriage of two Jews (born, converted, or identifying as Jewish). Intermarriage is defined as the marriage of a Jew with a non-Jew. The proportion in-married refers to the proportion of all married individuals who are in-married. In this subsample, 55 percent of married adults are in-married (were the Orthodox-raised respondents included, this measure, and others, would reach a higher level).
OBSERVANCE OF JEWISH RITUALS  This is a five-item scale consisting of the following:

- Attended a Seder last year
- Lit Hanukkah candles most nights last year
- Fasted a whole day on Yom Kippur
- Always or usually light Sabbath candles
- “Keep Kosher in your home”

The score represents the mean percentage (37 percent for the entire subsample) usually undertaking these five practices, as defined.

AFFILIATION  This is a dichotomous measure incorporating the following:

- Membership in a congregation
- Belonging to a Jewish Community Center
- Being a member in any other Jewish organization (e.g., Hadassah)

Those who belonged in any of these ways (37 percent in all) were defined as “affiliated.”

In-marriage and affiliation are dichotomous (two-value) scales, scored as 1 if yes and 0 if no. Observed and belonging were calibrated to range from a score of 0 to 1, representing, respectively, the lowest possible and highest possible values on each measure.

Controls for Demographic Characteristics and Jewish Upbringing

The analysis controlled for three sociodemographic variables — age, gender, and U.S. Census region (Northeast, Midwest, South, and West). After experimenting with various combinations of the many indicators of parental Jewish identity and Jewish upbringing, I settled on five measures that, taken together, serve to predict the adult Jewish identity measures almost as well as far larger groups of variables. The Jewish upbringing measures are as follows:

- During high school, how many of the people you considered to be your closest friends were Jewish?
- Did your family ever have a Christmas tree when you were a child?
- When you were ten or eleven years old, how often did anyone in your household light Sabbath candles on Friday night?
- Thinking about how you were raised, were you raised as Conservative, Orthodox, Reform, Reconstructionist, Just Jewish, or something else? (Those raised Orthodox were excluded from the analysis.)

In addition, I developed a measure of parental in-marriage, where respondents received a score of 1 (for one parent Jewish) if his/her parents had been intermarried, and 2 if they were both Jewish (whether by birth or by choice/conversion).
The rationale here is that these five pieces of information provide a powerful way of classifying individuals in terms of their Jewish upbringing. On one end of the Jewish socialization spectrum are adults who, as youngsters, had two Jewish parents and exclusively Jewish close friends in high school, never had a Christmas tree at home, witnessed Shabbat candles lit in their homes every week, and identified as Conservative Jews. At the other end of the spectrum are those who reported intermarried parents (one non-Jewish), no Jewish friends, Christmas trees in their homes, no Shabbat candles lit, and no denominational identification (associated with the lowest levels of Jewish socialization). Obviously, between these two extremes, respondents range over a spectrum, one that is finely calibrated.

Findings

The Distribution of Jewish Education: Fewer at the Top

As a preliminary matter, I present the distribution of Jewish education among this special, policy-relevant subsample of American Jews, born in the United States during or after 1946, and raised in non-Orthodox homes. I examine both the distributions of Jewish schooling and of the number of informal Jewish educational experiences. The results show that increasing levels of Jewish informal education are associated with fewer such individuals, with the largest single category consisting of those with no informal experiences, as table 2.1 reports.

The More Educated Then, the More Engaged Now

Current levels of Jewish identity measures in adulthood vary consistently, and sometimes strongly, with variations in Jewish education in childhood. Simply put, those reporting more Jewish educational experiences as children also report higher levels of Jewish engagement now, as adults. (Of course, the extent to which these straightforward associations can be attributed to Jewish education, or to parental Jewish identity remains be seen.)

This pattern is clearly illustrated with respect to in-marriage. The more intensive the form and duration of Jewish schooling, the higher the rate of in-marriage. Among those who went to day school (all, to repeat, were raised in non-Orthodox families), 80 percent married Jews, as compared with just 55 percent of those with no Jewish schooling. Moreover, former Hebrew school pupils (twice a week or more) in-married more than Sunday school attendees. Among those who went to Hebrew school or Sunday school, those who attended for more years experienced more in-marriage than those who stopped after six years. In similar fashion, in-marriage is closely linked with the number of informal Jewish educational experiences, rising steadily from just 53 percent among those with no such experiences to fully 80 percent among those with all three (youth group, camp, and Israel visit).
Attending Hebrew schools for more than seven years is associated with adult levels of Jewish engagement that equal and surpass those of individuals who attended day schools. Similarly, those with one informal experience report Jewish identity scores trailing those with two experiences, and, consistently those few who have had three such experiences report even higher Jewish identity scores as adults.

In short, today’s adults who have undergone Jewish educational experiences in their childhood and adolescence report higher levels of current Jewish identity, however measured. The differences support the impression that their current high levels of Jewish identity can be causally attributed to their time spent in schools, youth groups, camps, and Israel. However, before leaping to such a conclusion, one must take into account the considerable differences in the home backgrounds that differentiate participants in several types of Jewish education from their non-participating counterparts.

**More Jewish Socialization Leads to More Jewish Education**

Those with more intensive forms of Jewish education also benefited from other Jewish socialization experiences. In patterns resembling those reported above for
current Jewish identity, measures of Jewish socialization are indeed closely linked with the extensiveness and intensity of Jewish education.

We may take the proportion of friends who were Jewish as a bellwether indicator to illustrate this larger point. Of those with no Jewish schooling, just 37 percent of their high school friends were Jewish as compared with 47 percent of those who went to Hebrew school past seventh grade, and 44 percent of those who ever went to day school. Of those with no informal Jewish education, just 33 percent of their friends were Jewish as compared with 47 percent of those with even one such experience, and 55 percent of those with three. We find similar patterns with respect to Shabbat candles at age ten and the absence of a Christmas tree at age ten.

These findings imply that Jewish schools and informal experiences channel the Jewish population into different venues according to the levels of Jewish commitment experienced in the home. Thus, day school students benefit Jewishly from their own Jewish cultural resources and from being brought into contact with other students, members, campers, and travelers who share their higher-than-average

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Schooling</th>
<th>In-marriage (percentage)</th>
<th>Observance (percentage)</th>
<th>Affiliated (percentage)</th>
<th>Belonging (percentage)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Day school</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2+ times-per-week school, 7+ years</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2+ times-per-week school, 1–6 years</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sunday school, 7+ years</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sunday school, 1–6 years</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Number of teen experiences 

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of teen experiences</th>
<th>In-marriage (percentage)</th>
<th>Observance (percentage)</th>
<th>Affiliated (percentage)</th>
<th>Belonging (percentage)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Total number of informal Jewish educational experiences consists of overnight Jewish camp, Jewish youth group, and visiting Israel.

*Observance:* composite of seder, lighting Hanukkah candles, fasting on Yom Kippur, keeping kosher in some way at home, and usually lighting Shabbat candles; *affiliated:* membership in synagogue, JCC, and/or another Jewish organization; *belonging:* four items on feeling very positive about being Jewish, having a clear sense of what it means to be a Jew, belonging to the Jewish people, and being Jewish is very important.

levels of Jewish socialization. The friendship ties that grow out of such clustering reinforce the lessons that Jewish educators seek to convey. Conversely, those in less intensive schools and those who fail to participate in informal Jewish education maintain more friendships with non-Jews and with Jews who are less engaged in conventional Jewish life.

In sum, those who participate in more intensive forms of Jewish education bring with them higher levels of familiarity with and commitment to things Jewish. These educational experiences build on a cultural predisposition toward Jewish engagement among the participants, one that derives from the home and community, and

**Figure 2.1** Measures of Adult Jewish Engagement by Jewish Educational Experiences in Childhood

from mutually reinforcing Jewish educational experiences. The impact of Jewish education is effected not exclusively through the educational staff and curriculum but also by way of social networks among the participants and the communities that surround them.

**Jewish Educational Experiences: The More, the More**

The untangling of educational impact is further complicated by what may be called the “redundancy” of Jewish educational experiences. People with more intensive and extensive Jewish education in one area stand a good chance of undergoing other forms of Jewish education. Participation in youth groups, camps, and Israel trips generally increases with intensity of Jewish schooling. Thus, of those with no Jewish schooling, just 31 percent could report any informal Jewish education experience. The figure rises almost steadily with intensive Jewish schooling: Sunday
school, up to six years (46 percent); Sunday school for seven or more years (56 percent); Hebrew school, up to six years (59 percent); Hebrew school for seven or more years (76 percent) and day school (71 percent). These results point not only to the close relationship between formal and informal Jewish education, but also to the relative intensity of Hebrew school attendance in the high school years. Such ex-students report even higher levels of informal experiences than their day school counterparts.

In like fashion, participation in the three informal experiences are themselves closely related statistically. Youth group members were about three times more likely than nonmembers to attend a Jewish camp (54 percent versus 20 percent), and to visit Israel (28 percent versus 9 percent). Similarly, former Jewish campers were more than three times as likely to report having been to Israel in their adolescent and young adult years (28 percent for campers, versus 8 percent for noncampers).

The frequent overlap of Jewish educational experiences means that such experiences frequently reinforce one another. From the research perspective, the empirical overlap underscores the necessity of controlling for confounding variables if one is to obtain “pure” estimates of the net effects of each form of Jewish education. In other words, relying on simple descriptive data comparing former participants with

### Table 2.3

**Measures of Jewish Socialization in Childhood Years by Schooling Alternatives and Informal Teen Jewish Educational Experiences**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measures of Jewish socialization</th>
<th>Percentage of high school friends who were Jewish (percentage)</th>
<th>Shabbat candles usually lit, age 10 (percentage)</th>
<th>No Christmas tree, age 10 (percentage)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Schooling</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Day school</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2+ times-per-week school, 7+ years</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2+ time-per-week school, 1–6 years</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sunday school, 7+ years</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sunday school, 1–6 years</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Number of teen experiences</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(camp, youth group, Israel)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

their opposite number will only serve to yield significantly exaggerated impressionistic evidence of the impact of particular forms of Jewish education. Rather, owing to the clustering of educational participation, each particular educational experience also carries with it the likelihood that other experiences are also contributing to enhanced Jewish identity on the part of the students or participants.

Understanding the Analysis

The critical part of the analysis below relies on “multiple classification analysis” (MCA). MCA is a regression-based procedure that provides estimates of the

![Graphs showing measures of Jewish Socialization in Childhood Years by Schooling Alternatives]

**Figure 2.3** Measures of Jewish Socialization in Childhood Years by Schooling Alternatives

impact of each form of Jewish education, while controlling for other educational experiences simultaneously, as well as for demographic and background variables. The entries in the MCA tables and figures that follow report the “net impact” of attending a particular type of school as compared with those who experienced no Jewish schooling. That is, the analysis estimates the long-term contribution of each type of school to enhancing Jewish identity over and above anticipated outcomes for those with no schooling. For the impact of the three types of informal Jewish educational instruments, the entries report the impact of undergoing one, two, or three of the experience as contrasted with those who reported no such experience in their adolescent years.

To provide a more accessible explanation of this procedure, take the seemingly
Jewish Informal Educational Experiences by Jewish Schooling

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of informal experiences</th>
<th>None</th>
<th>One</th>
<th>Two</th>
<th>Three</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Day school</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2+ times-per-week school, 7+ years</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2+ time-per-week school, 1–6 years</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sunday school, 7+ years</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sunday school, 1–6 years</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Figure 2.5  Jewish Informal Educational Experiences in Teen Years by Jewish Schooling Experiences

straightforward question: to what extent do day schools increase the chances of in-marriage (or reduce the chances of intermarriage)? MCA compares those who went to day school with those who had no Jewish schooling at all. Any measure of true effect needs to take into account the several Jewish identity-enhancing advantages that day schoolers typically enjoy relative to those with no schooling. Like other regression-based procedures, MCA, in effect, removes these advantages and creates a statistically level playing field, in which day school students and no-school students are set equal in terms of all these possibly confounding variables. The gap in in-marriage between these two populations is then assessed, deriving the “net impact” of day schools, that is, net of all other factors. By similar logic, the net impact of other types of schools may be assessed, and of the number of informal Jewish educational experiences, on intermarriage and other measures of Jewish engagement.

_In-marriage: The Impact of Day Schools and Many Informal Experiences_

Given the central concern with intermarriage, as well as its undeniable impact on other forms of Jewish engagement, we begin with a focused examination of its etiology. Table 2.5 reports that, factoring out parents’ Jewish engagement and other forms of Jewish education, day school attendance alone raises the chances of marrying a Jew by 14 percentage points, as compared with those who never attended a Jewish school. All other things being equal (which they never are) someone who attended a day school will marry a Jew 14 percentage points more often (on a scale from 0 to 100, where 100 = absolutely likely to marry a Jew) than is someone who had no Jewish schooling as a youngster.

In contrast, attendance at Hebrew school (twice or more per week), whether for a few or many years, exerts no such impact. In even sharper contrast, Sunday school attendance actually lowers the chance of marrying a Jew by 8 to 9 percentage points. In other words, from the point of view of encouraging in-marriage, the contrast between day school and Sunday school can amount to as much as 23 percentage points.

We also find a noticeable effect of informal Jewish education on the chances of marrying a Jew. Two such experiences (say, camp and youth group, or Israel visit and camp) improves the odds of marrying a Jew by 7 percentage points. The small group who actually experienced all three types of Jewish informal educational experiences reported a net gain in in-marriage of 12 percentage points. Thus, of all the various Jewish educational alternatives, just two seem to substantially raise the chances of in-marriage: day school enrollment and significant participation in informal Jewish education in the teen years. Hebrew school attendance in the teen years also operates to increase in-marriage, but does so by way of leading to youth group, camps, and Israel travel experiences.
Impact of Jewish Education on Observance, Affiliation, and Belonging

As might be expected, day school exerts positive effects on all three other measures of Jewish engagement, but in none do we see effects as strong as those for in-marriage, where the net positive effect of day school amounts to 1.4 percentage points. Hebrew school exerts small to moderate effects. It increases the chances that adults will affiliate with a Jewish institution. Hebrew school attendance in the teen years leads to a more positive Jewish engagement imprint than stopping with bar/bat mitzvah.

The impact of Sunday school, though even smaller, is still positive. Sunday school probably operates much like Hebrew school for those who do in fact marry Jews. In other words, among the in-married population, those with any form of Jewish schooling are somewhat more Jewishly engaged than those with no schooling.
FIGURE 2.6 Impact of Jewish School and Informal Jewish Educational Teen Experiences on In-marriage

FIGURE 2.7 Impact of Jewish School and Informal Jewish Educational Teen Experiences on Observance
FIGURE 2.8 Impact of Jewish School and Informal Jewish Educational Teen Experiences on Affiliation


FIGURE 2.9 Impact of Jewish School and Informal Jewish Educational Teen Experiences on Belonging

The impact of youth groups, camping, and Israel visits on observance, affiliation, and sense of Jewish belonging is seemingly more powerful than that exerted by schools. Generally, just one such experiences seems more “productive” than going to Hebrew school for up to six years. Two such experiences seems to equal or surpass day school education with respect to Jewish engagement, outside of the matter of in-marriage. The impact of three experiences (youth group plus camp plus Israel travel) substantially outweighs that of day school alone.

Conclusions

Jewish education matters. Even more precisely, certain forms of Jewish education matter more than others for affecting certain types of outcomes.

To elaborate, of any single instrument of Jewish education, day schools exert the most powerful effects on adult Jewish identity, and, as this analysis has established, those effects are associated not only with Orthodox day schools as confirmed in previous studies, but with (putatively) non-Orthodox day schools as well (or at least, day schools of any variety that serve non-Orthodox children).

Also noteworthy is the impact of attending twice-a-week Hebrew school into the high school years. Its effect on affiliation is especially pronounced. Part-time (but more than once-a-week) schools do yield Jewish identity benefits. In several earlier studies, researchers found that duration of attendance was associated with more powerful effects. Youngsters who attended for several years did emerge as more Jewishly identified adults, while most part-time students showed minimal effects of schooling on adult Jewish identity.

Perhaps most encouraging is the “good news” about the strong impact of youth groups, camps, and Israel trips, especially in combination. These experiences seem more “Jewishly productive” in the adult years than do Jewish schools other than day schools. Moreover, the combination of all three generally exerts a more positive impact on measures of Jewish engagement than does attending day schools for five to eight years.

Combining these findings provides evidence that part-time schools, when extending to the high school years and combined with informal Jewish education, can produce fairly significant effects many years hence. The upshot of this line of information is that policymakers ought not to dismiss the possibility that part-time school youngsters can indeed embark on a path of considerable Jewish growth, providing their schooling is augmented by informal Jewish educational alternatives.

At the same time, the absence of any noticeable positive impact of Sunday school education on Jewish identity outcomes in adulthood should be noted. In fact, Sunday school works to lower the rate of in-marriage. One can speculate (and only speculate) on the reasons for this relationship (or lack thereof). Sunday schools may be limited simply by the number of hours their students spend in class over the years. In addition, their effectiveness may be limited by virtue of the type of fami-
lies they attract: those with relatively low rates of Jewish involvement even when compared with those sending their children to part-time schools. But more pointedly, and maybe more powerfully, Sunday schools serve the children of interfaith families far more than other institutions. Hence, Sunday schools, in effect, teach the acceptability of intermarriage, perhaps making their youngsters more prone to marry non-Jews than were they never to have been exposed in a specifically Jewish setting to the presence of so many children of intermarried parents.

Several considerations serve to understate the impact of Jewish education in this analysis. This study’s classification of Jewish educational experience necessarily fails to incorporate exact years of participation, nor any finely tuned measures of quality or intensity. Any increase in accuracy, precision, or sophistication in measuring Jewish education can only serve to further enhance estimates of its impact on Jewish identity outcomes.

These findings, then, testify to the power of Jewish education to shape adults’ Jewish identity and the education of their children. They also testify to the limits of some forms of Jewish education, as well as to the special areas where they exert influence and where they do not.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I thank Shaul Kelner for his helpful comments on an earlier version of this paper.

REFERENCES


II Jewish Education as a Family Matter
Who Is Being Taught?

Early Childhood Education’s Adult-Centered Approach

SHAUL KELNER

Whom does Jewish early childhood education (ECE) educate? Although one might expect the answer simply to be “Jewish children,” consider that a recent national study of Jewish ECE programs found that 44 percent of the preschoolers in Jewish Community Center (JCC) programs were not Jewish, as were 16 percent of those in Reform synagogue preschools and 10 percent in Conservative synagogue programs (Vogelstein and Kaplan 2002: 4). Perhaps better to broaden the answer, and reply “young children.” That too, however, would be too narrow a response. If we are to judge from recent research on the educational impact of Jewish ECE, it would appear that parents, as much as children, are the intended beneficiaries of the Jewish education provided in the preschools.

Between 2002 and 2004, three research reports were released by the Jewish Early Childhood Education Partnership (JECEP) and its successor department at the Coalition for the Advancement of Jewish Education (CAJE)—advocacy organizations working to promote Jewish ECE. The first, conducted by JECEP’s director Ilene Vogelstein, analyzed a survey of 152 preschool directors who were asked about student enrollment, program characteristics, and personnel (Vogelstein and Kaplan 2002). The second described a three-community study in which ninety families were interviewed about their experiences with the Jewish preschools where their children were enrolled (Beck 2002). The third analyzed educational materials, school visits, expert testimony, and focus groups with teachers and parents...
in order to identify outcomes that should be expected of “excellent” Jewish ECE programs (Krug et al. 2004).

A hallmark of the JECEP/CAJE research, consonant with earlier Jewish preschool impact studies (see Feldman 1992, for a review of this literature), was its de-emphasis of direct educational effects on children in favor of a focus on schooling’s ancillary impact on parents and families. This emerged both in the framing of the research, as well as in its content. Explaining the rationale for the Beck (2002) study, Vogelstein speaks not of children, but of families:

The 1990 National Jewish Population Study ushered in an era of greater awareness and concern about transmitting Jewish culture and developing Jewish identity. As the Jewish leadership searched for ways to renew and revitalize the Jewish community, proponents of Jewish early childhood education argued that Jewish preschools have a powerful and positive influence on families by strengthening families’ Jewish affiliations and enhancing their Jewish identities. In addition, they argued that preschools serve as a key gateway into the Jewish community, synagogue membership, and continued Jewish education. Unfortunately, there was no research [sic] to validate these arguments. . . . This lack of documentation was the catalyst for this study.” (Vogelstein 2002, emphasis added)

In fact, some research did exist. If anything, the few impact studies that had been conducted focused on parents rather than preschoolers (see Pinkenson 1987; Ravid and Ginsburg 1988; Reback 1984). Compared with this earlier work, Krug et al.’s (2004) research—not an impact study, but an effort to identify ideal outcomes—departed from the norm by raising explicitly child-focused outcomes such as faith-development and moral development. Still, no children were actually studied. They confined their discussion to a review of general psychological research on the topics. By contrast, Beck’s (2002) work fell squarely within the prevailing approach to Jewish ECE impact studies. Like her predecessors, she studied adults rather than preschoolers, and sought evidence of family-level outcomes.

Since the mid-1980s, a small body of quantitative and qualitative research has suggested that the enrollment of children in Jewish preschools both increases parents’ performance of home-based Jewish Sabbath and holiday rituals, and influences the meanings that parents associate with these practices (Beck 2002; Krug et al. 2004; see Feldman 1992 for a review of literature from the 1980s). As to the first claim, a majority of the interviewees in Beck’s study responded affirmatively when asked whether they were “doing anything different regarding their Jewish practice or Jewish lifestyle as a result of [their] preschool experience” (2002: 20). Elaborating on their answers, most referred to Sabbath eve home rituals. Some also mentioned enhanced feelings of communal belonging, greater interest in Jewish education for their children or themselves, and a heightened consciousness of positive feelings about being Jewish (2002). Similar effects were noted by Feldman a decade earlier (1992). As for preschool’s influence on the meanings of these home rituals to the families engaging in them, qualitative evidence from Krug et al.
Who Is Being Taught?

Who Is Being Taught?

Who Is Being Taught?

Who Is Being Taught?

Who Is Being Taught?

Who Is Being Taught?

Who Is Being Taught?

Who Is Being Taught?

Who Is Being Taught?

Who Is Being Taught?

Who Is Being Taught?

Who Is Being Taught?

Who Is Being Taught?

Who Is Being Taught?

Who Is Being Taught?

Who Is Being Taught?

Who Is Being Taught?

Who Is Being Taught?

Who Is Being Taught?

Who Is Being Taught?

Who Is Being Taught?

Who Is Being Taught?

Who Is Being Taught?

Who Is Being Taught?

Who Is Being Taught?

Who Is Being Taught?

Who Is Being Taught?

Who Is Being Taught?

Who Is Being Taught?

Who Is Being Taught?

Who Is Being Taught?

Who Is Being Taught?

Who Is Being Taught?

Who Is Being Taught?

Who Is Being Taught?

Who Is Being Taught?

Who Is Being Taught?

Who Is Being Taught?

Who Is Being Taught?

Who Is Being Taught?

Who Is Being Taught?

Who Is Being Taught?

Who Is Being Taught?

Who Is Being Taught?

Who Is Being Taught?

Who Is Being Taught?

Who Is Being Taught?

Who Is Being Taught?

Who Is Being Taught?

Who Is Being Taught?

Who Is Being Taught?

Who Is Being Taught?

Who Is Being Taught?

Who Is Being Taught?

Who Is Being Taught?

Who Is Being Taught?

Who Is Being Taught?

Who Is Being Taught?

Who Is Being Taught?

Who Is Being Taught?

Who Is Being Taught?

Who Is Being Taught?

Who Is Being Taught?

Who Is Being Taught?

Who Is Being Taught?

Who Is Being Taught?

Who Is Being Taught?

Who Is Being Taught?

Who Is Being Taught?

Who Is Being Taught?

Who Is Being Taught?

Who Is Being Taught?

Who Is Being Taught?

Who Is Being Taught?

Who Is Being Taught?

Who Is Being Taught?

Who Is Being Taught?

Who Is Being Taught?

Who Is Being Taught?

Who Is Being Taught?

Who Is Being Taught?

Who Is Being Taught?

Who Is Being Taught?

Who Is Being Taught?

Who Is Being Taught?

Who Is Being Taught?

Who Is Being Taught?

Who Is Being Taught?

Who Is Being Taught?

Who Is Being Taught?

Who Is Being Taught?

Who Is Being Taught?

Who Is Being Taught?

Who Is Being Taught?

Who Is Being Taught?

Who Is Being Taught?

Who Is Being Taught?

Who Is Being Taught?

Who Is Being Taught?

Who Is Being Taught?

Who Is Being Taught?

Who Is Being Taught?

Who Is Being Taught?

Who Is Being Taught?

Who Is Being Taught?

Who Is Being Taught?

Who Is Being Taught?

Who Is Being Taught?

Who Is Being Taught?

Who Is Being Taught?

Who Is Being Taught?

Who Is Being Taught?

Who Is Being Taught?

Who Is Being Taught?

Who Is Being Taught?

Who Is Being Taught?

Who Is Being Taught?

Who Is Being Taught?

Who Is Being Taught?

Who Is Being Taught?

Who Is Being Taught?

Who Is Being Taught?

Who Is Being Taught?

Who Is Being Taught?

Who Is Being Taught?

Who Is Being Taught?

Who Is Being Taught?

Who Is Being Taught?

Who Is Being Taught?

Who Is Being Taught?

Who Is Being Taught?

Who Is Being Taught?

Who Is Being Taught?

Who Is Being Taught?

Who Is Being Taught?

Who Is Being Taught?

Who Is Being Taught?

Who Is Being Taught?

Who Is Being Taught?

Who Is Being Taught?

Who Is Being Taught?

Who Is Being Taught?

Who Is Being Taught?

Who Is Being Taught?

Who Is Being Taught?

Who Is Being Taught?

Who Is Being Taught?

Who Is Being Taught?

Who Is Being Taught?

Who Is Being Taught?

Who Is Being Taught?

Who Is Being Taught?

Who Is Being Taught?

Who Is Being Taught?

Who Is Being Taught?

Who Is Being Taught?

Who Is Being Taught?
than on preschoolers, has resulted from efforts to redefine ECE’s place in the Jewish community.

For decades, early childhood education occupied a marginal position vis-à-vis the broader enterprise of Jewish education. In the community centers and synagogues that have housed Jewish preschools and day-care centers, these ECE programs have often been valued less for their educational mission than for the income they generate, which has often been diverted to support other areas of the sponsoring institutions (interview, Mark I. Rosen, May 26, 2005; cf. Holtz 1996; Wall 1994). Their ability to sustain a positive revenue flow resulted largely from their success in meeting a parental demand for child care. For years, federations expected ECE programs to be “financially self-sustaining” (Holtz 1996: 6), and typically excluded them from allocations to local Jewish educational institutions (Vogelstein and Kaplan 2002: ii). Even at the turn of the millennium, ECE’s continued marginality was evidenced by the fact that a comprehensive 110-page review of American Jewish education could successfully cover the major developments in Jewish ECE in a scant four paragraphs (Wertheimer 1999: 74–75).

A redefinition of ECE’s position in the Jewish community would require community stakeholders to join educators in seeing the educational mission, rather than the child-care or income-producing mission, as paramount. Efforts to this effect gathered steam in the 1980s. The term “Jewish early childhood education” came into use around this time—a linguistic innovation intended to replace the older, less education-oriented terms preschool and day care (Vogelstein and Kaplan 2002: i). Still, asserting that ECE should be valued for its educational mission does not sufficiently specify what that educational mission is, particularly in light of the fact that it can be conceived of in both general and Jewish terms.

Broader trends in Jewish communal discourse informed thinking on these issues. The final decade of the twentieth century opened with the release a new National Jewish Population Survey. Communal reaction was swift and sharp, interpreting the findings to portray American Jewry of the 1990s as a community in the midst of a “continuity crisis.” Observing that social-structural boundaries such as ethnic neighborhoods, social discrimination, and endogamous marriages could no longer be relied on to perpetuate Jewish group distinctiveness, communal leaders came to see the primary basis for ethnic persistence as resting in the free choice of each individual to associate with the group (see Alba 1990; Gans 1979; Waters 1990). Captured in the slogan “All Jews are Jews-by-choice,” communal discourse came to emphasize personal identity as the lynchpin to securing the American Jewish future. The community’s educational infrastructure was charged with the critical task of ensuring Jewish survival by helping Jews “choose Jewish.”

What is the nature of Jewish choice, though? And how does it relate to preschool-age children? Research on Jewish identity has shown that choice is not a onetime affair. It occurs continually throughout the life course (Cohen and Eisen 2000; Horowitz 2000). As a result, Jewish educators have not only shown interest in conditioning the outcomes of choice, but have asserted an ideal vision of Jewish living in which the self-conscious process of choosing becomes an ongoing lifelong
commitment. Kirshenblatt-Gimblett identifies this notion—called “the self as a reflexive project”—as a decidedly untraditional mode of Jewish existence. As untraditional as it may be, however, it has become a guiding principle in post-1990 American Jewish education (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 2002: 321–22; see also Grant et al. 2004).

This poses a dilemma for those seeking to move ECE out from Jewish education’s periphery. What relevance does “the self as a reflexive project” have for preschoolers with neither the cognitive nor emotional wherewithal, nor the unfettered freedom to engage in sustained acts of conscious self-invention? How do the Jewish choices that four-year-olds make bear on the Jewish future? There is a striking mismatch between the needs and capabilities of preschoolers, on one hand, and, on the other, the conception of Jewish continuity or renaissance that guides communal policy—a conception that values individual identity as a means to a collective end, and that seeks to root communal existence in the ethic of constant, conscious personal choice.

ECE’s adult-oriented research agenda is one attempt to overcome the difference. When a coalition of private foundations established the JECEP in 2001 to advocate for communal investment in preschools, its campaign rooted ECE’s mission in the post-1990 ethic of education-for-continuity. JECEP’s materials spoke less of children’s cognitive and emotional development than of ECE’s potential to strengthen Jewish life by “shap[ing] the Jewish identity of young children and their families,” serving as “a key gateway into the Jewish community,” and “creat[ing] permanent connections to Judaism” (Vogelstein 2002). The preschoolers may not have been able to reflect critically on how they wanted to shape their lives as Jews, but their parents certainly could. JECEP adapted ECE to the community’s functionalist conception of education⁶ by adopting a more holistic vision of what ECE could be—an educational experience that serves not only the child, but the entire family.⁷

This vision incorporates parents in three ways: First, because they are agents of Jewish socialization, parents are seen as pathways by which Jewish preschools exert indirect effects on their students. Second, they are also understood to be indirect recipients of ECE, subject to the influence of their enrolled children. In Holtz’s words, “the family can influence children . . . [and] children can influence the family” (1996: 10, emphasis in original). Finally, through adult education programs and other activities, adult family members are treated in their own right as potential targets of ECE-based Jewish engagement interventions, irrespective of their parental role vis-à-vis children. The recent research on ECE’s parental effects has helped convey this new conception of ECE’s role, as much through the questions it has chosen to ask as by the answers it has provided.

Research Questions

The new claims for ECE have done more than simply cobble together a hodgepodge of hypotheses and findings about the preschools’ effects on Jewish parents. Rather they have synthesized fragmentary information as part of a comprehensive attempt
to reframe ECE as a form of Jewish family education and adult Jewish engagement. In the era before this reframing was articulated, research brought to light the hidden and unacknowledged aspects of Jewish preschools by investigating unintended consequences: ECE, conceived as a quasi-educational program for young children, was observed to be having unexpected effects on certain behaviors of their parents. Some of these effects were well-documented, others less so. Some remained only reasonable hypotheses, supported not by research but by expert testimony and anecdotal evidence. As they became conscious of the existence of parental effects, advocates began arguing for systematic efforts to enhance them, expand their reach, and deepen their impact. Researchers' findings and advocates' claims filtered simultaneously into Jewish communal discourse, blurring the distinction between the two.

With ECE's potential to affect parental Jewish engagement now an acknowledged ideal for some, and with the precise nature of these effects unclear owing to the blurring of the actual and the possible, it is important that research attempt to reduce the uncertainties generated by this situation. Although small-scale qualitative and quantitative research efforts have roughly indicated the existence or nonexistence of certain types of ECE effects on parents, little research has demonstrated the prevalence of different types of effects within representative samples of parent groups, the distribution of the various effects across subpopulations, or the relationship of the various types of effects with one another.

These issues speak to three broad questions: First, to what extent is the reframing of ECE as family education something whose effects are already being realized in practice, or something whose promise remains greater in potential than in actuality? Do parents themselves testify to an impact, or do they deny that they are in any way changed by virtue of having their children in ECE programs? Second, when ECE is suggested as a means of engaging and educating families, what are the various dimensions of educational impact, and do they typically occur as a coherent package of effects, such that impact in one area is related to impact in another? Third, to what extent does ECE's family educational potential rest on an already Jewishly engaged group of parents, amenable to the prospect of preschool intervention in their family life? In other words, if the ECE experience influences the Jewish engagement of the parents, is that influence limited to the parents who are most amenable to this sort of influence, or does the ECE experience also reach those who are initially less engaged in things Jewish?

Data for this study come from a five-community survey of Jewish Community Center members with Jewish children ages birth to eighteen years in the household. Details on the survey method, response rates and the constraints on interpretation imposed by the nature of the data set are provided in a methodological appendix at the end of this chapter. The heart of this analysis is based on six survey questions asked of the respondents regarding the impact of Jewish ECE on the parents:

To what extent does/did the experience of having your child in a Jewish preschool

... make you feel like part of a community?
Who Is Being Taught?

...enrich the Jewish environment in your own home?
...teach you things you did not know about Judaism?
...lead you to pursue adult Jewish education for yourself?
...lead to close friendships with other parents in the school?
...lead you to consider enrolling your child in a Jewish day school?

Respondents were prompted to answer “not at all,” “a little,” “somewhat,” or “very much.”

Short of observing parents over time or asking them their views before and after experiencing the exposure to ECE, we must rely on these retrospective, introspective, and subjective questions, with all the attendant problems of reliability. Although all survey questions are subject to misinterpretation by interviewer, respondent, or analyst, questions that ask whether a certain experience in the past exerted a certain influence are necessarily among the most demanding, complex, and unreliable. Strictly speaking, these questions measure whether the respondents attribute impact to the ECE experience. The objective reality may well be different, but we have no way of knowing the extent of correspondence between the “real world” and the testimony of those who experienced it.

Findings

An Impact on Building Community, But Little on Jewish Learning

The effects of ECE on parents vary substantially depending on the nature of the effect in question. Figure 3.1 presents the frequency distributions for each of the six questions about parental outcomes. Parents were much more likely to acknowledge ECE’s influence in building community than in convincing them to see themselves as recipients of Jewish education. Still, in terms of their own testimony, even the most widely acknowledged effects did not reach most of the parents.⁸ About half of the respondents said that the experience of having their child in a Jewish preschool made them feel very much a part of a community (49 percent). Slightly less (42 percent) said that it led to close friendships with other parents. Approximately one-third said that it very much enriched the Jewish environment in their homes. About one-quarter said it led them to consider enrolling their child in Jewish day school. The proportions reporting that the preschool parental experience taught them things they did not know about Judaism and led them to enroll in adult Jewish education—two indicators of ECE’s ability to convince parents to see themselves as beneficiaries and appropriate objects of Jewish education—were even lower still (12 percent and 11 percent, respectively).

These results seem to concur with the available evidence, as impressionistic as it may be. To date, ECE’s efforts to build community among parents of preschoolers have met with far greater success than any of its attempts to engage parents as Jewish learners. Most parents continue to see early childhood education as just
what the name states—early childhood education, and not family education. This may partially account for the notable finding that ECE is over twice as likely to lead parents to consider enrolling their children in Jewish day school as it is to lead them to enroll themselves in adult Jewish education programs.⁹

Dimensions of Impact: Community-Building, Adult Learning, and Day Schools

Are these six selective indicators of impact a single package, such that the presence of one sort of outcome implies the presence of others? If so, then ECE practitioners would be confronted with a rather straightforward task: begin by building Jewish community attachments among the parents (the most widely acknowledged impact), in the expectation that other positive outcomes are likely to follow. Alternatively, the lack of structure, or the absence of a package, suggests a far more complex task, with attention needed to each of the discrete outcomes. Accordingly, I sought to determine, by way of factor analysis (a statistical technique that examines clustering among several items) whether ECE’s family educational impact occurs as a single package made up of the six measured effects, or whether the effects break down into different dimensions that do not necessarily occur with one another. The analysis revealed the inappropriateness of applying a one-factor model to the data.¹⁰ There is no evidence to support the hypothesis that ECE’s diverse effects operate as a coherent package.

![Graph showing the extent of having a child in a Jewish preschool](image-url)
To the extent that ECE has effects on parental Jewish engagement, these effects operate more or less independently of one another. But how much so? To what degree do the separate effects cluster together to represent broader categories of impact? To what extent are these broader categories of impact related or unrelated? Three dimensions of impact emerged. The first consisted of the single question on ECE’s role in prompting parents to consider Jewish day schools. It stood alone. There were no other valid factor models that included this variable along with the other five.

Treating day school enrollment as an effect unto itself, I proceeded to analyze the relationships between the remaining five impact variables (see fig 3.2). This enables us to identify two other ways in which Jewish ECE can influence parents. First, it can build Jewish community; second, it can encourage parents to view themselves, and not only their children, as appropriate beneficiaries of Jewish educational intervention.

With respect to the community-building dimension, all respondents who had enrolled children in Jewish ECE programs were asked about the extent to which they had become close friends with parents of other children in the school, and about whether they had experienced feelings of community as a result of their

---

**Figure 3.2** Two-Factor Model of ECE Impact
Chi-square = 2.26, d.f. = 3, P-value = 0.51927, RMSEA = 0.000.
experiences there. Each of these questions pointed to certain aspects of the underlying issue of ECE’s role in community-building.

The other dimension relates to ECE’s ability to shape parents’ views of themselves as beneficiaries and appropriate objects of Jewish education. This dimension is reflected in answers to the questions that asked whether sending children to Jewish preschool led parents to pursue adult Jewish education for themselves, or helped them to learn things about Judaism that they did not already know. Statistically, the evidence pointing to the existence of this second type of ECE effect is not as strong as that demonstrating the existence of the community-building effect.12

The foregoing accounts for five of the six questions I asked in the survey. The remaining question seems to “belong” or tap into both community-building and seeing oneself as a Jewish learner (or “educational openness,” as I have termed it.) This question asks about ECE’s effect in enriching the Jewish environment of the home. “Enrichment” is a complex matter. It appears to be somewhat more closely tied to parents’ seeing themselves as Jewish learners than feeling part of the preschool community. Still, the overall weakness of its relationship with both of these factors suggests there is much about Jewish enrichment that notions of educational openness and community-building simply do not capture. It is a matter that warrants deeper exploration, for it hints at the possibility of additional types of ECE effects unmeasured by the current data set.13 Although the two dimensions we identified are conceptually separate and distinct, they are not entirely independent of one another. Community-building and educational-openness show a moderate .48 correlation.14 Those who acknowledged effects in one area were somewhat more likely to identify outcomes in the other area as well.

To summarize, we identified three ways in which Jewish ECE may influence the parents:

1. It may strengthen their ties to other Jews and Jewish institutions.
2. It may open them to seeking Jewish educational growth for themselves.
3. It may provoke them to more seriously consider day school education for their children.

Although all three outcomes are high on the agenda of many advocates of Jewish ECE, the analysis here suggests that for the parents these are discrete events. This is a case where one “mitzvah” does not necessarily, or generally, lead to another. Building Jewish community among the parents is no guarantee that they will become Jewish learners, or think seriously about day school for their children. And even turning them into Jewish learners may not often lead them to consider enrolling their youngsters in Jewish day schools.

Are the Jewishly “Willing and Able” More Affected by Their Children’s ECE?

Whatever may be the overall magnitude and nature of the effects of ECE on parents, the question remains as to who, generally, is more affected and who less so.
Obviously, one important variation lies with the institutions themselves. Some school administrators or classroom teachers must be more active or effective than others in engaging parents in Jewish enrichment interventions. In fact, recognizing this variation, several local and national interventions have sought to enhance the commitment and ability of ECE directors and teachers to influence their children’s parents. Insofar as directors and teachers vary in their commitment and ability to educate Jewish parents, we would expect to see outcomes distributed differently across schools, or across classrooms within a school, with parents whose children are in certain schools more apt to be affected than are those who happen to attend others where the education of the parents is simply a lower priority.

Beyond variations across schools and classrooms, we may consider differences in the inclinations of the parents themselves. Certainly, they differ in their ability to experience an educational effect of their children’s school, as well as in their willingness to do so. Some are, in a sense, willing and able, some able but not willing, some willing but not able, and still others neither willing nor able.

Parents’ ability to be influenced by Jewish educators depends in part on their Jewish cultural or social capital. Those who have higher levels of Jewish literacy and Jewish institutional engagement may be better able to capitalize on the opportunities for Jewish community-building and lifelong learning that some preschools offer. By contrast, parental willingness is more a matter of human agency rather than human capital. Here, we would expect effects to concentrate among those who were looking to use the preschools as a means of enhancing their own Jewish lives, and to be notably absent among those who were not.

In actuality, it is likely that all three elements—the intentions of the school, the ability of the parents, and the willingness of the parents—play a role in determining which parents’ Jewish lives are enriched by virtue of their children’s enrolling in ECE programs. The survey we conducted, however, does not allow us to assess the impact of institutional (school) effects, as no institutional-level information was gathered. It is possible, however, to assess the role of Jewish cultural capital (ability) and parental desires (willingness) in shaping ECE outcomes.

Jewish cultural capital can be measured by the following indicators of childhood Jewish upbringing (the percentages answering “yes” are shown in parentheses):

- In childhood, someone at home regularly lit Sabbath candles (59 percent)
- Participated in a Jewish day camp (51 percent)
- Participated in a Jewish overnight camp (53 percent)
- Participated in a Jewish youth group (62 percent)
- Half or more of their high school friends were Jewish (77 percent)
- Participated in an Israel experience program (22 percent)
- Participated in a college Hillel (30 percent)

As for parental desires for an ECE-based family educational experience, they were measured by a single item. This question was phrased in hypothetical terms in order to allow it to apply to the broadest number of respondents—those with preschool-age children and those with older children; those who had enrolled children
in Jewish preschools, those who had not, and those who yet might. The question reads as follows: “Some Jewish preschools try to enrich the Jewish environment in their children’s homes. If you were thinking about sending your child to a Jewish preschool, how important would it be to you that the school try to enrich the Jewish environment in your own home? Please answer from 1 to 5—1 being ‘Not at all important,’ and 5 being ‘Extremely important.’” For the purposes of analysis, this variable was dichotomized to contrast the 56 percent who answered in the top two response categories (4 and 5) with the remaining 44 percent.

The key outcome—the extent to which the Jewish home environment was enriched by having a child in Jewish ECE—was also measured by a single question. Not coincidentally, its wording (“To what extent does/did the experience of having your child in a Jewish preschool enrich the Jewish environment in your own home?”) was designed to parallel the comparable question about desires. This dependent variable was dichotomized to contrast the 32 percent who responded “very much” with the remaining 68 percent who responded “not at all,” “a little,” or “somewhat.”

A binary logistic regression was used to assess the relative impact of the cultural capital (or ability) and parental desire (or willingness) variables on ECE’s reported

**Table 3.1**

| Logistic Regression Coefficients for ECE Enrichment of Jewish Home Environment |
|---------------------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-----------|
|                                | Model 1     | Model 2     | Model 3     |
|                                | B           | S.E.        | B           | S.E.        | B         | S.E. | Exp(B) |
| Parental desires               |             |             |             |             |           |      |        |
| Wants ECE-based family         | 1.43*       | (0.18)      |             |             | 1.45*     | (0.18) | 4.26   |
| enrichment                     |             |             |             |             |           |      |        |
| Jewish cultural capital        |             |             |             |             |           |      |        |
| Attended Jewish day camp       | —           | —           |             |             | 0.35*     | (0.17) | 1.32   |
| Attended Jewish overnight      | —           | —           |             |             | -0.31     | (0.17) | 0.81   |
| camp                           |             |             |             |             |           |      |        |
| Participated in Jewish youth   | —           | —           |             |             | -0.03     | (0.17) | 0.83   |
| group                          |             |             |             |             |           |      |        |
| Participated in Israel         | —           | —           |             |             | 0.08      | (0.18) | 1.09   |
| experience program             |             |             |             |             |           |      |        |
| Participated in Hillel         | —           | —           |             |             | 0.05      | (0.16) | 1.07   |
| Childhood home regularly       | —           | —           |             |             | 0.08      | (0.16) | 0.88   |
| lit Sabbath candles            |             |             |             |             |           |      |        |
| Half/most of high school       | —           | —           |             |             | 0.19      | (0.19) | 1.13   |
| friends were Jewish            |             |             |             |             |           |      |        |
| Constant                       | 1.79*       | (0.15)      | -1.07*      | (0.20)      | -1.77*    | (0.23) | 0.17   |

*p < .05
Who Is Being Taught?

We find a strong relationship between the desire for preschool-initiated efforts to enrich the Jewish home environment and the likelihood of claiming that the preschool experience did so ($B = 1.43$). Controlling for Jewish cultural capital does not diminish this relationship ($B = 1.45$). That is, even when we take into account those who are presumably more (or less) knowledgeable and connected, the impact of wanting ECE to affect one’s home environment still remains strong. In short, irrespective of Jewish background, parents who wanted ECE to be a vehicle for family Jewish enrichment were over four times as likely ($e^B = 4.26$) to say that their homes were Jewishly enriched by their experience with ECE. In contrast, indicators of Jewish cultural capital are not statistically significant predictors of an ECE home enrichment effect.\footnote{17}

Given the importance of parental desires for ECE-based Jewish enrichment to the success of such endeavors, how widespread are such desires and how well are preschools meeting them? Figure 3.3 places parents into one of four categories based on whether they wanted ECE-based Jewish enrichment and whether they received it. A majority (60 percent) of parents who had enrolled children in Jewish preschools said that it would be very or extremely important to them that the preschool try to enrich the Jewish environment in their home. In spite of this, only one-third (32 percent) of parents claimed that their preschool achieved this to any significant extent. Most of these were people who wanted the ECE program to function in this capacity (26 percent versus 6 percent). Even so, most of those who were interested in family enrichment claimed not to have received it.
Discussion

In recent years, Jewish early childhood education (ECE) has been reframed as a form of Jewish family education and adult Jewish engagement. In line with this emerging adult-centered agenda, we clarified questions that have arisen about the nature of ECE’s potential effects on parents and on the extent to which these effects are currently being realized. We found that only a minority of parents claimed to have experienced strong ECE effects, most of these in the realm of community-building rather than adult Jewish learning.

The analysis identified three separate ways that ECE may act as an agent of family Jewish engagement: (1) community-building, (2) fostering openness to the not-self-evident propositions that parents are appropriate recipients of Jewish education and that ECE has a role to play in this regard, and (3) encouraging parents to consider enrolling their children in Jewish day school. The inability of these three dimensions to satisfactorily explain respondents’ answers to the question of home Jewish enrichment suggests that additional dimensions of impact may also exist. Future research should explore the hypothesis that a fourth type of impact involves ECE’s ability to foster parent-child interaction around Jewish themes.

ECE’s parental effects do not operate as a coherent package. The existence of an ECE effect in one dimension does not imply the existence of an ECE effect in the other dimensions. This suggests that those who seek to promote ECE as a form of parental Jewish engagement will need to target their efforts to address each of the discrete outcomes individually. We found that ECE’s strongest parent-related effects are in the area of community-building. ECE was less successful in engaging parents as Jewish learners. This comes as little surprise. In proposing a new vision for Jewish ECE, communal leaders are attempting to change deeply ingrained notions about who schools should serve. Parents continue to see children as the primary recipients of education and to understand schools as vehicles, primarily if not exclusively, for educating children. That the schools in which they enroll their children should try to educate them, too, challenges these basic understandings.

ECE’s effects are currently reaching only a minority of the preschools’ parent populations. In large measure this is because the cultural change that is being proposed cannot succeed without support both from school personnel and from parents. Garnering this support is no easy task, as the issues raised by the proposed reframing become more contentious the more the new mission is taken seriously. If adult Jewish engagement moves closer to the center of preschools’ missions, what are the ramifications for these institutions’ other goals, as agents of early childhood education (generally conceived), and as institutions whose current structures have allowed them to attract a large and diverse population? I reserve judgment on these issues, but draw attention to the fact that the proposed changes regard matters of sufficient import that changes will come neither easily nor without conflict.
Among the parent body, a broad base would be favorably disposed to a Jewish ECE that engages adults as well as children. We found that a majority of parents (60 percent) fall into this category. When ECE effects on the Jewish home environment were reported, it was almost exclusively by this subpopulation. The apathy or opposition of the remaining 40 percent does, therefore, constitute an obstacle to extending ECE’s impact to a larger proportion of parents.

Obviously, however, the less-than-comprehensive reach of these outcomes is not solely attributable to a lack of parental receptivity. We must also assign responsibility to the ECE programs themselves. Most of the current or former preschool parents who wanted ECE-based Jewish enrichment said that they did not receive it. Did that result from lack of effort on the preschools’ part? Was it because the preschool professionals did not share this vision of their mission? We do not have answers to these questions. What is clear, though, is that the reframing of ECE to serve adult Jewish engagement is an ongoing struggle rather than an accomplished fact. To realize the goal of influencing the Jewish lives of parents, as well as children, will require changes in the practices and orientations not just of ECE directors and teachers, but of parents as well.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Steven M. Cohen co-directed the survey on which this chapter was based. At Brandeis University’s Cohen Center for Modern Jewish Studies, Leonard Saxe played a central role in the development of this research project. Fern Chertok, David Tobey, and Jacqueline Buda helped bring it to fruition. Mark I. Rosen, Charles Kadushin, and Ted Sisson offered valuable feedback. Elsewhere, Barry Holtz, Jack Ukeles, and Alisa Rubin Kurshen shared their expertise. This research also benefited from the conversation among the scholars gathered by Jack Wertheimer as part of the Next Generation project.

METHODOLOGICAL APPENDIX

This chapter and chapters 4 and 9 report on findings from a survey of parental attitudes and experiences surrounding Jewish education. Conducted under the auspices of Brandeis University’s Cohen Center for Modern Jewish Studies with the cooperation of the Florence G. Heller/JCCA Research Center, the five-community survey targeted Jewish Community Center members with Jewish children ages birth to eighteen years living in the household. In each community—Baltimore; Detroit; West Orange, New Jersey; Newton, Massachusetts; and San Francisco—the local JCC agreed to provide a machine-readable list of its members, prescreened in some instances to eliminate families with no Jewish children in the household. Additional nonqualifying families were screened out in the initial minutes of each interview. These steps eliminated some, but not all, nonqualifying families (a fact that influences the calculation of response rates.)

Interviews were conducted by telephone by Bezeq Online, a Tel Aviv–based call center using English-speaking interviewers, from October 2004 to April 2005. Although all
interviewers spoke English as their native tongue, accents varied and included American, Scottish, British, and others. Some interviewers were Israeli-born but were children of immigrants from English-speaking countries and were raised in English-speaking homes. Their distinct accents were neither typically Israeli nor typically British/American. To avoid the potential that knowledge of the calls’ origination in Israel would introduce bias into the respondents’ answers, the opening script identified interviewers as calling on behalf of the sponsors of the study and did not mention that they were employees of Bezeq Online working from a call center in Israel. This information was provided if respondents asked.

Response Rate

With 2,538 respondents, the survey had an overall response rate calculated at 46 percent. Response rates were calculated as the product of contact rate, the cooperation rate, and the completion rate, defined as follows:

\[
\text{Contact rate} = \frac{\text{contacted numbers}}{\text{working numbers}} = 75 \text{ percent}
\]
\[
\text{Cooperation rate} = \frac{\text{cooperating numbers}}{\text{contacted numbers}} = 67 \text{ percent}
\]
\[
\text{Completion rate} = \frac{\text{completed interviews}}{\text{eligible contacts}} = 93 \text{ percent}
\]

The calculation that produced this figure may give us an artificially low estimate of the actual response rate of parents of Jewish children, because it assumes identical cooperation rates for qualifying and nonqualifying households. This assumption is conservative, probably unrealistically so. Because the interviewers opened the survey by saying that it “focuses on education for Jewish children,” non-Jews and people without children might have been less likely to cooperate, including being less likely to answer the initial screening questions designed to identify them as ineligible. (As far as we were able to determine from those who agreed to answer the screening questions, the majority—59 percent—of people on the JCC lists we were using as our sampling frame had no Jewish children in the house and were therefore ineligible for the survey. We suspect that this proportion was even higher among those who refused to answer the screening questions.) The greater the differential in cooperation rates between qualifying and nonqualifying households, the more the response rate calculation is affected by the inclusion of people who were not intended to be in the survey and were called only because the information contained in the JCC lists did not allow us to

### Table 3.2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Community</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Baltimore</td>
<td>539</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Detroit</td>
<td>362</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Newton, Mass.</td>
<td>528</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West Orange, N.J.</td>
<td>682</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>San Francisco</td>
<td>427</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>2,538</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
screen them out beforehand. As the magnitude of this differential is unknown, it is impossible to calculate an adjusted rate. All we can say is that the response rate for our target population—JCC-member families with Jewish children—is likely higher than the 46 percent reported above.

As described below, we divided the survey into two waves. For this analysis of preschool effects, I analyzed data only from the second wave, which had 1,387 respondents and a response rate calculated at 33 percent (contact rate = 70 percent, cooperation rate = 53 percent, and completion rate = 90 percent). Again, the same caveats apply, and the actual response rate for the target population is probably somewhat higher.

**Weighting**

Because the JCC membership lists include both qualifying and nonqualifying households, the population of the sampling frame is not coextensive with the population of interest. Accordingly, there is no justification for applying poststratification weighting to the match the achieved sample to the frame from which it was drawn.

**Replicates**

The sampling frame was divided into replicates—that is, subsets that were fielded sequentially. When a replicate was opened, the respondents in it would be called while the respondents in the unopened replicates were held in reserve, to be called in the future. Later replicates were typically not opened for calling until earlier replicates had been called through several times.

**Interviewer Adherence to Protocol**

During the first month in which the survey was fielded, we determined that interviewers working in the Bezeq Online call center had diverged from the interview protocol and had asked questions in a nonuniform manner. At that time, we temporarily suspended the fielding of the survey while Bezeq Online replaced interviewers and instituted additional monitoring and quality control measures. Because it would be some time before we would be able to determine the effects of this on the data, and because most of the interviews with respondents in San Francisco had already been completed, prudence dictated that an additional community be added to the study. Baltimore was added and the survey was relaunched in December 2004. All replicates that had been open during the initial fielding of the survey were closed (that is, no new calls were placed to them), and the relaunched survey proceeded with previously unopened replicates containing an entirely new set of respondents. This enables us to directly assess whether the data gathered in the first month (Wave 1) differed significantly from the data gathered in the remaining months (Wave 2).

**Assessment of Data Validity for Early Childhood Education**

For the information on which this chapter is based, we checked whether the results of the analyses changed depending on whether we included or excluded the data gathered during the first month. We found no evidence that the inclusion or exclusion of the first month’s data substantively changed the results of the analysis.

Although we felt confident that the first month’s data could be utilized without com-
promising the validity of the findings, I nevertheless decided that nothing would be lost by excluding these data and that greater confidence among readers might be gained. I therefore chose to present this analysis based solely on the second wave of data. This decision had the effect of overrepresenting Baltimore and underrepresenting the other communities in comparison with their relative distributions in the full October 2004–April 2005 data set. For example, Baltimore constituted 21 percent of the full data set but 39 percent cases gathered from December onward. San Francisco’s representation dropped from 17 percent to a mere 4 percent. The degree of San Francisco’s underrepresentation made me wary of using poststratification weights to adjust the post-December community distribution to reflect the distribution in the full data set. Nevertheless, I explored this option and found that such weighting made little substantive difference in the results. I therefore have chosen to report the findings based on unweighted data.

**Implications of Near-Universal Jewish Preschool Use among JCC-Affiliated Families**

As many as 81 percent of parents of preschool-age children in our sample had enrolled their children in Jewish preschools. Sending one’s child to a JCC preschool may be the prime motivation for such parents to join JCCs. With such a small number who had not enrolled children in preschools, I could not—and did not—try to assess the effect of the preschool on Jewish identity and connections. Rather, I focused on parental perceptions of the preschool experience and impact, an objective totally consistent with the available data.

An example might make this clearer: There are many avenues by which Jewish communities are formed. Jewish preschools may be one of them. There is no reason to assume that if parents do not enroll their children in Jewish preschool they will be unable to find Jewish community through other means. Nor does the existence of other formal and informal frameworks for Jewish community detract from the fact that preschools may also fill this community-building role. The question, therefore, is not whether preschools are more likely to create community than other venues, but whether parents who enroll their children in them come to see these schools as meaningful creators of Jewish community in their lives. This is a question that can only be asked of parents involved in such preschools. Parents whose children are not enrolled in Jewish preschools are not an applicable comparison group in this instance, and therefore their relative absence from the data set is not especially problematic.

One other implication of drawing the sample from JCC lists is that if JCC preschools differ in significant ways from synagogue-based preschools, the findings presented here may reflect the JCC-preschool experience more than the congregation-based preschool experience. As the questionnaire did not ask where the preschool was housed, we have no way of assessing whether such cross-institutional differences exist; whether the data set is, in fact, skewed to underrepresent synagogue-based preschools; and how either of these factors would affect the interpretation of findings presented in the chapter.

**Notes**

1. The report omits details that would allow readers to assess the representativeness of the sample. We are informed, however, that response rates vary by denominational or in-
Who Is Being Taught?

institutional affiliation, with Conservative and Orthodox institutions likely underrepresented (Vogelstein and Kaplan 2002: iv).

2. The report did not specify whether one or both parents in each household were interviewed.

5. Without an appropriate comparison group, it is impossible to say whether the shift to child-centered observances is caused by Jewish preschool enrollment or whether it occurs generally among the population of Jewish families with young children. All that the studies tell us is that parents perceive the shift as being induced by the preschools.

4. The first published research explicitly referencing Jewish early childhood education by name was that of Ravid and Ginsburg, appearing in 1988. References to general “early childhood education” began appearing in the mid-1960s, with a rapid increase during the 1970s (Husa and Kinos 2005).

5. For a representative example of the use of the 1990 NJPS to define American Jewry’s situation as one that threatened “continuity,” see Bayme (1991). For a contemporaneous description of the survey’s role in shifting Jewish organizations’ agendas to address what had come to be called the “continuity crisis,” see Goldberg (1992).

6. Functionalist conceptions see the educational system as a communal agent serving the collective end of social reproduction.

7. At the same time, this approach downplayed Jewish ECE’s general educational relevance to the cognitive, emotional, social, and moral development of young children. ECE was being framed as a form of Jewish education first and foremost. As Jewish preschools can be seen as instruments of both Jewish and general education, the decision to emphasize one area over the other represents one choice among many. The reasons behind such a decision, and the implications of making one choice as opposed to another, are key questions for understanding Jewish ECE’s development.

8. Unlike dichotomous response categories (yes/no), the four-point response scales employed here leave the definition of appropriate cutoff points to the researcher’s discretion. I have decided to distinguish those answers in the highest positive response category (“very much”) from those in the other three (“not at all,” “a little,” and “somewhat”). Middling response categories may reflect not only true responses but also a lack of certainty about the proper response. They are also more susceptible to social desirability effects, whereby people who felt that ECE did not have an impact on them would respond that it did, because they presumed that this was what the interviewers would want to hear. Answers in the highest response category are less likely to be compromised by either of these problems, and are therefore the most likely to mean what they purport to mean.

9. It is likely that part of the difference may also be attributed to the fact that the question about day school asked about thoughts, whereas the question about adult education asked about action. Unfortunately, the lack of appropriate comparison groups in the JCC sample leaves us with no way of assessing ECE’s impact on actual day school enrollment.

10. χ² = 2.42, d.f. = 9, p = .000. When conducting an exploratory factor analysis using maximum likelihood estimation, the model’s goodness-of-fit is measured using a chi-square test. A statistically significant chi-square means that the model does not fit the data. In addition to this analysis, a one-factor model was tested for each possible set of five variables, but with no change in the result.

11. χ² = 2.26, d.f. = 3, p = .52, GFI = 1.00, AGFI = 1.00. I first used exploratory factor analysis to test two- and three-factor models. A two-factor model incorporating all six
outcome variables did not fit the data ($\chi^2 = 35.7, \text{d.f.} = 4, p = .000$). In the three-factor model, the degrees of freedom dropped below zero, eliminating the ability to calculate a chi-square statistic and thereby assess the model’s goodness-of-fit. Confirmatory factor analyses revealed no instance in which a three-factor model converged.

12. The latent community-building construct accounted for a majority of the variance in the community-feeling variable (58 percent of the variance explained) and the parental-friendship variable (60 percent). In contrast, the adult-learning factor explained only a minority of the variance in the questions about pursuing adult Jewish education (39 percent) and learning new things about Judaism (32 percent).

13. For the question about Jewish home enrichment, factor loadings were .50 on the educational openness factor and .27 on the community-building factor. The two factors account for only a minority (45 percent) of the variance in the responses to this question. We recall the earlier qualitative research, which found that parents testified that Sabbath eve rituals became meaningful sites for parent-child interaction during the preschool years (Beck 2002; Krug et al. 2004). We speculate that a fourth, family-communion dimension of ECE impact exists.

14. This correlation is statistically significant ($p = .04$).

15. I conducted a preliminary analysis to address the concern that respondents’ answers might have been colored by preschool-initiated Jewish enrichment that they had already experienced. If the variable had actually been measuring an effect of ECE-based enrichment, then we would expect to see the strength of this effect diminish over time. Binary logistic regressions of desires on outcomes, age of child, and an outcome-age interaction term revealed no significant age-related decline. (One analysis used the age of the eldest child. Another used the age of the youngest child.) I therefore feel confident about using this variable for the main analysis.

16. Answers to the question about desires were given on a five-point scale, whereas answers to the question about actual outcomes were given on a four-point scale.

17. At the zero-order level, day camp attendance was significant, however none of the other cultural capital indicators were, nor did day camp attendance remain a statistically significant predictor once entered into the final model.

REFERENCES


Why Has Growth in Day Schools Apparently Leveled Off?

The past twenty-five years or so have witnessed a dramatic rise in enrollment in Jewish day schools (Cohen 2004; Schick 2000). After becoming a nearly universal choice for Orthodox families, day schools’ appeal has spread to a substantial minority of Conservative families, as well as a smaller number of those with other denominational affiliations (Cohen 1997, 2004). At the same time, recent impressionistic evidence suggests a leveling off in the growth in schools and in day school enrollment in the past two or three years. If these impressions prove substantiated, what may explain this trend? After years of growth, why are Jewish day school enrollments possibly “stuck?”

One factor may entail the shrinking of the age-relevant population (Kotler-Berkowitz et al. 2003). The baby boom of 1946–64 created a less pronounced bulge in the Jewish population a generation later, with a peak occurring among births taking place in the 1980s, and declines in Jewish births ever since then. In addition, intermarriage grew rapidly between 1965 and 1985, easing its growth since then. Intermarried Jews produce, on average, fewer children, and only about a third of their children are raised as Jews (Kotler-Berkowitz et al. 2003). Among those children, day school enrollments are vastly lower than among the children of in-married Jews. The confluence of all these factors has worked to steadily shrink the reservoir of Jewish children available to attend day schools.
Another way to look at the possible halt in day school growth is by postulating that enrollment over the years has been following the contours of the “S-curve,” a pattern familiar to researchers in a number of fields. The S-curve is marked by three stages: initial slow growth, subsequent fast growth, and a concluding phase of slow growth, owing to a “ceiling effect.” In the early 1980s, day schools’ appeal slowly gathered momentum, becoming more and more legitimate for non-Orthodox, but Jewishly committed families. By the 1990s, for these sorts of families, day schools may have reached a tipping point, resulting in rapid growth. By now, possibly the vast majority of families who may seriously consider day schools, under current circumstances, are already doing so. The prevailing approaches to student recruitment may have “maxed out.” If so, then the next wave of sizable growth will require sharply different recruitment approaches, be they in terms of technique, message, or target audience.

For this, if not other reasons, day school advocates have begun to focus on Jewish preschools, or more precisely, the Jewish parents of preschool children, as a potential focus for their recruitment efforts. Parents who are sending their children to preschool already demonstrate several characteristics that make them desirable targets for day school recruitment efforts: they seek out Jewish school environments for their children, and they are willing and able to pay tuitions, albeit at levels below those generally required by day schools. Among these parents, it is those other than the Orthodox who offer the larger growth potential, in that Orthodox families almost universally choose day schools for their children, at least in the elementary school years.

Clearly, any such effort will need to rely on a correct assessment of how these parents view Jewish day schools — the complex of images, motivations, and inhibitions to considering Jewish day schools for their children. This essay, focusing on non-Orthodox parents of Jewish preschool children from five widely scattered Jewish Community Centers in major metropolitan areas, seeks to address the question of how they approach and understand the day school option. In short, it seeks to answer, what are the principal attractions and obstacles to considering day schools?

Why Parents May Send Their Children to Day School

Why do some parents choose day school for their children and others do not? One place to begin to answer this question lies with the nebulous notion of Jewish commitment. Quite simply and obviously, those who are “more committed” to being Jewish in their lives, or at least being Jewish in a certain way, should more readily to consider day schools for their children (Adams et al. 1972; Kapel 1972; Kelman 1979, 1984, 1992). Evidence in support of this proposition can be found in the relatively close connection between denominational affiliation and day school enrollment: the more traditional the denomination, the higher the rate of day school attendance. In the 2000–2001 National Jewish Population Survey (NJPS) data set,
among those belonging to congregations, the percentage of families with children in which any child has been in a day school exceeds 90 percent for the Orthodox, approximates 30 percent for the Conservative congregants, and falls short of 5 percent for the Reform.

To logically link this denominational pattern of day school utilization with the assertion that committed Jews more frequently choose day schools than the less committed demands that we make an assumption about the relative levels of commitment among members of the three major denominations. It demands that we, in effect, assume that Orthodox Jews are generally more Jewishly committed than their Conservative counterparts, and that both are more committed than typical Reform Jews. Truth be told, this potentially controversial inference does find considerable support in the data (Lazerwitz et al. 1998). For many indicators of Jewish commitment, we find a “denominational gradient,” in which the Orthodox Jews, as a group, outscore Conservative Jews, and both groups surpass Reform congregants on various measures. Among these measures are self-assessment questions (“To what extent is being Jewish important to you?”) and reported compliance with the central behavioral norms shared by all three movements (synagogue attendance, holiday celebration, charitable giving, adult Jewish learning, visiting Israel, and so forth). Wherever one turns, one finds the Orthodox substantially leading the other two movements, and Conservative Jews generally outpacing Reform Jews, even when the comparisons are limited to congregational members. Thus, by extension, if denomination relates to Jewish commitment, and denomination relates to day school enrollment, then, inferentially, Jewish commitment must be a factor influencing the day school decision.

Other analyses in this volume testify to the close relationship between Jewish commitment in one generation with higher levels of day school enrollment among its children and even grandchildren. The more Jewishly involved members of one generation raise children with more intensive Jewish educational experiences, whose children in turn, engage in relatively high rates of intensive Jewish education (Cohen 1995). Certainly it appears that Jewish involvement — however measured, be it in terms of denomination, observance, communal affiliation, or subjective commitment to being Jewish — promotes day school enrollment.

How can we further specify the attitudes that link Jewish involvement with day school utilization? One strong possibility is that those with higher levels of Jewish involvement entertain higher aspirations for the Jewish engagement of their children. To an extent greater than those with lower levels of observance, affiliation, and commitment, the more Jewishly involved express greater concern about, and greater interest in, how their children will eventually lead their Jewish lives as adults. These parents expect day schools to achieve the results they seek in their children, that is, higher levels of Jewish engagement in the next generation. In other words, they believe in the efficacy of day schools, their ability to deliver on their promise of producing graduates who are indeed, more committed to living engaged Jewish lives. One can chart a logic linking these various concepts: Jewish involve-
ment yields higher aspirations for children’s Jewish development, which leads to belief in (or hope for) the efficacy of day schools, which in turn promotes day school utilization. And, if these factors are influencing that decision, just as clearly, so do other factors that are quite distinct from Jewish commitment and from matters that closely relate to Jewish commitment.

Since the first Jews landed on North American shores in the mid-seventeenth century, the urge to win acceptance into American society has been a major motif of Jews’ relationship to the larger society (Liebman 1973; Sarna 2004). One clear expression of that urge to integrate has been vigorous Jewish support for high barriers between church and state, seeing strict separation as necessary for a society tolerant and welcoming of Jews and other minorities (Sarna and Dalin 1997). In this context we may understand the Jews’ widely held support for public schools, as instruments of Americanization, along with the deeply held suspicion of parochial schools, as bastions of Balkanization. Some Jews have seen all parochial schools, including Jewish day schools, as challenging the tolerance and openness of American society. Accordingly, Jews have looked askance at Jewish day schools not only because of their putative impact on their youngsters’ ability to function in the larger society, but also because they are associated with a vision of a religiously intolerant America, amounting to what might be called “fear of ghettoization.”

In fact, declining fear of ghettoization among American Jews generally, and Conservative Jews particularly, is a prime candidate for explaining the distinctive patterns of Conservative use of day schools. In the last third of the twentieth century, American Jews (or some of them) could feel less anxious about their acceptance in American society, owing in part to the sharp decline over the decades in social antisemitism. Another factor is the phenomenon of generational succession, where younger Jews coming of age feel more securely American as a result of ever-lengthening family histories in the United States. Related to these developments is the overall decline of social conformism (seen starkly in the Eisenhower years) and the commensurate rise of license for many forms of tolerance for social diversity, in matters as varied as dress, food, consumer products, music, sexual orientation, and, not least, religion. In other words, it became increasingly acceptable, if not desirable, for Americans to express their individuality and cultural differences, at the same time as being Jewish specifically became less of an impediment to social integration and advancement. The increasingly public and visible nature of Orthodoxy is itself testimony to Jews’ diminished concern with acceptability and with fears of ghettoization. Many considerations, then, support our conviction that American Jews have become (justifiably) less concerned with social exclusion or, as we call it, “ghettoization.” All of this reasoning suggests that to some extent, the somewhat diminishing belief that day schools serve to inhibit Jews’ integration in America—that they contribute to a subtle ghettoization—serves as an important explanation as to why some Jews prefer day schools and others do not.

Still another critical component in the day school decision centers on the perception of the quality and effectiveness of day schools. As consumers, Jewish
parents have the interest and the ability to seek out, demand, and often to obtain high-quality educational experiences for their children. As work elsewhere in this volume demonstrates, Jewish parents can be highly motivated, and often sophisticated, in making educational choices highly tailored to the personalities, strengths, and limitation of their individual children. Keenly aware of the demanding market they are serving, Jewish day schools invest in delivering academic excellence. But, although academic excellence, or the image of same, may be necessary to attract large numbers of Jewish parents to day schools, educational considerations alone are inadequate to explain why parents differ over sending their children to day schools.

Advocates of expanding day school enrollment have pointed to affordability as a major concern, arguing that cost barriers significantly inhibit many families from turning to day schools (Wertheimer 2001). Financial constraints, of course, limit day school enrollment, but their impact may be much less significant than widely believed. For only a limited number of parents is day school a genuine option, that is, a choice that is both available and relatively easy to reject. For the Orthodox, the day school choice is hardly an option, as day school enrollment is so nearly universal as to make it socially mandatory in order to remain part of the Orthodox community. Conversely, for a large number of other, less traditional, Jews the day school choice also is hardly an option, as so few of their family members, friends and neighbors make that choice. Reform congregants are largely averse to day schools, as very few of them take the day school option. Recognizing that Reform Jews, in the aggregate, are more involved in Jewish life than those who are not congregationally affiliated, or who are mixed married, or both (as they often are), one could hardly expect many of the latter to seriously consider day schools.

Consequently, it is only for those Jews whose levels of Jewish engagement are both higher than the population average, but lower than those typically expressed by most Orthodox Jews (in other words, committed Conservative Jews) that day schools are a true option — they are neither ruled out, nor ruled in, by the social circles that they inhabit. It is for these Jews that financial considerations may play a major role in inducing a day school decision, or dissuading them from doing so.

Indeed, an analysis of data collected from American Jewish parents in 1993, restricted to a subsample of Conservative Jews (Cohen 1999) displayed clear signs of a relationship between income and day school enrollment. For these Jews, day school utilization dipped for families with incomes (at the time) between $40,000 and $100,000, figures that would have to be revised upward in today’s terms. The pattern suggested that day schools were relatively inexpensive for the poorest families because they qualified for scholarships. Obviously, they are most affordable for the wealthiest because high-earning families have the most disposable income. Affordability of day schools, then, is clearly an issue, but its impact may well be confined to certain populations as defined both by Jewish engagement and by income.

Although Jewish involvement, fear of ghettoization, academic excellence, and
affordability all constitute important elements in the complex of parental decision making concerning day schools, several questions remain. One concerns the extent and potency of the influence of each of these considerations. As logical and as compelling as these reasons may appear, no published study, to date, has demonstrated that these are indeed crucial to the motivational calculus by which parents consider day school enrollment. Are these in fact the "right" reasons, the things that parents think about when they make decisions about enrolling their children in day schools? Moreover, insofar as these reasons are indeed influential, which are more influential than others, and conversely, which are relatively less important? Clearly, the answers to these questions are of interest to the analyst of American Jewry, but perhaps of even greater interest to parents, policymakers, and practitioners who struggle with issues of enrolling Jewish children in Jewish day schools in the United States.

The Sample

A Policy-Relevant Subsample: Non-Orthodox Parents of Preschool Children

To address these (and other) questions, we conducted a survey of parents of Jewish children age birth to eighteen, drawn from the membership rosters provided by five of the larger Jewish Community Centers (JCCs) around the country. The five locations are Boston (with major facilities in the suburbs of Newton and Stoughton); West Orange, New Jersey; Baltimore (in Owings Mills and Park Heights); Detroit (that is, West Bloomfield and Oak Park); and San Francisco. In all, our telephone interviewers (in the employ of Israel’s Bezeq Online) conducted 2,538 usable interviews. The five communities vary significantly in terms of region, Jewish educational resources, and patterns of Jewish identity. Recognizing that Orthodox parents almost universally send their children to day schools (as did 93 percent of the 336 Orthodox parents of six- to eighteen-year-old children in this study), this analysis excludes the Orthodox, leaving a total of 2,202 non-Orthodox respondents from the five JCCs. Of these non-Orthodox parents, 78 percent (1,715) have children age six or older and, as a result, already have decided whether to send their children to day school.

The others have had no children of elementary school age and thus could not as yet have sent their children to day school. For these parents, the actual decision regarding day school enrollment is still in the offing. They could, however, claim to have already considered day school for their children, and, of those, we asked about the respondent’s and the spouse’s attitude toward enrolling their children in day schools. They compose the subsample for the bulk of the analysis on attitudes toward day schools (N = 448, when reduced for parents who failed to answer the questions on considering day schools).
Basic Sociodemographic and Jewish Identity Characteristics

By way of background, we note that the sample derives from five communities and is restricted to preschool families, that is, those with children, none of whom are of elementary school age or older. They derive from several of the regions where many American Jews live. Perhaps more pointedly, they differ with respect to Jewish communal cultures, a reflection of the indigenous population, the institutional history, and the surrounding cultures.

Among the preschool parent subsample, the respondents were far more female than male (see table 4.2). Their median age is thirty-six, with more than two-thirds between thirty-two and forty-one. They are relatively affluent, with a median income of approximately $150,000. Hardly any went to day schools as children, but nearly four out of five had some sort of Jewish schooling. Denominationally, they are largely split between Reform and Conservatism. About half are synagogue members, a figure that slightly exceeds the estimated national average of 40 percent, owing in part to their life cycle stage (all parents of preschool children) and to their affiliation with a JCC, a condition for their entry into this sample. Fewer than a third attend services at least once a month, while 40 percent attend only on the high holidays or not at all, suggesting a reasonable and considerable diversity with respect to the Jewish religiosity specifically, and overall Jewish engagement more generally. More than half have been to Israel, as compared with a national average of more than a third, but this is comparable with figures reported for institutionally affiliated Jewish adults.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Community</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>San Francisco</td>
<td>153</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West Orange, N.J.</td>
<td>111</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boston</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baltimore</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Detroit</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>453</td>
<td>101</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sample: respondents with answers on favorability to day schools, sharing the following characteristics: non-Orthodox, children at home, no child over the age of five.
The Measures

Day School Utilization Among parents of school-age children, we measured day school utilization by simply determining whether the family had sent any of its children to day school at any point for first grade or beyond.

Day School Favorability This measure drew on several questions. The survey asked respondents whether they have even thought of possibly enrolling their child in day school. Those who answered yes (63 percent of this subsample of non-Orthodox parents of preschool children) were then asked about their stance,
as well as that of their spouses, on sending their children to day schools, assigning scores on a scale from 1 to 5. We then created a composite measure, drawing on the answers for both respondent and spouse, and recalibrated the scale so that it ranges from 0 to 100. Those scoring 0 were those who either never considered day schools, or had considered them and reported the lowest levels of favorability for them and their spouses (an answer of 1 for both). Those scoring 100 had both considered day schools and reported that they and their spouses were most highly favorably inclined toward day schools (answers of 5 for both). We arrayed the combined respondent and spouse favorability scores accordingly, such that, for example, an average score of 3 (midway on the scale from 1 to 5) was converted to a score of 50, on the metric of 0–100 for the dependent variable.

**Jewish Involvement** We measured their Jewish involvement by way of a ten-point scale that drew on the following items (results are in parentheses):

- Most closest friends are Jewish (86 percent)
- Reporting a denominational affiliation of any sort, as opposed to “secular” or “other Jewish” (83 percent)
- Being Jewish is very important or extremely important (76 percent)
- Fasts all or part of the day on Yom Kippur (76 percent)
- Donates to a Jewish organization other than a synagogue (73 percent)
- Usually lights Sabbath candles (67 percent)
- Synagogue member (51 percent)
- Feels very or extremely attached to Israel (47 percent)
- Attends services at least monthly (30 percent)
- Serves on the board of a Jewish agency (18 percent)

**Jewish Parenting Aspirations** The survey asked several questions, worded in a similar fashion, regarding parents’ aspirations for the Jewish development of their children. Four of the items, taken together, seem to measure a common underlying concept related to commitment to one’s children’s Jewish education (see table 4.3). To construct the index of Jewish parenting aspirations, the analysis summed the responses to the four items, each of which was scored on a scale from 1 to 5.

**Day School Efficacy** We presented respondents with four arguments for and against day schools, asking them to rate the persuasiveness of each argument. We asked whether they believed that day schools are more likely than other Jewish schooling choices to produce children who have Jewish friends, who feel proud to be Jewish, who will eventually marry other Jews, and who succeed academically. The responses to all four items were moderately correlated, suggesting that they do in fact all tap into, in part, a common underlying theme that can be called “day school efficacy.” All four arguments are correlated both with day school utilization
Why Jewish Parents Choose Day Schools

among parents of school-age children, as well as with favorable attitudes toward day schools. To construct the index, the analysis summed the four items.

**DAY SCHOOL Ghettoization** We presented respondents with several arguments against sending their children to day school. One cited concerns that day school children “don’t learn as well as others how to relate to non-Jewish children,” and another argued that they “turn out too religious.” Taken together, these two arguments in effect reflect the notion that day schools ghettoize their students. That is, they become either unable or unwilling to function comfortably in the larger multicultural society. The index summed these two items.

**TABLE 4.3**

Jewish Parenting Aspirations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Items in the aspirations index</th>
<th>$5—“Extremely” (percentage)</th>
<th>$4—“Very” (percentage)</th>
<th>“Very” + “Extremely” (percentage)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Giving your children a foundation of Jewish knowledge and tradition</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assuring that your children feel attached to Israel</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>57%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Encouraging your children to date only Jewish people</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>46%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Giving your children an intensive Jewish education</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>46%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Survey question: “I am going to ask you to rate how important different aspects of parenting are to you. Please answer on a scale from 1 to 5—1 being ‘Not at all important’ and 5 being ‘Extremely important.’”

**TABLE 4.4**

Arguments in Favor of Day Schools: The Day School Efficacy Index

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Arguments</th>
<th>Very persuasive (percentage)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Academically, day schools do as well if not better than public schools in this area in preparing children for high school and college</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[They] make friends with lots of other Jewish children</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Those who go to day school are more likely to be proud to be Jewish</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Day school graduates are more likely than others to date, and eventually, marry Jews</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Survey question: “I’m going to try to convince you to send your child to a Jewish day school. . . . I’m going to ask you every time if my argument is very persuasive, somewhat persuasive, or not at all persuasive.”
The Findings

Which Non-Orthodox Families Have Chosen Day Schools?

Among this sample of non-Orthodox JCC members, 30 percent with children age six to seventeen had sent one of their children to day schools. How then, among families who have already decided for or against day schools, are income, Jewish involvement, aspirations for one’s child’s Jewish growth, belief in day school efficacy, and fear of ghettoization associated with day school enrollment? In short, with respect to these characteristics, how do day school families differ from their non–day school counterparts?

Little Impact of Income on Day School Utilization

With respect to income, the relationship is essentially, and perhaps surprisingly, flat. Contrary to the widely held view that limited affluence means limited choice of day schools, we find that those with relatively “low” incomes (under $100,000 for affiliated JCC families with children) are no less likely to send their children to day school than are their more affluent counterparts. In addition, those who believe day schools are too expensive are not much less likely to use day schools than are those who reject this idea.

Among Conservative households in this sample, a U-shaped curve emerges, with higher levels of day school utilization among those at the lower and higher levels of income. For those earning between $100,000 and $150,000 annually, day school utilization stands at 40 percent, about 4 to 5 percentage points below those earning higher or lower levels of household income. However, the relationship

---

Table 4.5

Arguments against Day Schools

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Argument</th>
<th>Very persuasive (percentage)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Day schools are too expensive</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Day school children don’t learn as well as others how to relate to non-Jewish children</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Day school graduates don’t do as well academically in high school and college as do comparable youngsters who went to public schools in this area</td>
<td>2.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Day schools are not equipped to properly address children’s individual learning needs</td>
<td>2.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Day school children often turn out too religious for my tastes</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Survey question: “I’m going to try to convince you not to send your child to a Jewish day school. . . I’m going to ask you every time if my argument is very persuasive, somewhat persuasive, or not at all persuasive.”
Why Jewish Parents Choose Day Schools

for Reform Jews with income is flat, and among nondenominational Jews, those with the lowest levels of income actually use day schools more than those earning $100,000 or more per year. In any event, with the exception of the modest pattern for Conservative Jews, none of these findings supports the notion that relatively low income deters enrollment of one’s child in day schools.

How may we explain these seemingly counterintuitive findings? One important consideration lies with the constellation of families we are examining. Families with young children who join JCCs often do so in order to send their children to JCC preschools. In so doing, they demonstrate that they are comfortable with, if not attracted to, Jewish communal affiliation for themselves and a Jewish educational environment for their children. They also demonstrate that they feel they have enough financial means to pay not only for JCC membership, but for the additional fees for JCC preschool. JCC membership, by definition, selects out the most economically vulnerable families who could find day school enrollment for their children beyond their financial means, and it selects in people who are motivated to affiliate Jewishly and Jewishly educate their children. Given the sampling design, our analysis is confined to this population. Among these JCC-affiliated families, then, even the least affluent (who are, in fact, not exactly indigent) are no less inclined to choose day schools for their children than are the most financially well endowed.

strong relationships with Jewish-related measures Whereas income and perceived affluence bear no relationship with day school utilization within this JCC-affiliated sample, all the other factors reviewed earlier bear a very strong relationship. The matters of Jewish involvement, aspirations for the child’s Jewish growth, belief in the efficacy of day schools, and belief that day schools ghettoize (or that they do not) are all strongly related to day school utilization. For example, among those with low aspirations for one’s child’s Jewish growth, just 8 percent had sent a child to day schools, as compared with 50 percent of those with high levels of aspirations.

With all this said, these results constitute only indirect evidence that these attitudes influence the choice of day schools as the preferred option. The relationships between the predictor variables (Jewish involvement and the three attitudes) and day school utilization may reflect either day school choice as an outcome of these predictors. The choice of day schools may have been a consequence of these characteristics. Through their experience as day school parents, parents may acquire the distinctive features of the day school population. Specifically, day school parents, after some years of exposure to other day school parents and their day school–educated children, may well come to elevate their Jewish involvement, and come to share a certain set of pro–day school attitudes as a result of enrolling their children in day schools. From noting a relationship, even a strong relationship, between the choice of day school and a variety of characteristics at one point in time, we cannot be sure of the causal ordering, or the extent to which Jewish involvement and related attitudes provoke the choice of day schools, and the extent to which the
choice of day school brings about a change in Jewish involvement and in attitudes toward day schools.

Thus, all we can say for sure about this part of the analysis is that day school parents are, indeed, more Jewishly involved, hold higher aspirations for their children’s Jewish development, see day schools as effective, and express few concerns that day schools will adversely affect their children’s ability to participate in the larger society. The extent to which these attitudes predate day school enrollment is impossible to determine by way of a snapshot glimpse of school-age parents alone.

![Graphs showing day school utilization among parents of school-age children by selected measures.](image)

**Figure 4.1** Day School Utilization among Parents of School-age Children by Selected Measures
Values are the percentage of families who have sent a child to day school.
Predicting Favorability toward Day Schools among Parents of Preschool Children

To get a better sense of how these attitudes may bring about or obstruct the choice of day schools, we turn to the non-Orthodox parents of preschool children. Because none of their children are yet old enough to have reached first grade, these are parents who could not yet have actually made the decision as to whether to send their children to day school.

Little Impact of Income on Day School Intentions  For this group, as with their slightly older counterparts with somewhat older children, both income and the sense that day schools are inexpensive bear little relationship to favorable feelings toward day schools. In fact, the wealthiest among them are actually slightly less inclined toward day schools than are those in the middle and lower ranges of

| Table 4.6 | Day School Utilization by Income, Expense, Jewish Involvement, Aspirations for Child’s Jewish Growth, Efficacy, and “Ghettoization” |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Income of household | Low | Moderate | High |
| Day schools are too expensive | 31 | 38 | 28 |
| Jewish involvement | 15 | 30 | 48 |
| Aspirations for child’s Jewish growth | 8 | 22 | 50 |
| Belief in efficacy of day schools | 11 | 33 | 57 |
| Day schools ghettoize | 48 | 37 | 17 |

Entries are the percentage of families who have sent a child to day school.

Key
Income: low = under $100,000; moderate = $100,000–149,999; high = $150,000+.

Too expensive: “Very persuasive” argument against Jewish day school.

Jewish involvement: Summative scale incorporating ten items (feeling that being Jewish is very/extremely important; Sabbath candles; fasts on Yom Kippur; donated to a Jewish cause; board member of a Jewish institution; member of a synagogue; attends services monthly or more; very/extremely attached to Israel; identifies with a religious denomination; most/all closest friends are Jewish.

Aspirations for child’s Jewish growth: importance of . . . giving children a foundation of Jewish knowledge; giving children an intensive Jewish education; encouraging children to date only Jews; assuring they feel attached to Israel.

Day schools ghettoize: Children don’t learn to relate to non-Jews, and they often turn out too religious.
household income. In like fashion, the perception that day schools are too expen-
sive has no bearing on favorably considering day schools.

These findings run parallel to those reported above on actual utilization among
the older group of parents, those with children already in school. The curious rela-
tionship of income with day school utilization and intentions (or favorability) certain-
ly runs contrary to the widely held expectation that economic affordability
deters thinking seriously about day schools for one’s children. Affordability does not
seem to constitute a major barrier to day school enrollment for these JCC-member
families. In this context, we need recall that with respect to the parents of preschool
youngsters, most of these families are already paying several thousand dollars yearly
for their children’s JCC preschools. Perhaps having grown accustomed to paying
tuition for their children’s education, they are less sensitive than others to poten-
tial economic barriers for their children’s education, Jewish or otherwise. Among
the somewhat older parents presented above, we need to recall that by joining a
JCC, they are demonstrating a relative willingness to pay for Jewish affiliation and
a relative level of subjective financial security. Accordingly, the special nature of this
sample may obliterate the expected relationship with income.

For the most affluent, day schools compete against other costly options. For
their less affluent neighbors living in upscale suburbs, day schools compete against
cost-free public schools. If anything, the findings suggest that day schools lack the
cachet and upscale reputation that would make them more competitive with the
sorts of private schools that appeal to the most affluent Jewish families.

THE IMPACT OF JEWISH INVOLVEMENT AND RELATED ATTITUDES
Whereas economic considerations exert weak, if at times unexpected, effects on
favorable feelings toward day schools, the relationships of favorability toward day
schools with Jewish involvement and with the day school-related attitudes are far
more substantial, pronounced, and predictable. To illustrate, preference for day
schools is very closely linked with positive assessments of their educational effec-
tiveness. The mean score on the favorability scale amounts to only 21, on a metric of
0–100, for those who are least confident about day schools’ claims to educational
effectiveness, but rises to 59 for those who are the most confident about their ef-
ectiveness. Jewish involvement and aspirations for one’s child’s Jewish growth also
display the expected, strong, and direct relationships with day school favorability.
As we would expect, the reverse polarity can be seen with respect to fears of ghet-
toization. The least concerned with this issue score 58 on day school favorability,
and the most concerned drop to 29. In short, favorable attitudes toward day schools
rise markedly with increases in Jewish involvement, with belief in their effective-
ness, and with aspirations for children’s Jewish development. Conversely, they
decline markedly with increasing fears for ghettoization.

THE IMPACT OF ALL FACTORS SIMULTANEOUSLY Of course, all of these
measures are interrelated, such that the simple bivariate relationships with day
school favorability overstate the net unique effect of each dimension separately. To examine the simultaneous impact of each of the four measures attitudes on day school preference, we performed the regression analysis whose results are reported in table 4.8 and figure 4.3. We regressed the measure of day school favorability on Jewish involvement as well as attitudes toward aspirations, efficacy, and ghettoization. All variables apparently exert an independent impact on (or at least are independently associated with) day school favorability. Each exerts a modest impact on favorable attitudes toward day school, net of and independent of the other variables.
in the equation. Of all the measures, belief in the efficacy of day schools exerts the strongest net impact.

Conclusion and Implications

Perhaps one of the more surprising findings to emerge from this analysis entails the limited role of affordability in determining levels of interest in day schools for one’s children. An established line of reasoning in Jewish communal thinking and writing argues for the importance of the “high cost of being Jewish” as an obstacle to participation in Jewish institutions in general, and day schools in particular. This reasoning argues for the centrality of affordability as a barrier to Jewish communal
Why Jewish Parents Choose Day Schools

Contrary to this widely held view, this analysis, consistent with other research, demonstrates the limits of affordability (or lack thereof) as a genuine obstacle to day school utilization. Only a small number of families are even likely to consider financial cost a true obstacle to day school enrollment—they are the ones for whom day school is an option but not a necessity, and they are cost-sensitive. Day schools would find it hard to administer scholarship programs that target this participation in general. By extension, high day school tuitions are seen as a major barrier to recruiting many families who otherwise would seriously consider day schools for their children.

FIGURE 4.3 Impact of Measures on Favorability toward Day School

TABLE 4.8
Regression of Favorable Feelings toward Day School on Jewish Involvement, Aspirations for Child’s Jewish Growth, Efficacy, and “Ghettoization”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Standardized coefficients (betas)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jewish involvement</td>
<td>.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aspirations for child’s Jewish growth</td>
<td>.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belief in efficacy of day schools</td>
<td>.23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Day schools ghettoize</td>
<td>-.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multiple R</td>
<td>.48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>448</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

participation in general. By extension, high day school tuitions are seen as a major barrier to recruiting many families who otherwise would seriously consider day schools for their children.
group without seeming to show unjustified favoritism to one population, largely defined in terms of its Jewish commitment, at the expense of others.

Moreover, insofar as day schools compete in the marketplace of private schools, for some families they may be insufficiently exclusive and pricey for their tastes and social class. Making day schools more financially accessible for some may make them less socially attractive to others. Counterintuitively, scholarships and lower tuition may lead some of the most affluent to prefer high-cost private schools over moderately costly Jewish day schools.

At the same time, this analysis demonstrated that a variety of concerns and considerations other than affordability significantly influence parents’ thinking about day schools as an option for their children. Not surprisingly, we confirmed that the more Jewishly involved are also more predisposed toward thinking favorably about day schools. However, we augmented this widely held view by underscoring the importance of aspirations for one’s child’s Jewish growth as a key mechanism by which parental Jewish commitment shapes interest in sending one’s child to day school. That is, a major reason why those with more Jewish commitment (or involvement) think well of day schools is that they seek to raise children with higher levels of Jewish commitment. Moreover, such parents also tend to see day schools as effective—they produce youngsters committed to Jewish living and who are highly capable of succeeding academically. As an obstacle to considering day schools, the analysis points to the perception that day schools, in effect, ghettoize their students. In this view, day schools deprive youngsters of the ability to interact with non-Jews and also makes them “too religious,” in the eyes of their parents.

These results may be concretized if we think of an ideal type: a Jewishly committed parent who cares about raising a Jewishly committed child, believes that day schools can help make that happen, and has little concern that day schools will serve to ghettoize their children. In contrast, one may think of his/her opposite number, someone with little Jewish involvement, with low aspirations for his/her children’s Jewish development, with little confidence in day schools’ efficacy, and with heightened concerns about the potential ghettoizing impact of day schools. According to this analysis, these two types of parents would differ dramatically in their readiness to send their children to day school.

By demonstrating the influence of each of the four highlighted factors on attitudes toward day school, this analysis contains implications for efforts to market day schools to non-Orthodox Jewish parents. Although it may be difficult to raise levels of Jewish involvement among prospective parents, it may be more feasible to engage them in the question of the level of Jewish commitment they seek in their children (raising their aspirations) and in understanding the effectiveness of day school as a means to achieving those laudable ends. Though a function of their own commitment to being Jewish, parents’ aspirations for their children’s Jewish commitment are a dimension unto themselves. Perhaps day school advocates can heighten such aspirations. Moreover, although day school advocates may view the Jewish educational effectiveness as a given, parents do not regard this assumption
as intuitively obvious. This analysis suggests that convincing more parents that
day schools deliver, that they make a difference in the Jewish commitment of their
graduates, should also contribute to expanding the market for Jewish day schools.

Moreover, advocates for day schools need to take to heart the extent to which
concerns about ghettoization diminish the appeal of day schools for some par-
ents. Accordingly, recruitment efforts need to pay attention to this issue, and day
schools may need to undertake symbolically important activities and practices that
display their ability and interest in helping their students function in the larger
society.

In sum, the choice of day schools for non-Orthodox parents is an option, one
that is influenced by a host of factors, many of which were explored in this analysis.
Whereas the Orthodox are almost universally using day schools, not being Ortho-
dox does not rule out day schools as a live option. Although affordability may be
an obstacle for some, it is a surmountable barrier, especially when other concerns
are properly addressed. For the non-Orthodox, day schools exert special appeal to
those who are (1) more involved in Jewish life, (2) interested in higher levels of Jew-
ish commitment for their children, (3) confident about the ability of day schools
to provide more committed youngsters, and (4) satisfied that day schools will not
ghettoize their children. It follows that day school leaders, recruiters, and advocates
need to incorporate policies, programs, and practices that address these and related
concerns on the part of prospective day school parents.

REFERENCES

Adams, L., J. Frankel, and N. Newbauer. 1972. "Parental Attitudes toward the Jewish All-Day

Cohen, Steven M. 1995. "The Impact of Varieties of Jewish Education upon Jewish Identity:

gious Commitment*, ed. Jack Wertheimer, 18–23. New York: Jewish Theological Seminary
of America.

———. 1999. "Money Matters: Incentives and Obstacles to Jewish Day School Enrollment

———. 2004. "Jewish Educational Background: Trends and Variations among Today's Jew-
ish Adults." United Jewish Communities Report Series on the National Jewish Popula-

Kapel, D. E. 1972. "Parental Views of a Jewish Day School." *Jewish Education* 41 (2) (Sum-

Kelman, Stuart L. 1979. "Parent Motivations for Enrolling a Child in a Non-Orthodox Jew-

Schools exist first and foremost to educate the young. They are settings where, as John Dewey put it, society places all it has accomplished at the disposal of its future members. The social importance of schools until now has therefore derived from their influence on what Dewey called “the life of the child” (Dewey 1902/1990). For many years, however, researchers have shown that schools can also exert great influence on the lives of those who are already adult. Since the 1930s, sociologists of teaching have found that schools can mark the identities and values of those for whom they serve as workplaces, that is, those adults whose daily lives are conducted in their classrooms, corridors, and offices (Waller 1960; Lortie 1975).

What has been less commonly considered by researchers is the influence of schools on the lives of other adults, most obviously, those whose children they serve. Thus, when parents have been the focus of educational research, they have generally been viewed as agents whose presence or absence shape the quality of children’s schooling, not as subjects who may themselves be changed by their relationships with their children’s schools (Honig et al. 2001). Schools, it was supposed, are sites of learning for youngsters and not for adults who had already been to schools themselves.

In recent decades, with the emergence of charter schools, magnet schools, and school vouchers as educational options for millions of American parents, there has been a modest move toward a different, dialectical, appreciation of the relationships between parents and their children’s schools. Researchers have been
interested in the calculations behind parents’ choice of schools for their children (Goldring and Hausman 1996). They have studied school choice not only for how it affects children’s education but for how it serves as a marker or facet of parents’ own identities (Goldberg 1990). There has also been a move toward examining parent involvement in schools in relation to benefits in parents’ own lives and not just in terms of the consequences for children’s learning (Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler 1997; Mattingly et al. 2002).

In this paper I take up a view of parents as agents who shape and are shaped by their continuing interactions with their children’s schools in order to explore the impact of Jewish day schools on parents’ lives. This inquiry is grounded in two assumptions, one empirical, one theoretical: first, that Jewish day schools are private schools. Children, therefore attend day schools as a result of active choices made by parents based on their individual preferences. In addition, as private institutions, day schools depend on parent involvement for their governance, funding, and day-to-day operations. These organizational facts mean that schools occupy a significant place in the lives of many parents. The second (theoretical) assumption behind this inquiry is that adult identities are constantly being made, unmade, and remade in response to and as a direct result of the “dialectical interplay of processes of internal and external definition” (Hall 1997). People’s performances are what make them momentarily who they are. From this perspective, parents are necessarily influenced by their involvements in their children’s schools. How they involve themselves in their children’s education will have some effect on who they are as adults, since their performances not only express who they are, but also change them.

These assumptions lie behind my examination of two sets of related questions that can help expose the impact of Jewish day schools on parents’ lives:

1. On what grounds do parents choose day schools for their children? What constrains parents’ choice of schools? What does school choice say about parents’ aspirations for their children as well as about their own sense of themselves?
2. In what ways do parents and schools interact with one another once children have been admitted as students? How do parents and teachers conceive of the interactions between them? What are the consequences of these interactions?

By considering the direct interactions between parents and schools and also the indirect interactions that derive from what children bring in to their homes from school, it is possible to examine the impact of schools on parents’ lives and to uncover the extent to which they serve adults as well as children.

**Methodology and Research Process**

The growth of Jewish all-day schooling has been one of the most remarkable social phenomena of American Jewish life since World War II (Ackerman 1989). In 1944,
there were thirty-nine day schools in the United States, most of them in New York City; by 1982, there were more than 550. Today there are more than 750 schools located in thirty-three states and the District of Columbia (Schick 2005). As the number of schools has increased, so the proportion of Jewish school-age children enrolled has also risen. It is estimated that in 1962 there were 60,000 pupils in day schools; that by 1982–83 there were some 104,000 students, representing about 10 percent of the Jewish school-age population (Della Pergola and Schmelz 1989); and in 2004, there were approximately 205,000 students, that is, nearly one-quarter of all Jewish school-age children (Schick 2005).

Because of the difficulties involved in coming to grips with a social phenomenon of this magnitude, I have adopted a qualitative case study approach. Often likened to viewing the universe within a grain of sand, a qualitative study can capture the quality of human experience in ways that may not have been previously evident or understood. It cannot quantify the extent of different phenomena, but it can generate categories for subsequent study within a quantitative analytical framework. A case study, likewise, cannot claim to produce findings that are typical, but if constructed carefully, it can aspire to what Connelly and Clandinin (1990) call *verisimilitude*, a life-likeness that communicates what it is like “over there” to those who are “over here” (Geertz 1988).

In my quest for a representative case, I set out to study a medium-size Jewish community (with a population greater than fifty thousand and less than one hundred thousand) where there is more than one non-Orthodox day school option. In such a community Jewish parents have a choice not only between day school education and public or non-Jewish private schools but also between a variety of day schools. Eight such communities exist outside the Greater New York area where Schick (2000) has calculated that slightly more than half of the national day school student population is located.

Centerville, the city I chose (and known henceforward by this pseudonym), satisfied many of my criteria for representativeness. The city’s metropolitan area has a population of slightly more than 2.5 million and is away from the eastern seaboard. It is home to almost 60,000 Jews, almost all of whom have moved out of the inner city into the suburbs of Centerville County, where their numbers have been stable for the past thirty years. The community supports four Jewish elementary day schools spanning the denominational spectrum, with a combined population of almost 650 students. This institutional diversity makes possible an analysis of the processes of school choice and also a comparison of the ways in which families and schools (of different denominational orientations) relate to one another once a choice of school has been made.

Between February and May 2004, I spent two to three days in each school. In each instance, I interviewed senior administrators, between six and ten faculty members, rabbis from congregations associated with each school, and other community informants. I collected documentary artifacts produced by children, parents, and teachers. I attended morning *tehilla* (an experience that opened
a valuable window onto the particular culture of each school), and I mixed with children and teachers in the schoolyard, the parking lot, and school corridors. I also attended the annual gala of one of the schools.

A research assistant interviewed thirty-one sets of parents from the four elementary schools who were selected to represent a cross-section of the school’s population. The mean age of participants was forty-five. The youngest was thirty-eight, and the oldest (by five years) was fifty-seven. In the majority of cases both spouses/partners were interviewed. The interviews took place in people’s homes and workplaces, and followed a script of questions similar to that used by Riv-Ellen Prell and Jeffrey Kress in their studies.

The Research Context

In qualitative research both the researcher and the research context are shaped by particularities. Neither can fully stand-in for other people or other places. Disclosing the particular characteristics of the research context is not intended to emphasize the gap between the research findings and other realities (and so diminish their generalizability) but is aimed at providing a context for readers within which to locate the findings in relation to other places and other times.

Introducing the Schools

As indicated above, Centerville, the study site, was selected because of its representativeness in terms of the size and diversity of its Jewish all-day schools. Its four schools, and the timing of their creation, correspond well with trends that have played out across the United States over the past fifty years. The Hirsch Academy (a pseudonym like the names of all other schools in this study) was founded in the 1940s under Orthodox auspices with a goal of serving students from across the community. It is one of the oldest American day schools outside the eastern seaboard. In the early 1980s, a second day school, the Frankel School, was launched under the auspices of the Conservative Solomon Schechter Day School network during a period that coincided with a bitter desegregation battle in Centerville-area public schools. In the late 1980s, a third school, Hafetz Haim Prep, was launched by a group of parents who split away from the Hirsch Academy in order to create a non-coeducational school for boys and girls. Most recently, in the late 1990s, a Reform school, the Baeck Academy, was founded with the help of matching funds from a foundation that supports the creation of new day schools.

There are two Jewish high schools in Centerville that were not included in the study. One was founded in the 1970s as a coeducational continuation of the Hirsch school. Today, it operates different sites for boys and girls with a combined student enrollment across grades 9 to 12 of about fifty students. Most students are graduates of Hirsch Academy. The other high school is a Beis Yaakov girls school with a
student enrollment of about thirty-five across the four high school grades. Most of its students are graduates of Hafetz Haim Prep.

All of the elementary schools apart from the Baeck Academy (which is growing grade by grade each year) operate classes from kindergarten to grade 8. As is typical of day schools elsewhere, class sizes in all four schools are small compared with those in public schools. There are rarely more than twenty students in a class, and in some instances (for example at Hafetz Haim, where boys and girls are taught in separate sites after grade 1) there can be fewer than ten students in a class. The schools are privately incorporated. Their funding comes from annual school-based fundraising campaigns, from tuition subsidies provided by the local Jewish Federation, and from student fees—which at the time of the study were set at about $9,000 a year. In contrast to some day schools elsewhere, the four schools are institutionally independent, that is, they are not operated as agencies of specific synagogues, although two (Frankel and Baeck) rent space from synagogues.

All four schools offer a “dual curriculum” of Hebrew/Judaic studies and general studies. The mix in each case corresponds to norms prevailing in similar schools elsewhere. At Hirsch, the day is equally divided between Jewish and general studies, each of which is taught by a different teacher. At Frankel, there is also a clear separation between Jewish and general studies, with about one-third of the timetable allocated to the former. At Baeck, the Jewish and general curriculum is essentially integrated and taught by the same classroom teacher, with a specialist teaching Hebrew language for one hour a day. At Hafetz Haim, a major part of the day is devoted to Hebrew and Judaic studies, with general studies usually confined to afternoon hours. In all cases, the school day is longer than in most other public and private schools.

Distinctive Features in the Research Context

Although these features of Centerville’s day schools make them representative of the great majority of small- to medium-size day schools in North America, specific aspects of the social and educational context in the greater Centerville region, in the Centerville Jewish community, and within the four schools themselves give this setting its particular character and strongly color the relationship between parents and schools.

Public Schooling in the Centerville Region

Centerville was once one of the largest cities in the nation. Today, according to one local history, “it is a ghost of its former self.” As in numerous other metropolitan areas, a divide has opened up between the mostly white suburbs and the city core populated largely by blacks and Latinos. In a Jewish Federation census from the mid-1990s, it was found that less than 10 percent of Jewish households have
remained in the city, their primary area of settlement until World War II. The remainder has settled in Centerville County with “its autonomous, locally controlled municipalities, their separate fire departments, police departments, and, most important, school systems” (Wells and Crain 1997: 67).

The good reputation of Centerville County public school districts is a large factor in making suburban neighborhoods so attractive to families with children. Nevertheless, if Centerville County public schools are more attractive than public schools in many other regions of the United States, their appeal is moderated by two local factors. First, there is a long tradition of private parochial schooling in the area because of the predominance of European immigrants in the region with a preference for Catholic education. A study in the early 1990s found that more than 20 percent of school-age children in the metropolitan area enrolled in private schools, nearly double the national average of 11 percent, with three-quarters of private school students attending Catholic schools (Savageau and Boyer 1993). A second factor undermining the appeal of county public schools has been the fallout from a protracted legal battle over public school desegregation that resulted, in the early 1980s, in the launch of a “voluntary” program for transferring children from the suburbs into city magnet schools and from the city into suburban schools. While the impact of desegregation on the quality of suburban schools remains moot, its perception has created a sense among some suburban parents that public schools are not as academically serious or as safe as they once were.

The Centerville Jewish Community

In many respects the Jewish community of Centerville has been a bellwether of the forces that have shaped American Jewish life over the past two hundred years. Founded at the start of the nineteenth century, the Jewish community prospered with the influx of large numbers of German Jews in the twenty years before the Civil War. Reform Judaism flourished in a city that retained visible traces of its European origins well into the twentieth century. The cultural and fraternal organizations created by the community proved long-lasting too, and in time absorbed the large influx of Eastern European Jews who arrived in the city around the turn of the twentieth century. The community thus conforms to patterns similar to those in most Midwestern urban Jewish communities.

A Jewish Federation–sponsored study conducted in the mid-1990s found that Centerville’s Jewish community today is much like American communities of similar size, in terms of the observance of Jewish practices, perceptions of antisemitism, rates of intermarriage, and connection to Israel. The proportion of children under the age of fourteen attending Jewish day schools is also close to national levels (22 percent of the 72 percent of all Jewish children who attend Jewish schools in grades K through 8). The community departs from national patterns in two central respects: in rates of synagogue membership, which are almost 20 percent higher than the national average of 39 percent, and in the proportion of families who identify
themselves with Jewish denominations in general (nearly 20 percent above the national average) and with the Reform movement in particular (at 60 percent, almost 30 percent above the national average). As will be seen below, the combined effects of high levels of congregational affiliation together with the dominant position of the Reform movement in Centerville has resulted in ambiguous consequences for day school education.

The Jewish Elementary Schools of Centerville

Although the shared features of Centerville’s Jewish elementary schools were described above, the city’s four day schools differ from one another (and from denominationally similar schools elsewhere) as a result of the combined effects of local circumstance and culture. It is difficult to appreciate the interrelationship between parents and schools without first sketching the particular characteristics of the four schools. In an essay of this length, these sketches cannot aspire to comprehensiveness, but they can at least provide some sense of what Lawrence-Lightfoot (1983) calls the “institutional story” in each setting, particularly as it relates to the relationship between school and home.

THE HIRSCH ACADEMY As indicated above, the Hirsch Academy is one of the oldest day schools in the United States outside the New York area.Founded during World War II, it was for almost forty years the only Jewish day school in Centerville and operated as a community school albeit with an Orthodox ethos. Today, following the diversification of day school options in the city, the school serves a parent body that is primarily Orthodox in orientation (some three-quarters of the parents attend three Orthodox synagogues) but retains an openness to students from non-orthodox families. Between 5 and 10 percent of the students are new-Americans with few Jewish connections, and a small number come from families affiliated with non-Orthodox congregations. The school’s history of inclusiveness explains why Hirsch, although an Orthodox school, retains a reputation for being more diverse and less selective than other day schools. The school’s commitments are well communicated by its mission statement: “disciplined and inspired by Torah, dedicated to the Jewish people and the State of Israel, committed to excellence in religious and general studies, the school seeks to educate all Jewish children in a nurturing environment.”

Visiting the Hirsch Academy, one is struck by the ample nature of the recently refurbished facility, located on the edge of a business park midway between the two main communities from which most of the school’s 250 students come. The school includes many of the features one might expect from a good private school: a sizable gym, a comfortable library, a computer laboratory, a resource room for students with special learning needs, well-stocked classrooms, and sufficient office space.

For all its physical solidity, the school betrays symptoms of the fragility that besets modern Orthodox life in Centerville and beyond. This fragility is seen in
challenges related to staffing choices, recruitment dilemmas, and curriculum controversies. A common feature of modern Orthodox schools is that Jewish studies faculty and the students they teach often hail from different communities. At Hirsch this is seen most immediately in the fact that (in contrast to other Centerville day schools) Jewish studies teachers and students observe different dress codes. The male teachers observe the standard yeshiva wear of black pants and white shirts, whereas the students look much like (modestly dressed) kids at any other school.

For the Jewish studies faculty at Hirsch, working in the school provides an opportunity to realize an agenda of kiruv—outreach to the nonobservant. This is not an agenda they pursue aggressively—teachers employ the language of religious “growth” rather than of change—but it is an agenda that implies a negative valuation of their students’ lifestyles. For many families this is a problem. Their own values, if not delegitimized, are implicitly critiqued. However, because of the difficulty in recruiting “modern” Orthodox faculty to a medium-size community like Centerville, such discomfort is a necessary but unfortunate fact of life.

In relation to student recruitment, Hirsch suffers from a dilemma that besets many modern Orthodox schools. On the one hand, the school cannot expect to recruit more effectively in the ultra-Orthodox community while it remains coeducational, the most profound indicator of religious orientation (or what is often called hashkafa). On the other hand, if it recruits more energetically within non-Orthodox communities, it will drive away more traditional families who do not want their children to become a minority even while the school maintains its Orthodox ethos. Ultimately, the school must work with a fragile and narrow constituency, navigating competing pressures—the so-called pull to the right (of ultra-Orthodoxy) and the left (of liberal-Orthodox and Conservative Judaism). Often, the least problematic solution is to refrain from proactive recruitment.

In a politicized environment where people are especially alert to boundary crossings, parents are acutely sensitive to the nuances of school life. The markers of modern Orthodoxy are subtle and contested, and are liable to provoke eruptions over numerous matters such as dress code, Hebrew reading policy, the celebration of Yom Haatzmaut, and school policy regarding the associations between boys and girls. The school’s stance on any of these issues is liable both to attract and enrage members of the parent body.

The Frankel School Like the Hirsch Academy, the Frankel School has been in existence long enough to graduate a number of generations of students. The school was founded in the early 1980s by activist lay-people and clergy within the Conservative community in order to offer a non-Orthodox alternative to the Hirsch Academy. The school’s creation, although catalyzed by a period of uncertainty in the public school system, was ultimately triggered by an attempt to introduce greater religious conformity at Hirsch. At that moment, a group of families sought to introduce the Solomon Schechter franchise to Centerville, enabling them
to access an intensive day school education without having to justify themselves as non-Orthodox Jews.

For fifteen years, Frankel operated classes from kindergarten to grade 6 and then some half-dozen years ago expanded to include a middle school division that still struggles to retain half of its students in grades 7 and 8. Until a few years ago, the school was housed in the Hebrew school building of one of Centerville’s largest suburban Conservative congregations in an area known for the quality of both public and private schools.

Today, more than twenty years after its creation, Frankel is located in its own recently completed and purpose-built structure on the grounds of its original synagogue landlord. A great deal of careful attention has been given to the physical organization of the school. The buildings are full of light; there are carpets in every classroom; grassy fields surround the building; and at the school’s heart is a thoughtfully planned sanctuary, an intimate space designed for use by groups of different sizes and ages. A colorfully decorated passageway connects the school building to the adjacent synagogue. In sum, the school’s physical appearance and facilities compare favorably with those of local private schools.

In many ways, the school’s organization is as impressive as its physical appearance. It operates a highly developed system for communicating with parents. It has developed a sophisticated curriculum map covering all grades and subjects, an achievement that distinguishes it from most North American Jewish day schools. It markets itself efficiently in the Jewish community and beyond. It maintains a current and highly informative Web site, and in order to ensure high levels of parent involvement, it operates a detailed system for ensuring “volunteer service.”

The school’s mission statement makes no mention of Conservative Judaism. It talks instead of “[Kindling] the eternal lights of Judaism and love of learning in each child” and of “[enriching] our children’s lives by involving families and congregations in an integrated curriculum designed to instill critical thinking skills in the context of Jewish values.” Nevertheless, since its creation, the great majority of students in the school have come from families affiliated with one of Centerville’s four Conservative or “traditional” synagogues. This proportion (close to 70 percent) is higher than is often the case at Solomon Schechter schools in other cities, which attract greater numbers of both unaffiliated and modern Orthodox families, a fact that can probably be attributed to the fragility and resultant conformism of Centerville’s modern Orthodox community and also to the generally high rates of synagogue affiliation in the city.

Although Frankel has become an impressive physical presence in the community, with a student enrollment of more than 220 students that rivals if not exceeds that at the Hirsch Academy, the vagueness of its mission statement indicates an uncertainty at the heart of the institution. The great majority of students in the school come from families affiliated with Conservative congregations, and yet those families constitute a minority of Conservative synagogue members in Centerville.
Since its establishment, there has been uncertainty about how to market the school to Conservative synagogue members ambivalent about day school education. The preferred strategy has been to emphasize “academic excellence”—the fact that Frankel alumni “excel in top public and private schools” and “have made their mark at prestigious universities.” But this approach (with its implicit elitism) conflicts with a broader commitment to Jewish community and student inclusion. A second strategy, that of promoting the school as the non-Orthodox day school alternative to Hirsch has become problematic with the creation five years ago of a Reform day school in Centerville. Indeed, this uncertainty about what distinguishes a Conservative day school (in a city where membership in Conservative synagogues is declining and where the great majority of Jews are affiliated with Reform congregations) may account for the high turnover among the school’s senior leadership as they struggle to satisfy the sometimes contradictory concerns of the parent body. At the time of the study the school was at another moment of transition, with one principal (who favored emphasizing the quality of the school’s Jewish education) about to leave and an acting principal (who was inclined to emphasize excellence in general education) about to take over.

HAFETZ HAIM PREP Uncertainty of vision is not a criticism one can make of the third Jewish day school to be established in Centerville. Hafetz Haim Prep was founded in the late 1980s by a small group of parents, all of whom were members of the same Orthodox synagogue. This group withdrew from the Hirsch Academy because, in their own words, they wanted “more rigorous religious observance and studies in the school,” a curriculum with greater emphasis on Jewish studies, and the separation of boys and girls from the elementary grades upward. The school they created began with a kindergarten for six children in the basement of a private house. Today, there are about two hundred children from pre-kindergarten to grade 8, with boys and girls located at separate sites from grade 2 onward.

The two branches of Hafetz Haim are closer to the city center than Centerville’s other day schools, located in a neighborhood of longtime Jewish settlement where there is easy walking access to synagogues and other Jewish institutions. The boys’ branch is situated in what was once a large store, while the girls’ branch is in a former Christian school, separated by a parking lot from a still functioning church. The two buildings look somewhat rundown and betray the impression that they were once intended for other purposes.

It is tautologous to talk about the relationship between families and the school in the case of Hafetz Haim. Although there are some two hundred children in the school, they come from only sixty families (some from families with more than ten children), most of whom worship alongside their children’s teachers in the same Orthodox synagogue. Parents and teachers shop in the same small number of kosher stores and participate together in the same welfare and social associations. It is difficult to talk about the role of parents as volunteers in the school when at least one adult in almost half of the school’s families is employed as a teacher or staff
member. In many cases, these families only came to Centerville so that a parent could take up an appointment in the school.

Providing an intense Torah education is central to the school’s raison d’être. While students receive what is described as “a satisfactory general education,” priority, according to the school’s mission statement, is given to “teaching students to live their lives as Observant Jews according to the Halacha.” These priorities are reflected in the fact that graduates of the school almost always continue on to Jewish high schools with intensive Judaic studies programs, with girls attending the Beis Yaakov High School in Centerville and boys leaving town to receive the kind of yeshiva education currently unavailable in Centerville.

The school does little to recruit families. It does not hold open houses for prospective parents; it does not provide buddies for new parents; and it does not advertise in the press. As one administrator explained, the school does not need to market itself. Parents with young children know what the school is about even before they register their first child because of their social relationships with those deeply involved in the institution. And, as many parents and teachers insisted during interview, they would not have stayed in Centerville if the school did not exist. They would have moved to other cities where a non-coeducational day school option is available.

To a great extent, Hafetz Haim Prep is the keystone in the arch of Centerville’s ultra-Orthodox community. It is neither the largest nor most visible piece in the edifice. Other institutions, particularly the synagogue, play a more prominent role in parents’ daily lives, but without the school the community would probably not survive. It is, therefore, no accident that the school was launched within a few years of the creation of the synagogue from which most parents come. Educationally and institutionally, the school provides chizuk. It affirms families’ choices to live intense Jewish lives in Centerville.

**Baeck Academy**  The creation story behind the Baeck Academy, Centerville’s most recently launched day school, is different again. The school was neither conceived by pioneering educators nor by concerned parents joining together in pursuit of a common agenda. It was founded by a small number of congregational elders. These people, essentially grandparents, were concerned about the sustainability of the Reform community in Centerville or, to put it bluntly, they were troubled that their own grandchildren might not be or were no longer being raised as Jews. The initiative was controversial in a city where the clergy in Reform congregations have a long and prominent history of activism on behalf of public education, where less than 5 percent of children in Reform congregations attend private school, and where there is a well-established Reform afternoon school system serving more than two thousand children. In short, the school was created in the face of opposition from those who might be expected to provide its natural constituency.

The two senior administrators at the time of the school’s launch (and who were still in place five years later) were two veteran educators from the Centerville area
with solid backgrounds in Reform congregational education as well as in public education. They have developed a sophisticated curriculum that in their own words took “the best practices educationally from around the world, the best of informal Jewish education and formal Jewish education, the best of the camp experience, and created a new culture for Reform Judaism.” Occasionally, they have found it difficult to appoint faculty to realize this vision, but their own rich careers in the community have enabled them to attract former colleagues and associates to work with them or to invest in the school.

Like other schools at a similar stage of development, excitement and uncertainty surrounds the Baeck Academy, making it attractive for some and problematic for others. The school is planned to include two classes from kindergarten to grade 6 with about fifteen children in each class. At the time of the study, there were from kindergarten to grade 3 more than fifty children from about forty families. When it opened, there were just eight children in one kindergarten class. Since then, the school has rented space from one of the oldest Reform Temples in Centerville. The space, although adequate, lacks additional facilities such as a gym, playground, and child-friendly library. Symbolic of the changing face of Reform Judaism in America, the landlord congregation, today aging and in decline, would in its prime have been a staunch opponent of Jewish parochial education.

The majority of families in the school (some 70 percent) are affiliated with Reform congregations. A significant minority are unaffiliated or are connected with Conservative synagogues but have been attracted to the school because of its progressive educational philosophy, its inclusion of intermarried families (which constitute about 30 percent of those in the school) and its creative approach to Jewish education. A significant minority of families can be described as elite members of the Reform community, that is, family members of clergy, educators, and Federation young leadership.

In contrast to Hafetz Haim Prep, there are few issues at Baeck more important than recruitment. The school calendar is constructed around the recruitment effort: the school organizes mailings to Temple members with newborns, coffee mornings, prospective parent evenings, open houses, and kindergarten visits by current students. In general (and in this case not unlike Hafetz Haim) there is a frequently intimate relationship between the Baeck Academy and its parent body. To some extent this reflects parents’ concern for a fledgling educational enterprise, but it is also because the school holds many events during the year that bring parents into the building or that involve families taking up aspects of the curriculum in their own homes. The school building even includes a room set aside as a “parents’ room,” where adults can come in to schmooze with one another or to help with the preparation of classroom resources.

In a later section, I will discuss the causes and consequence of these measures. For the moment, it will suffice to suggest that the school’s relationship with parents reflects its dominant institutional story as a young institution struggling to realize an alternative vision of Jewish schooling for which few models exist in the Jewish
world and for which there is only tentative support in the local community. Forged by its contested place in the community, the educators articulate a different vision, of a Jewish day school that does not just provide for the continuity of Jewish culture and peoplehood but one that encourages cultural creativity.

Although these sketches indicate that parents face an array of choices when it comes to choosing schools for their children, this account is both overstated and understated. On the one hand, there are few if any families for whom all four schools constitute competing options, while on the other hand, most Jewish families actually choose from among many more public and private school options not described here. The four schools are, therefore, both more and less than the full story as far as school choice for Jewish parents in Centerville is concerned. For our purposes, they mark out the boundaries within which this study is conducted. They make up the stage on which parents play out their relationships with Jewish day schools.

On What Basis Do Parents Choose Schools?

A central challenge in studying school choice (as in much social scientific research) is to avoid reductionism, that is, the distillation of a complex set of considerations and constraints into a series of analytical categories that rarely correspond with the choices made by particular individuals at particular moments in time. This methodological problem is exacerbated in the case of school choice in two further ways: when parental decision making is seen as a singular, rational act, and when school choice is viewed as a zero-sum activity where the only constraint on those making choices is the availability of reliable information. Often it seems as if day school advocates are guilty of both of these assumptions. They assume that public schooling constitutes a default option that parents abandon only when public education fails to meet their needs or expectations. Advocates argue that if day schools would only provide (and demonstrate) a level of general education superior to that available in other school systems, parents (as rational consumers) would find day schools hard to resist.

Behind these arguments lies a conception of individuals (parents) as rational decision makers who act out of self-interest and who choose alternatives that provide the highest benefits based on individual preferences, once they have weighed all of the educational options and alternatives (Ostrom and Ostrom 1971). According to exponents of this “rational choice” perspective, there are four broad considerations that (all) parents take up when choosing schools: (1) academic reputation and curriculum, (2) discipline and safety, (3) religion and social values, and (4) convenience. It is suggested that when public schools fall short in terms of some or all of these considerations, parents are ready to select alternative public or private schools (Goldring and Shapira, 1993).

Although our interviewees rarely took up these four considerations in neat or
systematic fashion, there is evidence of some such calculus behind the way a number of them talked about their choices, particularly in relation to the relative appeal of day school and public school. For example, one family explained that they switched their children from public school to the Frankel School when they “started noticing that . . . educationally something was missing [in public school] which we couldn’t put our finger on at the time, and which we later identified as the Judaics side of the school.” Other parents emphasized how much safer it was for their children at the Baeck Academy: “By safe I don’t mean locks on the doors. . . . It’s a safe place emotionally and intellectually. It’s remarkably free of negative influences, which is not something that you would expect in many other schools based on the news that I see on TV.” At the Hirsch Academy, a number of parents offered an objective analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of the school, but ultimately found the school’s congruence with their own social and religious values to be decisive. In one memorable instance, a father offered a series of compelling academic and convenience reasons why Hirsch was not a “perfect school” but then explained that the school’s values made it unquestionably preferable to Hafetz Haim.

A succinct demonstration of the calculus behind choosing a day school is provided by a couple of parents at the Frankel School:

rs6b: David and I are both products of public school, so we automatically assumed that our child would go to public school. [Our local public school] system is good. Adam, who is our oldest, is a very bright individual. . . . What brought me to [Frankel] was its ability grouping. In other words, if your kids were in a higher reading group, they would separate them out. If they were in a higher math group, they would separate them out. That is honestly what brought us here. The perk of having the Jewish studies was great. Grow up, good moral values, good judgment, nice people, homogenous type group was certainly a plus, and didn’t have to go to Hebrew school. So that was a real plus, but it wasn’t what brought us here. It was really the general studies.

This brief statement shows how parents can weigh a number of concerns when choosing a school: social and religious values (“good moral values”), convenience (not having to go to afternoon Hebrew school), and social considerations (“nice people, homogenous group”). Yet, these comments, like those we heard from many others, also make plain that parents do not relate to public education as a factor “pushing” them toward the consideration of private or Jewish alternatives. Other than for a minority of families who lived close to Centerville city and who talked of choosing between moving to a better school district or staying in the city and sending their children to private school, parents indicated that the (poor) quality of public schools did not make it necessary to look at private school alternatives. Instead (at least for those not already thinking exclusively in terms of Jewish day school), public education framed parents’ calculations, providing a set of reference points against which to measure their educational options. For these (invariably non-Orthodox) parents, Jewish day school was only a plausible option if it was at
least as good as public school. Public education provided a context (a frame) for
their choice, but not its central cause. This is well demonstrated by the responses of
a couple of Baeck parents:

**BA4a:** The day school academics were the number one thing, and the religious
content was a bonus.

**BA4b:** It had to be at least as good as our public school, which is the best in the
state, academically. And we moved to this neighbourhood for the schools which
are the best in [the state].

**BA4a:** And when we moved here, Baeck had only been around maybe a year or two,
and we really had no intention of sending our kid anywhere other than the public
school.

**BA4b:** Well I’m a product of public school. [Baeck] wasn’t even on our radar. And
guess what, I was even hired as a freelance writer to write the brochure for Baeck
before they opened. And I’m writing it, and thinking this is going to be a great
school and I’ll never use it. I mean it was not even a consideration.

**BA4a:** . . . It wasn’t Baeck versus other day school considerations or even other
private school considerations.

**BA4b:** If [our girls] were not at Baeck, we would be at public school. If there was not
a Reform day school option in Centerville, we would be in public school.

**BA4a:** And if it wasn’t an excellent Reform day school, if it were just the fact that it
were a Reform day school, it wouldn’t have been enough. But the fact that they
had an excellent academic side and that we feel they do a great job of instilling
the Jewish values. There is a lot of character education about how they treat
others, how they see their place in the world. Those things were lacking in the
public school.

These comments are provocative, as they complicate commonplace notions
about perceptions of public education within the process of day school choice.
They prompt the question: Why do people whose values and experiences make
them inclined to support public education end up choosing day schools? Or, in the
words of one Baeck father, who asked rhetorically about himself, how does an indi-
vidual who would once have viewed “someone who went to Jewish day school as a
dork with a yarmulke” become a day school parent, even when, as his own parents
have reminded him, “you have the best public school in the country in your back-
yard”? I want to suggest two possible answers to these questions—one that takes up
concepts from the developing literature on magnet school choice and another that
suggests a move in a less conventional interpretative direction.

**Social and Familial Networks as a Context for School Choice**

Smrekar and Goldring (1999) argue that the most telling critique of rational choice
theory derives from Coleman’s (1990) conceptualization of the social networks
within which individuals make decisions. These networks not only influence the
quantity and quality of information on which individuals draw in order to make
choices (about matters such as where to send their children to school), they also shape the values and commitments that determine how individuals act on this information (that is, how they prioritize considerations and concerns). This does not mean that people’s decisions are socially determined, but it does emphasize that so-called individual decisions are made in negotiation with given or inherited circumstances.

Social networks have had a pervasive impact on all interviewees in this study. Thus, it was hard to find any Frankel School interviewees who were not intimate with other families that had already experienced a Solomon Schechter (Conservative day school) education either in Centerville or elsewhere in the United States. In an extreme case, an intermarried couple, who were not themselves affiliated with a Conservative congregation and where the husband was “not interested in converting,” placed their daughter in Frankel after moving to Centerville from another city where their daughter had been in a public school gifted program. They explained that their daughter “needed the bar higher”:

FS2: [In the public school] everything was geared towards pulling people up to the middle. And we had friends in Frankel here, we had friends in Schechter in New York, we had friends in Schechter in Chicago. And it just seemed that in Schechter schools the bar was higher. . . . It’s more challenging for the kids, and then they throw in this great Jewish education. . . . We said, we are not Conservative but we are ready to buy in to that. . . . We had all of these friends who are not much more observant than we are, and we met people in the community who belonged to Reform synagogues and were happy at Frankel. So that was the decision.

In this case and others, the existence of family and friendship networks improved the quality of information people received about the school (by providing them with insider information), but the networks also possessed a different dimension. They helped people feel a sense of belonging with those already in the school. Parents could see themselves fitting in. They saw families who they looked like or who they would like to look like. Social networks thus made the choice of a particular school plausible if not desirable. As a couple who became deeply involved at Hafetz Haim explained:

HH2b: We spoke to a few people [at the ultra-Orthodox (UO) synagogue]. We spoke to some of the various families, and we just could feel that we were inspired. We would like our family to be like certain families that . . .

HH2a: We saw them as role models.

HH2b: Yeah. We saw them as role models, and those families were the ones from Hafetz Haim.

At some point, membership in a familial or friendship network can make choice of a particular school necessary; that is, membership in the network acts as a predicate for school choice. This effect was especially noticeable among orthodox Jews whose membership in one or another synagogue more or less determined their
choice of school. Thus, although the children of a small number of families at the UO synagogue attended the Hirsch Academy because of special considerations of one sort or another, Hafetz Haim was overwhelmingly the normative option for synagogue members. As one Hafetz Haim parent pointed out, it is not so much that membership in the synagogue influences one's choice of school: “It’s like a chicken and egg thing. It is not that the synagogue is going to lead you to the school or vice versa. They both reflect the same values.” Membership in the synagogue is created by and also creates certain commitments of which a preference for ultra-Orthodox day school education is one.

Among non-Orthodox interviewees, we found a few further social networks that produced similar effects. For example, four families at the Baeck Academy share membership in a Havura (an informal group for worship, fellowship, and prayer made up of six activist Reform families). Although none cited membership in the Havura as the factor that led them to the school, it is surely no coincidence that these families talk about what they get from the school in similar ways, emphasizing “the joy of Judaism” and Jewish spirituality.

A group of interviewees at the Frankel School explicitly connected their satisfaction with sending their children to the preschool of a Conservative congregation and their willingness to continue with Conservative day school education. Although one described it as a case of “being sucked in by a wonderful preschool program,” it is apparent that the preschool’s influence worked not only by modeling the quality of a program in an all-day Jewish setting, it also created a social network in which continuing on to a Conservative day school was desirable.

Occasionally, social networks can be so powerful that they constrain an inclination to satisfy otherwise countervailing considerations. In these situations parents (especially Orthodox ones) talk about “not having any choice” or about having to sacrifice certain educational ideals when it comes to school selection. A South African immigrant to Centerville explained:

HA6: There are other schools that perhaps would have been more of a choice for us—public schools where they would have been exposed to diverse communities, and we could process that with our children. Or private schools that are into ecology and into the Native Americans and into alternative lifestyles. That would have been interesting for us. We would have loved their teaching. Or schools that were much stronger in the arts, music, and drama. I would have chosen that. And to sacrifice all of that so that our kids could be in an Orthodox environment—that was the main thing.

A Personal-Historical Context for School Choice

Running through the presentation of these cases is an emphasis on the social circumstances within which school choice is made and the way these circumstances complicate and constrain individuals’ attempts to satisfy their needs and goals. Although this (weakly deterministic) interpretative orientation provides a more
nuanced view of school choice than is proposed by rational choice theory, it may not probe deeply enough into the making of decisions that are freighted with existential significance for the decision maker. Decisions that express and shape an individual’s identity (as I am proposing is the case with school choice) are grounded in an internal conversation, or what Jenkins calls the “dialectical interplay of processes of internal and external definition” (1996). In these processes, people’s personal histories (and their reflection on those histories) have a significant bearing on their choices.

Parents demonstrate the multiple ways in which their own personal histories have shaped their choice of school for their children.

1. A Frankel parent made clear how her own positive day school experiences at a Schechter school influenced her plans for her children, to the extent that she and her husband bought a house a mile and a half from Frankel even before her children were born, “knowing” that this was where they were going to send them to school.

2. Another Frankel parent suggested that her husband’s determination to help his children avoid the horrible experience he suffered in Hebrew school led him to support her commitment to a more intensive Jewish educational option. When he learned that his son would not have to go to Hebrew school because Judaic studies was integrated within the dual curriculum at Frankel, it was, his wife said, “like a switch went off.”

3. A parent who in his words “came from 27,000 years of Catholic education” and who had converted to Judaism, attributed his deep commitment to the Baeck Academy to his determination to give his own children the kind of solid grounding in religion and spirituality he had received as a child, even if he had subsequently rebelled against it.

4. A Frankel parent argued that, having grown up in a small town in the southern United States with few Jewish resources and many encounters with antisemitism: “How can I live in a city where there is a day school option and not try it?”

In many instances people cited significant or transformative adult experiences that prompted them to take day school education seriously or that led them to choose one school rather than another.

5. A couple of Baeck Academy mothers attributed their interest in the school to their experience a few years previously on a Jewish Federation mission to Argentina. One of them explained: “I visited some of the day schools down there and just saw the community and what being part of the community can do, and actually said my children would never have this opportunity to be there.” It was this awakening that prompted her to take her husband to see the school.

6. A divorced mother, who lived in various parts of the world with her non-Jewish former husband, explained that she “couldn’t go back” to the supplementary model of Jewish education she had experienced as a child after sending her children to a small Orthodox preschool in Singapore. “We were in school with Jews from all
over the world and that was incredible to me. He had two teachers from Israel, and they spent half a day talking in Hebrew and half a day talking in English. And they do Kabbalat Shabbat on Friday. You know, the parents could come and participate and we all sang, and it was an incredible feeling to me. I think at that point I knew for me it would always be about a day school.”

7. Another Frankel mother who had attended private school as a child reflected on a conversionary experience of a more literal kind. She had always been “pretty religious” but became a convert to Judaism because, she explained, it became clear that her husband was not going to convert to Catholicism. As a result of her adult learning about Judaism, she became a Hebrew school teacher, and it was this experience that made her determined to send her children to day school despite her husband’s apathy. In her words: “The Judaics was the part I wanted for my kids to have in their life during the day, and to learn that it was part of their life, not something after school when they were tired.”

The most powerful transformative experience (and the most influential in leading to a day school choice) was that of visiting a school and finding something parents had themselves missed in their own childhoods and perhaps all of their lives until now.

8. Many of the interviewees from Baeck talked in these terms about their first encounter with tephilla (prayer) in the school. One mother reported: “We walked into the school, we came in, and we were there for the tail-end of tephilla, and you see these children sitting on the floor talking about their blessings for the day, discussing the meaning of what they were saying. How could you not at that point say ‘I want to do this every morning?’” Others point to the significance of discovering a formal Jewish educational institution that communicates what many call “the joy of Judaism” and its spirituality, a Judaism that reminds them more of camp than of Hebrew school.

9. For many parents at Hafetz Haim or Hirsch, their choice of school was not prompted by a sudden reassessment of priorities but by a longer-term but no less transformative process of socialization within the Orthodox community that brought with it a changing valuation of the merits of day school education. In the most extreme example of such an evolution, a mother at Hafetz Haim described how her daughter had started out in public school in another city and had transferred to a Solomon Schechter school when her family’s “commitment to Judaism increased.” When the family relocated to Centerville, she checked out both Hafetz Haim and Hirsch. Her daughter chose Hirsch, where she stayed for two years until she transferred to Hafetz Haim, a school that offered a better fit between school and home even though at the time, as the mother put it, the family “wasn’t quite at the Hafetz Haim level.”

The stories gathered here can be conceptualized both within the terms of rational choice theory and within Coleman’s social-context critique. In other words, the
sudden discovery of “what day schools are really like” can be seen as expressing parents’ access to information about the educational philosophy and values of schools that enables them to make a more informed choice. Alternatively, the paths to one school or another can be seen as a consequence of increased integration into the social networks of different denominational communities. I want to suggest instead that the fluidity and subjectivity present in these accounts calls for an additional analytical frame, one that takes better account of the personal-historical context for decisions or, putting it differently, the origins and consequences of decisions within the narrative of parents’ lives. This narrative perspective locates school choice within the shifting sands of adult Jewish identity and emphasizes how school choices possess significance and consequence for adult lives and not only for those of their children.

In recent years, the case for viewing Jewish identity as a journey involving the invention and reinvention of self has become increasingly compelling. As Horowitz explains, this view of Jewish identity emphasizes how “Jewishness unfolds and gets shaped by the different experiences and encounters in a person’s life. Each new context or life-stage brings with it new possibilities. A person’s Jewishness can wax, wane, and change in emphasis. It is responsive to social relationships, historical experiences and personal events” (Horowitz 2000: viii). This fluid concept of identity highlights the extent to which acts of Jewish identification shape and are shaped by an evolving life story.

Choosing to send one’s children to a Jewish day school (an act that departs from almost a century of normative Jewish behavior in North America) emerges, then, from a particular mix of relationships, experiences, and events, but it should not be seen as a terminal moment in which an adult with a fully formed Jewish identity makes a decision about the Jewish life of another. There is a strong sense in the data quoted above that choosing a school for one’s children both clarifies and changes the meaning one attributes to past experiences from one’s own life. For many, it is an opportunity to think anew about Judaism and Jewish life, and it implies a readiness to experiment with untried forms of Jewish engagement. For others it is an act that gives expression to long-established Jewish associations and commitments.

Extending a View of the Relationship between Parents and Schools

In a later section I will consider the implications that derive from viewing day school choice within a personal-historical perspective, that is, as an outcome of and as an element within an adult Jewish journey. First, though, I bring this narrative perspective to bear on an examination of the interactions between parents and schools after a choice of school has been made. This kind of personal-historical perspective calls for a view of parents as agents who shape and are shaped by their continuing interactions with their children’s schools. It sees day school choice as
part of an adult’s evolving Jewish identity and assumes that adult identities will not stop evolving once parents have selected a school for their child. By the same token, seeing school choice emerge from a context bounded by networks of social relationships provokes an expectation that the relationships between parents and schools will contribute in an ongoing fashion to the same social networks.

Conflicting Hypotheses Concerning Parental Involvement

Previous studies of the relationships between parents and schools have been anchored by two competing assumptions about patterns of involvement between parents and schools of choice. On the one hand, it has been argued that school choice promotes the conditions and processes that lead to the basic elements of community: commitment, communication, and collegiality (Smrekar and Goldring 1999). From this perspective, parents are bound by a perception of shared interests and mutual goals embodied in the act of public choice (Smrekar 1996). They develop a sense of fellowship with other families who have made similar school choices. They also seek opportunities to work with the (professional and lay) partners in their children’s education, who in turn cultivate their support and involvement (Bryk et al. 1993). Critics of school choice suggest a different dynamic: they argue that because school choice is itself an extreme product of the individualistic pursuit of personal goals it is unlikely to result in parents’ developing a sense of fellowship or community with other “consumers” who may happen to have made the same choices. At best, once parents have made an initial choice of school, they will delegate responsibility to the school for their children’s education, exempting their own involvement (Bauch 1989).

The foregoing analysis of the processes that lead to day-school choice provides grounds for expecting that both of these arguments may find an analogy within a Jewish day school context. On the one hand, it is reasonable to expect that parents will continue to be deeply invested in their children’s school, if, as I have argued, school choice carries so much personal significance for parents. On the other hand, we have also seen that choosing the same school as other families does not imply shared interests or beliefs. People can and do select the same schools for widely different reasons. Their choice does not mean that they constitute what Coleman and Hoffer (1987) call either a “functional” or “value” community. In similar fashion, it is difficult to predict what might be the outcome of an important finding above: the fact that so many parents did not themselves receive a day school education as children. On the one hand, we might anticipate that a lack of familiarity with the day school setting means that parents will be cautious about intervening in an environment where, to some extent, they are cultural outsiders. On the other hand, we might expect that because many parents have not themselves experienced a Jewish day school education as children, they will demand guidance from school professionals as to what constitutes appropriate expectations in this context. For this reason, they might seek as much of a connection as possible with the institution.
Four Realms of Interaction

I will explore which of these hypotheses best characterize parents’ behavior in this context by surveying four different realms within which parents and schools interact. These realms correspond to the conceptual frames Bolman and Deal (1997) employ to analyze organizational life. These frames—the structural (concerned with organizational efficiency), the human-resource (concerned with the needs of individuals in an organization), the political (where members of an organization compete for power) and the symbolic (where members find meaning and inspiration)—help separate out the different purposes with which parents interact with their children’s schools, the different roles they play in these interactions, and, in turn, the different tasks for educators in their interactions with parents. I will consider the (reported) scope of interactions within each of these frames and what the participants conceive to be their causes and consequences.

The Structural Frame—Parents as Volunteers, Helping Make Their Children’s Schools More Effective

All Centerville day schools encourage (and some require) parents to “work” on behalf of the school. Some of this work may involve parent contact with and support for their own children, but frequently its immediate purpose is to help the school as an institution save or raise money. During school hours this kind of unpaid work can involve parents in assisting the school librarian, helping with the preparation of classroom materials, ferrying or chaperoning children on field trips, serving them lunches, supervising them during recess, and providing them with one-on-one support in the classroom. After school hours it usually involves working to promote the school, planning and preparing fundraising events, and, less frequently, painting the corridors during the summer break, filling envelopes, or constructing playground equipment.

These kinds of “volunteer” activities are widespread in cash-strapped school systems where budgetary constraints limit the services and programs schools can provide, particularly to individual students. The day-school professionals we interviewed regard these contributions in largely pragmatic terms. That is, they see them as enabling the school to employ limited resources to greater educational effect. But evidently some believe that they would be better off without having to depend so much on parental help.

Parents (especially those who themselves work full time) talk about these activities in similarly sanguine terms. They recognize that schools depend on their help to provide services they cannot otherwise purchase with income from tuition. For parents at the Baeck Academy, an institution with limited financial resources, this is an especially important consideration. Parents see that their skills in marketing, real estate, arts and crafts, and organizational matters can make a difference to the quality of life in what is essentially a precarious enterprise. It is evident, however, that many parents volunteer for these activities not only from a general concern for the ongoing success or vitality of their children’s school but also because they are
looking, as one of them explained, “to be involved in their children’s education.”

This does not mean that they seek to intervene or meddle in schools, but rather (and especially for working parents who have few available hours for volunteer work or for leisure time with their families), this kind of involvement, when it occurs during school hours, provides an opportunity to spend time with their children. As one Frankel mother explained: “I made a decision that I wouldn’t [spend my time sitting on committees as I had done at my children’s preschool], but I would do everything that brought me into their classrooms, that brought me in closer contact with my children. I would be room mother. I would go on class trips and things like that, but I wasn’t going to be the super-mom that was organizing every fundraiser, because that wasn’t going to put me where I wanted to be.” In a sense, this is strategic volunteering: contributing to the welfare of the school while taking account of one’s own resources and needs.

When parents reflect on what they personally derive from their volunteer contributions during after-school hours, they tend to focus on the social dimension, that is, their integration within a peer-group of committed individuals, many of whom have become close friends after long hours of collaborative volunteer work. They also make evident their satisfaction in helping to establish institutions that, they believe, have the potential to transform Jewish life in their community. In both of these respects, their involvement nurtures a perception of shared interests to the extent that parents use similar imagery when talking about their children’s schools. Thus, active volunteers at the Baeck Academy talk repeatedly about their school as one that communicates “the joy of Judaism,” while those at the Frankel School repeat how their school is “preparing future community leaders.” One wonders whether this shared language is a consequence of their separate receptiveness to the schools’ presentations of themselves or whether it emerges from parents’ joint participation in shared endeavors on behalf of schools.

When schools produce a weekly or monthly newsletter for parents, it serves as an important medium of interaction within this organization-building realm. The newsletter only occasionally tells parents about the activities of their own children but connects them instead to the larger life of the institution, to news about other students and families, to announcements about upcoming school events, and to the ideas and opinions of personalities in the school. As Anderson (1983) is frequently quoted as suggesting, regular published communications of this sort serve to cultivate a sense of shared community and, in this instance, convey to parents some of a school’s overall vitality.

THE HUMAN-RESOURCE FRAME—PARENTS AS PARTNERS, HELPING THEIR CHILDREN IN/WITH SCHOOL. Whereas the involvements described above are largely initiated by teachers or administrators and tap into an expectation among parents that what benefits the whole school will probably benefit their own child, parents talk about other school involvements in ways that express a different notion: that what benefits their child will also benefit others. Although the
distinction seems subtle, it points to a range of interactions whose primary impulse comes from parents’ desire to enhance the quality of their own child’s school experience. These interactions are always initiated by parents and usually include direct involvement with their own child, but when they occur in school space and time they result in benefits to many others.

At both the Baeck and Hirsch Academies, for example, a number of parents have started scout troops for their children. Of course, the scout group serves many children, but as one of the parents who launched the program explained: “We wanted it for our own kids, and if we didn’t do it, nobody else would.” In this case, the initiative came from parents who were inclined to intervene actively in their child’s education (in fact, one scout leader’s husband also launched a baseball team at the school), but their involvement benefited the whole school. As the scout-leader parent elaborated: “[The school] is pretty focused on religious stuff. I felt they needed exposure to the other world out there, and I wanted the scouts to be part of my daughter’s life, so I had to do it.”

These parents open a useful window onto their interactions with the school because of the explicitness with which they talk about the motivations behind their involvements. The husband and wife are among the small number of non-Orthodox parents at Hirsch. Their independence in pursuing what they think is best for their children is already evident in their choice of school, and their involvement in this instance comes from a similar proactive desire to provide their children with an experience that would otherwise be missing from their education. The parents make evident that their involvement also expresses their belief that as a non-Orthodox family they are limited in the ways they can make a contribution to the school, a contribution that is important to them. Scouting and sports, therefore, constitute “a good way for us to volunteer our time for our children, involve other kids, and help us build relationships with other parents from the school.”

The interventionist spirit articulated here was echoed among other groups of parents who were involved, for example, in launching an in-school music program, a weekend program for mothers and daughters, and a learning center within the school for children with special-educational needs. More frequently, parents’ desire to be involved in or to enhance their child’s educational experience saw expression in less public fashion, either through the support they provided for their children at home or through their interactions with individual teachers and administrators on behalf of their children. Although some teachers were skeptical about parental motivations in these cases, complaining that “parents are too damn involved,” others recognized that the impulse to intervene or advocate for their children often came from the same source that led parents to select a private Jewish school in the first place.

An administrator at the Hirsch Academy who had worked in a number of private schools helpfully identified the various expressions that this involvement can produce:
If [parents] want to be part of their child’s educational life . . . I think it means everything from working with their child on a project, to guiding the child on homework, to having input if they feel strongly that their child would do better in so and so’s class of the two teachers for the next grade, . . . to coming to celebratory events that are organized around the holidays or the Judaic curriculum or a dance performance—a culmination of school instruction their child has been part of, to music lessons they may arrange here, to parent-teacher conferences. There is a feeling that they want to be connected and they want to know if anything seems to be falling through the cracks, to call up and say . . . could we check this out. I see that as very similar to the parents in very good private schools. Parents want to be a part of it.

These comments provide an antidote to the complaints one often hears from day school teachers about overinvolved Jewish parents. From this administrator’s perspective, such involvement is characteristic of private school parents whose choice of school is symptomatic of a deep interest in their children’s education. Nevertheless, our interviews with Centerville parents reveal that there is at least one source of parental involvement that may be particular to Jewish day schools, one that derives from the widespread discontinuity between parents’ own experience of school and that of their children.

Only a minority of our total parent sample received an intensive Jewish education as children. Less than 25 percent attended Jewish day schools themselves. For many parents, then, the decision to select a Jewish day school comes out of a desire to provide their own children with a degree of cultural and/or religious immersion they themselves had missed. This impulse triggers powerful reactions when they discover that their children (often at young ages) achieve a fluency in Hebrew or a self-confidence about their Jewishness that they, as adults, lack. This “discovery” can result in a variety of responses. It can produce a proud but somewhat distant bemusement. But in many instances, it inspires parents to attend to their own Jewish learning. In part (and perhaps for reasons of self-esteem) this is so that they can keep up with their children. As one father of a second-grade child put it: “You feel a bit stupid when your child comes home and says, hey, I know this and you don’t.” In part, it is also motivated by a determination to continue contributing to their child’s education. As another parent put it: “How can I help my children with Hebrew if I know less than they do?” In either case, the decision to attend to their own Jewish learning can lead to signing up at the local Melton Mini-School for adults, at a weekly synagogue class on the Torah portion, or to taking a Hebrew reading course offered by the area Jewish Federation.

Although many teachers seem unaware of it, many parents actively accompany their children through their school years as participant-facilitators. Their goal is to help their children, but this can involve a good deal of learning of their own. In a phrase used by many, parents “learn with and through their children.” This was most strongly demonstrated by a mother at the Hirsch Academy who described herself as having received a “minimal Jewish education” as a child. In a response that
slipped back and forth between an account of her learning and of her daughter’s, she reported:

**Hajib:** I think that the most important thing for me is to be home with my daughter when she comes home from school and helping her with her homework and just learning from her. I’m learning to write cursive Hebrew. I never learned cursive Hebrew. Now she knows block letters and cursive Hebrew, and then next year it’s a different alphabet, almost a Romanic alphabet that one of the commentators used, called Rashi script. So she is going to learn that next year. It’s different—it’s a whole different alphabet. Just when you think you got one down—I got the block letters down a couple years ago; now I’m teaching myself the cursive. So that’s my connection to the school that I really enjoy, it’s that I’m learning along with her. (Emphasis added)

The significance for this mother of her interaction with her child’s Jewish schooling is hard to exaggerate. At the end of her interview, when asked whether there was anything she wanted to highlight, she said:

**Hajib:** What I would like to say is: when my daughter comes home, when she studies the Torah, and she’ll be reading along in Hebrew and translating in English as she goes along—she is nine years old—and I just start crying. And she says, “Mom, you stop crying,” you know? I explain to her. I said, “Mommies cry when they are sad and when they are happy. And I’m so happy that you have a Jewish education. You know all of this stuff. I had to learn this when I was much older.”

I didn’t get to go to a Jewish school. And it does affect me because I had a very difficult and painful growing up in elementary school. . . . And so seeing her and having this experience just fills me with emotion and with gratitude for where she is, and what she is able to do and what the teachers were able to do with her.

Although this may seem like an extreme reaction, it points in heightened fashion to a widespread phenomenon wherein many parents find great personal significance in their children’s (Jewish) educational experiences. As we will see, there are other realms of interaction where these emotions are closer to the surface, but it is noticeable that even when centered on their concern for their children’s educational success, parents are inclined to compare and sometimes integrate their children’s experiences with their own. In the process, they make assessments and reassessments about their own lives long after completing their own formal Jewish education.

Within this realm of interaction between parents and school, where parents are focused on the educational needs of their children, the most appreciated measure schools can adopt in order to connect with parents is that of establishing procedures for regular and frequent communications about their children. This is not achieved by producing a monthly or weekly newsletter. Newsletters tell parents about the school as an institution; they do not tell them what they want to know about their child as an individual learner. What parents seek and deeply appreciate is the kind
of weekly update they get at both Frankel and Baeck that includes an individualized one-paragraph report about the progress of their child. These communications are burdensome for teachers to compose when they come on top of periodic meetings with parents, but they enable parents to feel that “they know what’s going on” and that “they are communicated with”—primary concerns for those focused on maximizing the quality of their children’s education.

THE POLITICAL FRAME—PARENTS AS GOVERNORS, SHAPING POLICY IN THEIR CHILDREN’S SCHOOLS The most uncomfortable point of interaction between parents and schools is in the political realm, that is, in the area where school policies are established and maintained. As private institutions, Jewish day schools are governed by boards with a large parent presence rather than by outsider trustees from the community. Schools, therefore, call for parent participation in matters that in public school settings would be determined by state- or municipal-level appointees. Even when parents have no formal role in the determination of these matters, our interviews with parents and educators reveal that in this environment parents often seek to exert influence. A few parents in fact indicate that their choice of school was informed by their sense of the extent to which they were able to shape school policy in formal and informal ways. This was especially the case at the Baeck Academy, where parents did not enter an environment with long-established traditions of practice. In the words of one Baeck parent: “We were both really excited that it was a new school, and we felt like we could be really involved and have an influence on the curriculum . . . rather than going into a school where there were already hundreds of families. That was something that really interested us.”

In general, parents do not select one or another school because of a desire to sit on the governing board. More likely, their interaction with the school over political matters is triggered by a change of school policy, by some classroom incident, or by changes in their own Jewish lives that have made them uncomfortable with some long-established school policy.

While there are conflicts in all Centerville day schools about these kinds of matters, it is noticeable that these issues generate most tension at the Hirsch Academy, probably because of a combination of factors. First, the parent body at Hirsch is much less homogenous than that at Hafetz Haim in terms of religious orientation. At the same time, parents are more limited in their school choices than are parents at Frankel, who can and frequently do switch into the public system when they are uncomfortable with some aspect of school policy. Thus, during the course of our interviews, Hirsch parents indicated their disagreement with a whole range of school policies. More-Orthodox parents complained about the school’s coeducational setup, the lack of school uniform, and the choice of certain readers in the language arts program. More-liberal parents complained that the school choir is not allowed to perform for men, that fathers are not allowed to watch girls’ basketball games, and that some Jewish studies teachers seem less than enthusiastic about celebrating Israel Independence day. Both groups reported that they lobby administrators and
board members in an effort to change policy, but in most cases parents appear to stick with the school because of their discomfort with the alternatives.

Another unusual feature at Hirsch is that some Jewish studies faculty do not share the same religious orientation as many of their students, or in the words of one parent, they “don’t quite fit into the value system and the mission of the school.” As indicated above, this is a typical problem for modern Orthodox day schools in small- to medium-size communities. Parents occasionally find that they disagree with things their children may hear in class or that they disapprove of what a teacher conveys to students about, for example, the extent to which boys and girls should mix with one another. In these instances, parents tend not to confront their child’s teacher but instead connect directly with the principal as someone who they perceive as better representing a modern-orthodox Jewish orientation. Ideological conflicts of this nature were not reported in any other Centerville day schools, but seem to consume a lot of energy at Hirsch, where, the principal reported, they can occupy a great deal of his time and attention. Indeed, one wonders whether some parents have more contact with the principal over matters such as these than over issues immediately related to their children’s learning.

From the perspective of one Hirsch parent, the intensity of the school’s political environment is explained by the fact that families live in a closely knit community where many aspects of daily life intersect within the same geographical, social, and ideological boundaries. He explains:

HA7a: Because people are so involved in similar synagogues and they interact in so many of the same ways, it’s hard to change things at a school like Hirsch. . . . You’re constantly seeing everybody else . . . at Walgreens, at Schnucks, at the synagogue. And so everything becomes personal and it’s hard for people to separate and say okay this is professional and this is personal because you’re going to see them again the next day at services, and your kids are friends and you’re going to see them at the birthday on Sunday. And so it’s very hard to find that fine line and be inclusive of people, of everyone who’s a little different. . . . And when people say I don’t like this or that, then all of a sudden people look at you and . . . all of a sudden that’s personal, and that’s what happens at Hirsch. . . . I think that happens across the country in any school similar to Hirsch.

An implicit consequence for parents who live within such an environment is that school issues can exercise great influence on their adult lives. The positions they take on relatively minor matters of school policy can define who they are (for others and themselves) in matters that in fact have little or nothing to do with the school. Thus, one’s views about an issue, such as whether the school should be represented by a mixed choir of boys and girls, can identify you as someone allied with a set of opinions on a whole range of religious and ideological matters.

THE SYMBOLIC FRAME—PARENTS AS MEMBERS OF A (SELF-)CHosen COMMUNITY Parents and schools interact in the most visible fashion when parents
come into schools for special ceremonies and events convened for the family members of students. These events are a familiar part of the day school landscape across North America. Most frequently, they include occasions to acknowledge landmark events such as the presentation of a first siddur or chumash to students, or the first time students are called to the Torah. They also celebrate select moments from the weekly or annual calendar such as a special havdalah event or a Pesach seder. Less commonly, they include ceremonial conclusions to a program of study such as a book of chumash or a unit of history. These events—as hackneyed as they often seem—can be conceived as occurring within what Bolman and Deal identify as a fourth and final frame for analyzing organizational life, what they call the symbolic frame, that realm within which organizations build a shared culture through ritual, ceremony, and story (1997: 262).

Teachers generally see these events differently. In fact, the terms they employ to describe them are closer to those of Bolman and Deal’s structural frame where the goal is to improve an organization’s functioning. For many, these events are time-consuming performances intended to demonstrate to the school’s customers that they are getting value for their money. As one teacher unexpectedly put it: “Teaching younger grades, you always want to involve parents. Parents are a positive. . . . The more they see, the better vibes they have about the school. They’ll do commercials for your school.” From this perspective, these events are essentially marketing exercises. But in the opinion of some, there is no need to mount a special event to demonstrate the quality of the education they provide. Parents should be able to see as much from their daily interactions with their children.

Provoking even more skepticism among some teachers are those occasions when parents are invited to the school ahead of special programs so as to familiarize them with the Jewish content of the upcoming occasion. This unusual programming move, which is a special feature at the Frankel School, aims to help parents better understand, for example, the elements in the havdalah service or the organization of the siddur. From the perspective of teachers, for whom these occasions promise few benefits for their students, these orientation evenings burden parents and teachers with yet one more obligation to come into school.

Our interviews reveal that for parents these occasions possess greater significance than many teachers expect and in some instances play a profound role in bringing a deeper level of meaning to the parents’ relationship with the school. There is no doubt that these events do enable parents to observe their children’s growth, but this does not mean that parents have not being paying attention over the rest of the year. Rather, as one long-serving Frankel teacher noted, these occasions serve as milestones; they highlight the ways in which children have developed. This, of course, is a source of pride to parents that few can resist, but as this teacher goes on to suggest, it is also a moment “that really puts things into perspective for them.” As she explains, that is why at “our siddur ceremony everybody just cries. They just sit there crying away because they finally realize, I think, what the Jewish education is doing for their kids.”
For parents who were uncertain about their choice of school or who may still be ambivalent about it, these events, when presented with authenticity and spirit, force them to confront the implications of the choices they have made. Of course, this confrontation may be resolved quietly and undramatically with parents bracketing these experiences as part of the price to be paid for getting a decent private education in the company of other Jews, much as an earlier generation of American Jews coped with dissonant elements in the private Catholic schools that a small minority chose to attend. Yet, for many, these milestones serve as portals for the reexamination of their Jewish selves.

This outcome is seen most vividly at the Baeck Academy, where a majority of parents report having experienced a fairly shallow (and in their eyes, meaningless) Jewish education as children, while, at the same time, the school shows great creativity in its programming of special events for parents. These include hands-on programs (such as a pre-Chanukah cook-in and a Tu-Bishvat chocolate seder) that are aimed directly at parents and introduce them to a range of Jewish practices with which they may not be familiar. The events also incorporate milestone occasions in which parents both observe and participate in Jewish experiences unlike any they have encountered elsewhere. As a consequence, it is not surprising that one parent interviewee could say, without any sense of exaggeration, about her participation in these events:

BA6B: I think that this has been the most significant Jewish experience in my life. . . . The other day the kids were up there, and they wrote their own siddurim. [The teachers] wrap them up [in a Torah wimples], and each child had written a piece in their Hebrew names and they sat in the middle of the room. And I looked at them and I saw that continuing thread (whether or not you believe in heaven or anything) of how the Jewish people could go on for five thousand years. And in the room I saw the kids that were going to take it to the next place. That is a beautiful thing that I don’t find in synagogues because they’re so big, so huge, so hurried; the program is so scripted. There are just unimaginable moments of beauty that take place there that we wouldn’t get to see and judge as spiritual if we weren’t a part of it.

This powerful statement not only offers some indication of how the spontaneity and intimacy of these events gives them their force, it also points to the significance of these experiences in cultivating a sense of Jewish identification and purpose among parents. Another parent (who herself had experienced a relatively engaged Jewish childhood) elaborates further on these qualities and on how and why they contrast with most of the Jewish experiences of her past.

BA6B: I think a lot of the Reform Jewish people that I know grew up at the same time I did and have the same experience that our involvement in Judaism was: Our parents got involved mostly because of social actions and civil rights. It wasn’t a very spiritual involvement. And when we see our kids learning this, we want to have more of a spiritual involvement along with the social action. So a lot of the traditions that they are including in the school now—maybe they would not have been included when we were young because it was just not that generation’s focus.
What is so striking about these comments is that they reveal the extent to which parents find meaning in events staged for and by their children, and how (as adults) they struggle to find such meaning elsewhere. In her interview, this parent went on to suggest that the spirituality and joy she finds at school is comparable only to what she experienced as a teen in Reform summer camp. As an adult, the only place she finds it is in her daughter's school.

It would be misleading to suggest that all events staged by the schools operate at such an emotional peak. On many occasions parents are treated as passive observers who are invited to view what is little more than a glorified dog-and-pony show. Furthermore, it seems that events staged as family or adult education programs do not always strike a chord with parents, especially when parents feel patronized or infantilized by instruction directed at them. However, on those occasions when parents come in to school to participate in (or simply observe) Jewish rituals that at former historical moments would probably have taken place in the synagogue or in people's own homes, a move can occur to a different register of meaning that engages parents as much as children.

That ritual occasions can serve profoundly different organizational purposes is best seen through the example of morning tefilla, an event that is held every day in all four schools. At the Baek Academy this, as I was told frequently and indeed as I observed for myself, is an occasion when the school's “magic” is most evident. It is no wonder that current and prospective parents are encouraged to come and observe whenever they can. As one parent put it: “When you listen to them sing, to what they talk about, and you hear what each child has to say, that’s all you need.” Another said: “You see them sing Sim Shalom with such intent . . . [My daughter] sings with her eyes closed, and she is sending peace, usually to someone in particular (that's what they encourage them to do). . . . And I feel like I've learned from her.”

At the Hirsch Academy, parents (fathers to be precise) do not attend morning tefilla to observe “the magic.” The moment is an undoubted educational one for their sons, who by virtue of their daily participation become socialized as a prayer community of responsible members. But fathers attend for pragmatic reasons. They are organized as a roster of males who make up a minyan (a quorum of ten males) at those times of the year when many of the boys are below the age of thirteen. During interviews, no Hirsch fathers made mention of their participation in the service, and it is fair to assume that their participation does not bear any special significance for them. It is a functional rather than symbolic matter, by which they are fulfilling their responsibilities to the school as an organization that supports a daily minyan.

At the Frankel School parents hardly ever attend tefilla. On the day I myself participated, the only adults present were “professional Jews,” that is, teachers and administrators. But in interviews, parents did indicate that they do make an effort to come in on Rosh Chodesh (at the start of the Jewish month), when their children are making a special presentation as part of the service, or when they are called to read Torah. It seems, then, that they attend in their role as partners in their children's education.
At Hafetz Haim the parents’ role in morning *tephilla* is different again, and this difference provides a graphic indication of the difficulty in applying Bolman and Deal’s analytical framework to life in this school and to the parents’ role within it. At Hafetz Haim there are many adults present at morning *tephilla*; some are fathers, but there are others with no immediate connection to the school. Apparently none are there for any special educational reason but rather because this happens to be a convenient minyan, close to home, and at a later time than the alternatives. As in so many other matters, the school’s relationship with the community and with parents is not exclusively educational.

*How to Make Sense of Hafetz Haim?*

In general terms, the role of parents at Hafetz Haim looks different from that at the other schools. The school has a relatively small parent body for a student enrollment of two hundred because of the large size of its families. Moreover, one member from at least half of the families works in the school. The school is not really managed by a board either, but is directed by a few key individuals who hold things together, both financially and educationally. Although there is an intimate relationship between the school and the community, with parents, teachers, and students tending to worship in the same synagogue, teachers report that it is hard to find parent volunteers. Some years, for example, it is not even possible to run a PTA.

These phenomena might be taken to indicate that parents are not interested in their children’s education or that they lack commitment to the ongoing success of the school. But it is more likely that these patterns point to causes of a different nature: first, to the school’s location in a small community where almost every adult is needed to play an active role (in the synagogue, welfare associations, and adult education); second, to the fact that most families are so large that parents have little “free time” for volunteer work in the school. Finally, the ideological congruence between families and school is such that parents generally defer to the judgment of professionals, particularly since more than 50 percent of the parent body are *Baalei teshuvah* (newly Orthodox) and do not have the confidence to challenge the school’s religious policies and procedures. For all of these reasons, parents tend to assume that the school can more or less look after itself, or, at least, that the paid professionals will look after it.

Some indication of the unusual situation at Hafetz Haim is provided by the fact that this is the only Centerville day school where parents call teachers for advice on religious and educational matters. Parents seek guidance, for example, about the appropriate ways for their daughters to spend their time on weekends or about which summer camp is most appropriate for their children. These interactions speak to a trust and intimacy between parents and the school that other institutions try to nurture but which at Hafetz Haim are a by-product of the deep integration of school personnel in the social and religious lives of families. Although parents may
not be visible participants (as volunteers and advocates) in the life of the school, the school is a significant part of their lives.

**Impact**

I proposed in the introductory section of this chapter that by exploring the relationships between parents and schools, it is possible to investigate the impact of Jewish day schools on adult lives. Although, for the sake of analytical clarity, the foci for these interactions were separated from one another, it is important to emphasize that their effect is not experienced in discrete or segmented fashion. When parents reflect on their interactions with their children’s schools, they do not distinguish, for example, between the impact of their volunteer work for the school as an institution and that of the support they give their children as engaged parents. In this section, I therefore develop a more integrated picture of the school’s impact both as a direct consequence of parents’ interactions with members of the school community and also as an indirect consequence of what children bring home with them from school.

**Integration (Fellowship)**

Although many parents (and in particular religiously Orthodox ones) attribute their choice of school to their membership within an existing social or religious network, others, who came to a school for different reasons find that their involvement in their children’s education leads to their integration in new interpersonal networks. One Frankel parent stated as fact: “you always become friends with the parents of your children’s friends.” Actually, this was not the case for all members of the research sample, but it does appear that those who have both the time and the inclination to be involved in their children’s schooling do become closely connected with others with whom they and their children spend so much time. Thus, some highly involved Baeck Academy parents reported:

**RJASb**: One of the most interesting things is that [before I came here] I thought I knew a lot of people, but when [our son] started it was amazing. I think I knew one other family in his class. . . . It has been really interesting meeting the different families because it’s a very diverse group.

**RJASA**: Well, we’re kind of at the school all the time.

**RJASb**: We’ve made some good friends. We’ve met people we probably wouldn’t have run into otherwise. We live on a street where there’s not a lot of kids our kids’ age, and not a lot of Jewish families. I would say that most of our friends don’t live on our block, so it’s either kids and families from the school or it’s friends we have through either business or past experience.

It is not surprising to hear Baeck parents talk in this way. They are connected by their joint investment in an experimental enterprise that enhances their sense of
fellowship with other families. They are more geographically dispersed than members of any other school sample and are likely to have known fewer school families before they signed up than is the case in other settings. Finally, there is a sense at Baeck, because of its contested position in the larger Jewish community, that the school’s professional and lay leadership seeks actively to cultivate a sense of esprit de corps among parents through programming and social events aimed at adults both with and without their children.

More than half of the sixty-one parent interviewees in this study moved to Centerville after marrying and do not have extensive family connections in the city. Day schools therefore play an important role in building social networks among individuals who may not otherwise be well connected within the Jewish community. Of course, other institutions may perform no less an important role in the city, but for some parents, at least, their children’s school serves as a gateway to membership in Jewish social networks. As one Hirsch couple reported who had lived in a variety of cities before settling in Centerville, “thanks to the school . . . this is the first time we actually belong to a community of friends.”

Information and Inspiration

A more common reaction among parents from across the sample is to say that they have learned a great deal from and through their children. In some cases, this may be quite superficial, with parents picking up pieces of information from their children that they may have forgotten or never known. But, as we have seen, a number of parents learn things from their children that have a significant impact on their Jewish lives. For example, a Frankel family, whose children had started out in public school, described vividly how their Friday nights were changed by what their children brought home from day school:

**FSA:** Our Friday nights evolved as the kids got older. . . . We had a Friday night dinner, and they would bring in the prayers, the full Kiddush, and some of the singing and songs. It was easily ten, fifteen, twenty minutes prior to dinner, from what they had been doing in school. . . . It became that that was the night that we were home, nobody was going anywhere.

**FSB:** And it also became social, that we were inviting a family over or we were going to a family’s house. And it was always fun to see other people’s traditions . . . and we would sort of incorporate what they were doing. . . . So it’s just like we did a lot of learning from our children and from what they brought home from school and then sharing with other families from Frankel.

Among non-Orthodox parents, the most common experience of learning from and through children is in relation to the Hebrew language, that aspect of children’s education that, because of the many hours devoted to it in Jewish day schools, is most different from parents’ childhood experience of Jewish schooling. On not a few occasions this results in children actually instructing their parents in the lan-
guage: “BA1A: So [our daughter] comes home one day and she’s doing a book, and it got to the point that I couldn’t keep up anymore. She says, ‘Oh dad, I want to go make you some sheets,’ and she comes back and gives me a worksheet. She made a worksheet, filling in the blanks and other things like that, for Hebrew words, and she hands it to me. She’s like, ‘Here dad, I’ll help you with Hebrew.’”

More frequently, exposure to children’s Hebrew fluency results in parents’ becoming increasingly aware of their own literacy deficit. In about a quarter of the non-Orthodox sample this led parents to study Hebrew or some other aspect of Jewish culture so as to keep up with their children. In one case, however, it resulted in a family’s concluding that the school was devoting too much time to the Judaic curriculum. As a result, they decided to transfer into the public system.

When parents are open to the learning their children bring home, the consequences can be quite dramatic. Another Baeck couple reflects on what their daughter has taught them about Havdalah, and in the process, by referring to a variety of halachic nuances, demonstrate how much they have learnt from her:

BA4A: Neither of us grew up celebrating Havdalah, and neither of us paid much attention to it. Saturday night comes, or it’s Sunday, oh we forgot to celebrate . . .

BA4b: But you really legally have until Tuesday to celebrate.

BA4A: And sometimes if she remembers on Sunday night, we’ll say we know what you are going to do at school tomorrow. [Laughter] But if we remember, or if she reminds us at the right time or we remember, which is incredible since it wouldn’t even have been on our radar two years ago, a year ago. But she likes it and we like it too.

INTERVIEWER: Sounds almost like she helps you be enthusiastic about it again. You think you are reenergized around it again.

BA4b: Well if you remember, neither of us even knew anything about it, so it’s not that we are being reenergized, it’s we are being informed and newly energized.

Enculturation

Most frequently, when parents talk about the influence of their children’s education on their lives, it is usually in less specific terms. They do not single out particular things they have learned. Instead, they point to what might best be described as enculturation, that is, the increasing integration of Jewish culture into their lives. Some Orthodox parents indicate that they cannot be sure whether this is a consequence of their involvement in the school or the synagogue. This is because, as some Hirsch parents explained, “the school and the synagogue have a mutual incestuous impact on your family in a positive way.” Some families comment on this influence wryly. In the words of one Frankel father: “We’re probably more aware, not more observant. We know what we’re not supposed to do.” In other homes, the school’s influence may be minimal for different reasons. As one Hirsch parent explained: “There hasn’t been any real effect because that’s the way we were already living as a family.”
In quite a few cases, however, parents point to the introduction of language, values, and ideas into their homes that are different from before. They depict a change in the culture of their families that they link to what their children learn at school. This effect can best be conveyed through the comments of a Baeck Academy father who, ironically, kept insisting that not much had changed in his family:

8a: I don’t know that much has changed really. I think [there] are deeper roots taking place in who they are rather than who I am. But I’m loving it, and I love living it through them, kind of re-living it. For a second time for me it’s easier, I find, to share those values and live them here in this house because now they are just expected. . . . In other words, they are taught at school, so when we talk about a concept in Judaism like Tzdakkah I don’t have to explain it or justify it to them. During Hanukkah if we decide, as one of our traditions, to go take Tzdakkah money to donate toys to tots, I don’t have to have discussions as to why we are giving away toys on Hanukkah, it’s just Tzdakkah. It’s part of who they are. They understand that. So Jewish values now are really a given in our household and that might be the only real difference but more of an awareness too. How do I know what would have been different had they gone to [the local] elementary school? Probably I would have had to do much more explaining. I may have gotten lazier and said to hell with Tu Bishvat, it’s a minor holiday anyway, I don’t have to do that. It has really been easier on me because I can just pick things up and they know [snaps finger] what Tu Bishvat is, and they know what they are going to do.

Although this parent may not state it eloquently, he points to a variety of changes in his home, changes in how he and his children talk and changes in what they do. As someone who for a time attended Jewish day school himself, he finds that his own Jewish education makes more sense now that it is refracted through the experience of his children. The outcomes he describes (in terms of the introduction of Jewish values, practices, and language into the home) are also mentioned by many other parents, but in less receptive environments they can produce different effects. This is most sharply indicated by the case of one couple in which the father is Jewish and the mother is not. This family came to the Baeck Academy because they were attracted by its educational philosophy and impressed by the principal’s openness to the fact that one of the parents was not Jewish, although it was made clear to the family that if the son came to the school he would consider himself Jewish. They report:

b3a: Well, we certainly never had prayer services prior to him going to this school. Like if we hadn’t gone to synagogue, we would do things like go on a hike and have like a tephilla where I might say a prayer in English and [my husband] might say a prayer, and [our son] might sing some songs or we might all sing songs. 

b3a: I think what it [their son’s Jewish education] has done is that when we have family here, especially when we had [my wife’s non-Jewish] family here and we participated in any holiday, we always asked them to do whatever they are doing.
So like we do all the Shabbat stuff and then we ask them to say a Christian prayer. And that's changed.

**BAJb:** Well, I think because Jonah seems himself as so Jewish we have had to be more mindful of encouraging him to respect other religions. And I think some of it was where he kind of saw he was on the good team and that's the bad team. You know, he kind of saw it as very polarized and would say some hurtful things to the extended family, like “I don’t sing Christian songs.” You know, that kind of thing.

This example demonstrates with great power that day school education can disturb the balance of parents’ lives. In this case, the parents made clear that they chose the school because they wanted the best education for their child. They were attracted by the school’s smallness, its safety, and its creativity. It turns out that their choice has had an impact on their own lives and relationships in a way that neither of them expected.

It seems, in general, that the school’s influence on parents is greatest when it is exercised through their children, that is, rather than as a result of parents’ direct interaction with teachers or programs. In part this is probably because parents may be more resistant to ideas they encounter in an adult-to-adult mode compared with when they learn things from their own children. But there may be another subtle factor at work. When parents encounter new ideas or practices that they experience outside the home, they can keep them outside, without translating them into their own lives. When these ideas and practices come inside their homes through the agency of their children, they stick more readily. This may indicate a kind of “situated cognition” effect, wherein learning is more powerful when it occurs in the context where it is to be applied. It may also be that at home a disturbance or rupture is created in an environment that parents previously thought they controlled. As I have suggested, researchers (and parents) commonly assume that the interaction between parents and schools results in the influence of the latter over the former; when the reverse occurs, parents (and researchers) are surprised in ways that can shake their prevailing assumptions and behaviors.

Jewish day school education so much departs from the normative experiences of most American Jews that it disturbs the equilibrium of many parents’ lives. It enables Jewish songs, concepts, and conversation to seep into their homes. Children draw on examples from Jewish history and culture when talking with their parents. They burst into Hebrew song in unexpected places, on the beach, in the supermarket. They ask their parents about the meaning of Jewish practices they see in the home and wonder why their parents do not observe other practices they have heard about at school. Children model behaviors learned at school that move parents through the power of their example. In these often indirect but nonetheless powerful ways, schools, founded as vehicles for the education of children, challenge (although they do not necessarily effect change in) the patterns of parents’ lives.
Implications and Illuminations

This analysis of the interactions between parents and schools suggests four implications.

Personal Choice and Denominationalism

The journey to day school choice is unpredictable. Unexpected encounters and experiences are as likely to inspire as to inhibit an interest in day schools. Although the data confirm that for non-Orthodox parents day schools must be at least as good as public schools if they are to constitute a plausible school choice, subjective and not always rational considerations determine whether parents will actually find schools desirable. Contrary to the rhetoric of some day-school advocates, establishing and marketing the academic excellence of schools will not guarantee day school growth. What parents actually want are schools that are “good enough,” where the standards of general education are at least comparable to those available in local public schools.

Despite the frequently idiosyncratic nature of school choice, the greater availability of day school choices does seem to increase the likelihood that parents will choose a day school option. When day schools offer clear and authentic alternatives (along denominational or educational lines) their general appeal is greatly increased, even though sociologists and popular commentators have in recent times characterized denominational differences as anachronistic and artificial.

How many such alternatives it is fiscally responsible to offer is, of course, another matter. Some have argued that multiplying the range of day school options by creating “boutique schools” that cater to minority tastes is ineffective use of limited resources and further fractures an already divided Jewish community. Nevertheless, a developing literature in public education argues that “small schools” of between two hundred to three hundred students can be efficient and make possible the nurture of community. Meier, Ayers, and others have made a powerful educational case for segmenting large institutions into smaller separately administered schools, all with distinct identities (Meier 2002; Ayers et al. 2000).

Social and Emotional Consequences

Although the interview script used in this study specifically invited parents to talk about if and how they had been changed by their children’s schools, it is still noteworthy that parents did not lack examples or passion when invited to talk about their interactions with schools. As we have seen, many talked with great emotion about their children’s education. Mothers, in particular, revealed how they were moved to tears by school visits or by other interactions with their children over school matters. It is unclear why these experiences stir up such emotions. Perhaps it is the result of the sharp contrast between children's positive experiences of Jewish
education and the frustrations and disappointments of their parents’ Jewish school experiences. Perhaps this emotion expresses a release (or relief) when parents have invested so deeply in their children’s education or have had to wrestle with conflicting commitments when choosing schools.

In general, the data reveal that choosing a Jewish day school for one’s children can have social and emotional consequences for parents that day school educators frequently overlook in their interactions with their adult clients. These consequences raise difficult questions about the extent to which schools should try to cultivate such effects still further. School professionals are often uncomfortable with acting as parent educators. Most became teachers in order to work with children, not with adults. It also seems that parents are less receptive to programs designed specifically to educate them than they are to other less formal and less direct interactions with schools.

These findings point to the basic need for school professionals to open themselves to a reality in which they are not only teaching children but where parents are also learning “with and through” their children. The moment is ripe to explore a view of the school, developed by Comer et al. (1996), as a site of learning for the whole community and not only for children.

**Calibrating Frames**

A key premise behind this analysis has been that parents and schools interact within a variety of realms and not just within those concerned with facilitating children’s learning. The data confirm that during these interactions there can be a misapprehension of roles. For example, parents may be interested in experiencing something of the school’s ritual life when professionals suspect them of being obsessively involved in their child’s education. It is likely that the relationships between parents and schools would be less charged if educators were alert to the variety of concerns that underlie parents’ interactions with them. School professionals need not feel threatened by intense parent involvement. Parents have many reasons for wanting to be a part of their children’s schooling, most of which are not intended to question the teacher’s competence.

**Changing Educational (and Societal) Norms**

The most significant finding here is how much of a gap there is between parents’ own childhood experiences of Jewish education and that of their children. This discontinuity may be as significant as that experienced a century ago by Jewish immigrants to America when their children entered the public system in large numbers.

Given that schools exist in large part to reproduce culture, this discontinuity has created a disequilibrium whose consequences are not yet apparent. It is not clear how the institutional map of the Jewish community will be changed by parents
who invest so many personal resources in one institution and within which they find adult meaning and attachment. To this extent, the school assumes roles previously played by the synagogue. It remains uncertain how Jewish culture will be affected by the emergence of a generation that has experienced an intense Jewish education in which Hebrew occupies a prominent place. In this study, there were already indications of possible impacts on the cultural lives of families. Finally, it is unknown what will be the consequences for the place of Jews in America when an increasing proportion of Jewish children no longer attend public schools. This, as we have seen, is a concern that parents themselves express even as they opt for a parochial model of education.

The political theorist Hannah Arendt argued that in the United States education has played “a different and, politically, incomparably more important role” than elsewhere, in large part because of “the role that continuous immigration plays in the country’s political consciousness and frame of mind” (cited by Tyack and Cuban 1995: 2). In a social context where so much trust is invested in schools as vehicles for societal change, the emergence of Jewish day school education will likely have profound implications for the Jewish community of the future. In fact, it may already be changing the way many adults think about what it means to be Jewish in America today.

NOTES

1. The sample was constructed around the following overlapping dimensions that I presented to the principals:
   1. Pioneers: Parents who have been with the school since its start
   2. Newcomers: Parents who are new to the school this year
   3. Borderliners: Parents who might have chosen another day school or parents who could easily have chosen a public school
   4. Committed [denomination] families: Parents who are active members of their synagogues, for whom the school is a “natural” extension
   5. Intermarried and or conversionary couples
   6. Day school graduates: Parents who themselves went to day school
   7. Activists: Parents who are deeply involved in the school
   8. Pacifists: Parents who are hardly ever seen, other than at mandated events
   9. Boosters: Loud advocates for the school (the most satisfied customers)
   10. Nudniks: Parents who always seem to be complaining about something

In two cases, the principal coded the entire student roll and allowed us to put together our own set of interviewees. In the other two cases, the principal selected a sample of twelve families, indicating how these included all of our sample types. In all four schools, the principal sent out a note encouraging families to participate in the study.

2. Schick (2005) reports that 596 of the 759 day schools in the United States enrolled 350 or fewer students. Combined enrollment in these schools accounted for 75,254 students out of a total day school population of 205,035.
REFERENCES


Expectations, Perceptions, and Preconceptions

*How Jewish Parents Talk about “Supplementary” Religious Education*

JEFFREY S. KRESS

*If they were honest, the parents would say they are only interested in the bar or bat mitzvah.*

— Jewish communal leader

In speaking about this study with colleagues and Jewish communal professionals, the very mention of religious schools would often provoke a Pavlovian smirk or rolling of the eyes. When I asked about these reactions, I was regaled with countless narratives about negative experiences in religious school or about frustrations encountered as professionals working with religious schools. Previous research has also painted a bleak picture regarding religious school education. The setting in Schoen’s (1989) study is marked by poor relations among students and teachers, and teachers and parents who are frequently disengaged from the religious educational process. Himmelfarb (1984) suggests that religious school educations are limited in their ability to promote lasting Jewish outcomes. However, through all of this, the number of Jews educated in religious schools remains high, especially among non-Orthodox denominations (Wertheimer 2001).

More recent literature points to a “warming” toward religious school education. For example, the Conservative adolescents studied by Kosmin and Keysar (2000) showed unexpectedly strong Jewish outcomes, particularly those attending Hebrew high school. These authors conclude that “day school proponents may well be disappointed with these findings. The gap between these students and the rest is perhaps not as wide as expected or hoped for” (49). Further, analyses conducted by Cohen (1988, 1995) demonstrate that part-time Jewish education (but not Sunday-only)
has a positive impact on Jewish identity outcomes. In fact, even in Schoem’s work, we can find traces of potential strengths for religious schools in his conclusion that “the Jewish school teaches young Jews lessons on Jewish survival and does this well. In fact, it was from the very fact of the school's existence that its students and their parents learned most about Jewish identification” (Schoem 1989: 139).

Parents, Education, and Development: Theoretical Issues

This chapter takes as its starting point the research-validated concept that parents’ involvement in, and engagement with, children’s education is beneficial. In the literature on general education, parental involvement in the educational process has been linked to a variety of outcomes in a child’s achievement, including improved academic performance, attendance, and behavior (Christenson, Rounds, and Franklin 1992). One focus of this chapter is parents’ articulated beliefs, attitudes, and expectations. “Parents’ ideas provide a way to help understand parental action” and “are one aspect of the idea of ‘context’ in child development” (Harkness and Super 1996: 5). Parental attitudes—including parents’ construction of their parental role and their sense of efficacy in helping their children—determine the extent of parent involvement in education (Hoover-Depsy and Sandler 1995, 1997).

Parents play a role of dynamic interaction within the context of education. That is, parents are part of the context that affects a child’s educational experience and in turn, have the potential to be influenced by their child’s participation in the religious school. Parents’ relationships with schools have been described as “transactional” (Power and Bartholomew 1987)—that is, they exist in a relationship in which each party is ever-evolving, in part because of the existence of the relationship itself. The ongoing evolution of the parties has the potential to lead to changes in the relationship, and so on. Such an approach supports the concept of bidirectional lines of influence among parents, schools, and students. Parental beliefs, values, and skills all affect the environment and are influenced by the environment (Kuczynski, Marshall, and Schell 1997).

For example, findings of an association between parental involvement in school and student achievement are often interpreted in terms of the former causing the latter. However, it is possible that greater achievement on the part of the student “may have engendered a positive school climate that, in turn, was accompanied by greater parent interest and participation in school activities” (Griffith 1996: 40). Likewise, the National Association of Secondary School Principals suggests that increased parental involvement can have an impact on parents themselves as well as on the parent-school relationship. “Increased parent involvement enhances the sense of pride [held by parents] in community and school,” and “as with all participatory strategies, parents who have had substantial input—even those who disagree—will be more inclined to ‘buy into’ and less inclined to sabotage educational decisions” (Stouffer 1992: 5).
The Current Project

Sending one's child to a religious school (as well as giving a child a bar/bat mitzvah) entails a commitment in terms of money, time, logistics of carpools, and so forth. The current study explores the expectations parents hold for this experience. Given the literature reviewed above, it would be beneficial for Jewish parents to be committed to the process of religious school education, connected to the school through their involvement, clear in their view of the mission of such an education, and confident in the school's ability to deliver their desired goals. However, given the traditionally negative framing of religious schools, a starting point for what one might actually expect might be minimal or no expectations for the religious school experience beyond the bar/bat mitzvah and generally little concern about the experience. Although parental disengagement is part of the story, also in evidence are parents who care deeply about Jewish outcomes for their children and have themselves been affected by their religious school experiences.

Efforts are made to show both sides of this story. However, given that religious school education “has not fared well in either popular or scholarly depictions” (Reimer 1997: 2), emphasis is placed on information that may seem surprising in contradicting the conventional wisdom about religious school parents. The goal is not to be unbalanced, but rather to be consistent with an “empowerment” approach to community-based research, in which “rather than concerning ourselves with deficits or finding out what is wrong with people and trying to fix matters, we look for abilities and skills” or “obvious or hidden strengths of the people we study” (Rappaport 2000: 58).³

The interviews conducted for this project reveal that parental opinions are complex, multifaceted, and at times, seemingly self-contradictory.⁴ To illustrate this, parental Jewish outcome expectations regarding religious school education are summarized. The range of outcomes is then discussed in terms of factors complicating parental engagement in religious schooling and those factors that have the potential to foster or deter such engagement.

Parental Jewish Expectations for Children from Religious School

How do parents frame the Jewish educational process? What, if anything, do they want their children to gain from religious school? How do they see their children expressing their Judaism in the future? How do they understand the bar/bat mitzvah in relation to their children's Jewish development, if at all? Is the conventional wisdom—as reflected in the epigraph to this chapter, that parents only care about the bar/bat mitzvah—supported? Nearly all the parents interviewed articulated clear expectations (and some voiced multiple expectations) for their children's Jewish development. Major themes in their responses are summarized here.⁵
Connection, Continuity, and Carrying-on

One theme relates to parental expectations that their children develop a connection to Judaism, an internal feeling about being Jewish, sometimes but not always along with certain external manifestations. In the words of one father: “I think I’d want to see him just comfortable and having pride and just knowing where he came from and just identity. In terms of practicing . . . that’s going to be up to him. I view our job as being one of establishing pride and identity and heritage and after that, how much he wants to make that part of his daily life is up to him.”

The connection identified by many parents involved the knowledge that one is Jewish, and that the fact of being Jewish brings with it a shared experience—historical and contemporary—with other Jews, as well as, for some, a particular set of religiocultural practices, even if these practices are not routinely observed. Much as Americans emphasize the “right to vote” even in the face of poor voter turnout, many parents stressed the idea that the set of historical and religious ties are important, even if they are not frequently practiced.

Often, parents expressed the importance of their children’s “carrying-on” (a commonly used phrase) Judaism into the next generation: “First of all, I hope he would marry somebody Jewish and keep the lines going. But I also would hope that he would bring up his children and give them the opportunity to have the identity and the heritage and, you know, have Shabbat and the holidays the way we did with him because we think it’s been an important part of their childhood. . . . [W]hether he keeps kosher in college or not, that’s up to him.”

Some parents saw this sense of connection to Judaism as helpful for maintaining a positive self-image in a predominantly non-Jewish environment. These parents seemed very aware that they are living in an area where Jews are a minority and Judaism does not infuse their neighborhoods in the same way that it might in a concentrated Jewish population area. In fact, parents who grew up in larger Jewish population centers tended to draw contrasts between their current area of residence and their place of origin. In much the same way described by Horowitz (1993), analyzing results for the 1991 Jewish Population Survey for New York City, these parents tended to talk about an infusion of Judaism into the rest of their developmental experience owing to the preponderance of Jews in their neighborhoods. They recalled public school being closed for Jewish holidays (or at least that a majority of children stayed home), having many Jewish neighbors, and so forth. This stands in contrast in the minds of these parents to their current neighborhoods where they feel their children are in the vast minority.

Although parents generally did not speak of overt acts of antisemitism in their or their children’s experience (though a few describe what sounds like moments of awkwardness that they or their children have encountered because of being Jewish), they seemed to acknowledge the potential negative impact on their children’s self-identity of being a minority. They wanted their children to feel comfortable and proud, even in the face of being “different.” The hope for the children of one parent
were for them “. . . to have a basic knowledge about what it is that they’re learning and talking about. I’d like them to feel comfortable about being Jewish. We are not in a highly Jewish population here, so I’d like them to feel comfortable saying, ‘Oh, we do things this way.’”

Some parents spoke with pride of their children’s ability to maintain a sense of themselves as Jews even in the face of this minority status. For example, one mother described how the religious school experience helped her son confront issues of Jewishness with his public school peer group: “My oldest . . . is figuring out why the things he does are different. . . . He’s comfortable in seeing that, and that is okay and that he’s not wrong and that someone else isn’t wrong. He’s comfortable in saying, ‘I do things this way.’” Another set of parents, in discussing the decision not to send their daughter to a Jewish day school, alluded to the importance of this type of identity outcome:

MOTHER: [She has] to learn how to . . .
FATHER: . . . integrate herself.
MOTHER: Right . . . and take pride in being Jewish. Whereas, if she was at a day school, she wouldn’t think about it . . . everybody would be Jewish. Here she goes to school, and she has learned to stand up for being Jewish, “I’m proud of this; this is who I am. I don’t celebrate Christmas, but we can still be friends. Come to my house on Friday night . . . I’m going to services. Can you come with me?” These kids [who are not Jewish] come with us to Temple and they get to experience something that they would never have experienced.

The idea of making Jewish choices is another recurring theme. Several parents described the array of choices they foresee as vying for their child’s time and attention at college, and express their hopes that their child will make the choice, at least occasionally, to attend services or to be involved in Hillel activities. Some parents valued the act of making choices and voiced the desire that their children would “want to do” a particular Jewish act, rather than espousing a hope that their children would feel a sense of obligation. Perhaps as Jewish practice and connection has come to be seen as more voluntaristic (Cohen and Eisen 2000), parents are realizing that their children may well “opt-out,” and they articulate a hope for sustained involvement, or at least a sustained feeling of connection.

**Jewish Social and Communal Experiences**

A second theme related to parents’ wanting their children to develop a Jewish peer group. As they projected ahead, some wanted these social connections to continue, evolving to encompass not only friendship, but involvement in Jewish communal organizations. Several parents expressed the hope that their children would become involved in Jewish activities in college, at Hillel, or Jewish fraternities/sororities. Several parents, particularly those who discussed their own positive activities related to volunteer work, philanthropy, and communal involvement (both in the
Jewish community and beyond), expressed their hopes that their children would do the same. Some parents focused on the synagogue as a potential “hub” of Jewish connectedness.

Jewish friendships were seen as both ends in themselves and as a means to maintaining a broader connection to, and involvement with, Judaism. For example, some parents, such as this mother, described friendships as motivating synagogue attendance: “These students from her Hebrew school are now some of her closer friends. They do Shabbat and then they encourage each other go to the Temple and enjoy their time at the Temple.” Parents often described their child’s enthusiasm or motivation for religious school as related to the child’s having friends in the school. These parents described the importance of Jewish friendships in getting their children “into the door” of Jewish education. Relatedly, parents discussed the importance of Judaism and Jewish education as being “fun.” Several discussed the importance of creating positive memories of Judaism that a child will recall when she/he is older.

Finally, as in the previous section, some parents assigned additional importance to Jewish friendship outcomes because of the specific nature of their communities in which Jews are very much in the minority: “Well, because she [daughter] goes to public school . . . there’s like two or three Jewish kids in her grade, so in school she doesn’t associate with Jewish friends, but she has her own set of friends at the synagogue. But that’s not the only place she sees them. She sees them outside; we call them up. But she knows she is going to see them there. So she has another whole set of relationships that she developed at the synagogue.”

Tools for Ritual Participation: Synagogue and Home

Parents overwhelmingly described the expression of their own Judaism in terms of home-based holiday rituals (with Passover and the high holidays being the most frequently mentioned); marking the Sabbath in some way at least occasionally (such as a family meal or lighting candles); and synagogue attendance (which varies widely in terms of frequency). A third theme of expectations involves the hope that their children will be able to replicate, perhaps with deeper meaning and understanding, the rituals they themselves enact. For example, some wanted their children to develop synagogue skills: “I’d like him to be able to be comfortable going to a synagogue . . . to be able to walk into any synagogue in the United States and be able to follow the prayers and know what the prayers mean. You know, read Hebrew . . .”

Parents wanted their children to learn not just to say the prayers but also to know what the prayers mean. Several parents echoed the sentiments of the father quoted above, whose lack of understanding leaves him uncomfortable in the synagogue and less able to appreciate, or participate in, the experience. The development of synagogue skills was also seen by some parents—particularly those affiliated with the Conservative movement—as a key outcome of the bar/bat mitzvah experience.
These skills are viewed as an important outcome of the process and as a point of pride for the family.

The kids here, if they’re able to, are encouraged to really conduct the whole service themselves, starting with psukei, going all through Shacharit, Torah service. . . . So they really do a lot. In fact, they do way more even than I remember bar mitzvah boys doing when I grew up, because I think back then we didn’t think kids were capable of doing that and it might not be perfect enough. . . . So I think the main thing that I think she’s going to take from [the bat mitzvah] is this terrific working knowledge of the service. A twelve and a half, thirteen-year-old girl, to stand up and conduct a service in front of three hundred people, I think that’s pretty good.

Finally, a range of home-based holiday and Shabbat rituals—for Passover and other high holidays, such as lighting Shabbat candles—was mentioned by some parents as important in bridging Judaism into the next generation. As discussed previously, they wanted to make sure that some Jewish “traditions” (a frequently used term) are carried on. Conservative-affiliated parents tend to have more specific goals for particular observances or rituals.

Positive Self-Growth: Values, Self-Confidence, and Leadership

A final theme of expectations involves parents’ desire for their children to develop a set of morals and values through their Jewish education. As one put it: “. . . be a good person and learn all the reasons why it is good to be Jewish. I think it’s the same thing a Catholic person would take away. . . . Just be a good person and that’s what we want.”

They wanted their children to emerge knowing, in the words of another mother “the meaning of treating people good and just being a good person and helping others.” A few parents discussed the religious school and synagogue as places where values hold steady in a world in which they are seldom reinforced. Often, parents discuss with some ambivalence whether such values incorporate a “Jewish” aspect or whether they are more universal (as the previous quotation illustrates). Reform-affiliated parents tend to associate these outcomes specifically with religious school goals more than do Conservative-affiliated parents.

Many parents spoke about the bar/bat mitzvah in terms of their children’s growth as people, gaining self-confidence (emphasized slightly more often by Reform parents), developing leadership skills, and achieving a sense of accomplishment (emphasized slightly more by Conservative parents). Some described feelings of pride and appreciation from observing their children doing something they had not done. One father described the sense of accomplishment thus: “You have to know so many prayers and to work towards a goal for literally probably ten months and then to achieve that goal as well as he did, I’m hoping he’ll get out of that a true satisfaction and accomplishment that . . . I’m not sure where else he would get that sense of working for so long a period of time for one goal. I think that’s a big thing, and I hope he realizes that.”
Similarly, a mother discussed her daughter’s emerging sense of leadership: “[The bat-mitzvah] gives you confidence and the understanding that you are one person, but you can be more. You know, one person starts leading a group which leads another group. She’s one teenager who always thinks of herself as a child. Yet when they’re up on the pulpit, you know, they then have the power to lead others towards a good teaching or towards something spiritual.”

The bar/bat mitzvah experience was seen by some parents as a unique opportunity for their children to work toward a goal and to demonstrate their achievement while exercising leadership skills and being publicly acknowledged for their accomplishments.

Minimal Expectation for Religious School: Support for the Conventional Wisdom

Although parents overwhelmingly expressed the desire for some Jewish outcome for their children and very frequently connected these goals to the religious school experience, there were some who did not ascribe any causal relationship with religious school or the bar/bat mitzvah experience. Some answered in very vague terms when asked about their expectations. For example, one mother, finding it hard to formulate a response, stumbled: “You know, honestly, since I didn’t go to Hebrew school, I’m not exactly . . . It’s just all . . . I guess it’s just all about Judaism, because . . . I’m trying to think . . .” Others stated outright that their expectations were minimal.

Further, some parents’ expectations of religious school were simply and specifically for their children “to learn all the prayers for the bar mitzvah,” or as another parent put it: “I don’t really hone in on the whole Jewishness. I’m sending them there [religious school] so they do have a direction. I want them to be bar mitzvahed because I think it’s a meaningful ceremony. . . . I want them to be part of the Jewish community because that’s who we are, but I don’t want them to be a religious leader or anything like that.” With regard to the bar/bat mitzvah, some parents similarly questioned whether there is meaning beyond having “to do it because we have to or are expected to.” One remarked: “He [son] did it [bar mitzvah] because of tradition. . . . I don’t know if he was supposed to get anything out of it or not. That’s what he has to do, and it’s what every boy has to do when they become thirteen. They have a bar mitzvah. It’s required.”

Parents’ Religious School Memories: Opportunity and Challenge

To better understand their attitudes toward their children’s religious school experience, parents were asked about their own experiences with religious education. Many described negative memories of their religious school experiences. As one set of parents puts it:
Expectations, Perceptions, and Preconceptions

MOTHER: I don’t remember anything valuable that I took away [from my religious school education] because I just remember hating going. . . . My parents didn’t really carry forth any of the holiday stuff that I might have learned as a young child. . . . I don’t really think I came away with anything from my religious training.

FATHER: Yeah, I’d have to agree. I just really didn’t enjoy my religious education. . . . I was well prepared for my bar mitzvah, and I do remember having prepared a lot for that and being proud and all of that. But other than that, I would agree with [wife]. When you’re that age, religious school is just not one of the fun things you want to do.

MOTHER: I just remember that it was boring and the teachers were boring and I didn’t like them. Even on Sunday mornings, it was a chore to be there. None of the kids enjoyed it. It was probably the way everything was presented. Just read the book, answer the questions.

The lack of pedagogic creativity described by the mother is typical of many of the memories related. Many parents described the experience as boring and not useful, and some went so far as to describe their teachers as mean and ill-tempered.

Early experience is important in shaping one’s set of assumptions or world views, or what is referred to in cognitive psychology as one’s schemata. A schema is “a kind of informal, private, unarticulated theory about the nature of events, objects or situations we face” (Rumelhart 1980: 37). Schemata organize information, shape actions, and guide perceptions and attitudes. For example, we may have a schema for dining at restaurants, based on previous experiences and other sources of information, that will shape our expectations, attitudes, and actions when we are faced with an experience that we see as similar. Though we might not have dined in a particular restaurant previously, we are not at a loss for what to do when walking in the front door, and we may have expectations about the quality of food and service to be received.

Schemata are malleable in the face of disconfirming data, but because they also shape the way we encode incoming information, they tend to resist change. Schemata exist in dynamic interaction with their external contexts. External data can change a schema, and a schema can change one’s behavior in a given situation, which can then lead to a change in the context itself. As a timely personal parallel, I recently visited the Department of Motor Vehicles in my home state to renew my driver’s license. Based on my previous experiences renewing my license, obtaining automobile registrations, and the like, I had developed a set of expectations (for example, to wait in line for a long time), attitudes and affect (primarily negative anticipation of this event), and behaviors (bringing along work to do during the lengthy wait I anticipated). These expectations and beliefs were maintained in my mind even in the face of organized attempts (in the form of radio commercials featuring the state’s governor touting improvements) to change it. When I arrived at the office, I immediately encountered data that did not fit my expectations. I was greeted politely at the door, my documents were quickly reviewed to ensure I had
what I needed, and I was issued a number and asked to be seated. Changes had indeed been made. I was able to track my progress as numbers were called, and I was confident that I would be processed efficiently. Indeed, I was on my way home within thirty minutes with both a renewed license and changes to my preconceptions regarding the Department of Motor Vehicles! When I think about returning to the office should I need to again, I am now more hopeful, though still not 100 percent confident, that the experience will be pleasant. With the proliferation of more positive attitudes comes the potential for individuals to arrive at the Department of Motor Vehicles in a better mood and to be more patient. This, in turn, can make the climate of the office more positive still and to generate more data disconfirming negative schemata.

Although parents were not asked to articulate their religious school schemata or to evaluate their children’s religious schools, it is possible to draw inferences from the parents’ responses. Many parents—even those with definite expectations and hopes for their children’s Jewish involvement—brought to their children’s religious school experience at least a concern, or at most an assumption, that the experience would replicate their own negative experience.⁶ For some parents, this emerged in tones of resignation regarding their children’s reactions to religious school.

Some parents clearly demonstrated the power of their own negative experiences in their framing of their children’s education, even in the face of conflicting evidence. For example, one father related a narrative that was repeated in various forms by other parents. His child complains on the way to religious school, but afterward is excited about his time there. When asked what might account for this, the father replied: “Well, it’s also Sunday and their mindset is not in school. I mean, I didn’t like Sunday school. I don’t even remember whether I went on Saturday or Sunday!”

This father’s comments point to the continuation of a family tradition—he didn’t like his religious school experience; therefore, it is no surprise to him that his child complains about going. His religious school schema is resistant to change even in light of the fact that his child comes home happy. Similarly, the father who was quoted earlier as saying “when you’re that age, religious school is just not one of the fun things you want to do” discusses, elsewhere in the interview that his son has enjoyed religious school throughout much of his experience there.

The impact of parents’ own negative educational experiences has been discussed in general education as well. For example, Daniels (1996), writing about discussions with parents about their own educational experiences, finds that: “What unfolds are two kinds of stories: accounts of positive literacy experiences, where the person was well-supported and moved ahead; and tales of very destructive experiences, which discouraged the person from reading and writing, sometimes for good. Strikingly and sadly, the hurtful experiences usually occurred in school; and the positive experiences elsewhere” (40). His interventions with parents includes making it clear to parents that his goals are not to recapitulate these negative experiences but rather to create the opposite type of learning environment.
Whereas schemata can change based on disconfirming data, it is noteworthy that parents generally had very little direct experience with the religious school, especially as children grow older. One mother provided a commonly heard description. In the early grades, her son would bring home projects, often with ritual objects to be used during a holiday or Shabbat observance. However, as her son became older, she began to feel removed from what was going on in the school, stating: “I don’t get a lot of feedback or interaction about what goes on there.” Less material comes home, and preadolescents are reluctant to share their experiences. The trend of diminishing parent-school contact is consistent with findings in general education (Epstein and Sanders 2003) but may be exacerbated in religious school education where the older grades are marked by an increased focus on gains related to the bar/bat mitzvah—learning Hebrew, prayers, and synagogue skills. Until the actual event of the bar/bat mitzvah, when a child gets to demonstrate his or her gains, parents may experience this focus on synagogue ritual as a decrease in emphasis on home ritual, thereby further adding to the difficulties (already imposed by developmental issues, increasingly busy schedules, and so on) of interacting with their children around religious school activities.

For most parents interviewed, involvement in the religious school means occasional attendance at school events such as model seders and negotiating carpools and schedules. Occasionally, parents mentioned times in which they volunteered more intensely in the school, and a small number have worked in some way in the school or synagogue. Parents are generally in contact with school personnel only regarding logistical concerns (scheduling conflicts and such) or issues that concern them in relation to their children’s particular situations.

Negative preconceptions and limited involvement constitute a negative feedback loop. Parents with negative schemata are unlikely to be motivated to become involved in the school. This lack of involvement both decreases chances for parents to encounter data that may exist to disconfirm their schemata, and may also reinforce children’s own misgivings about religious schooling. For example, parents who are “on site” at the synagogue for various reasons—volunteering or employed at the school or synagogue, or serving on committees in leadership capacities—often discussed the impact of this involvement in terms of giving them a better understanding of the organization and increasing their contact with administration, teachers, and other children. Some stated this as important in showing their own children the importance of participating in the school and/or synagogue. Also, there appeared to be a tendency for parents who have generally positive attitudes toward the religious school experience to have more contact with, or involvement in, the school or the synagogue. Of course, the line of causality can run either way—parents who are more positive about religious school education may be more apt to get involved. Although the impact of this involvement may be multidirectional, it is assumed that if parents have more, and more positive, interactions with the school, this will impact positively on their attitudes. A small number of parents expressed frustration with attempts to become involved or to learn more about what is going
on in the school: “With everything you can do on the Internet, they send home once a month or so a little Xerox of what they’re doing and what they’re working on. I think they can go a lot further. I think there should be an active effort from the religious schools to say what the lesson plans are and give practical links and practical examples online, because to me that [the aforementioned photocopy] is just one more piece of paper.”

However, some, whether as a result of their own prior negative experiences or because of their busy schedules, do not seek further engagement in the school. As such, even a strong religious school program that might disconfirm a negative schema may remain “invisible” to such parents. Finally, the ability of increased parental involvement to break a negative schema presupposes that the school program is strong, that students are actively engaged in the learning process, and that parent involvement is seen as motivating (rather than as boring or a chore). On the other hand, a weak program may confirm negative schemata or even change the mind of a parent who holds a more positive schema.

Negative preconceptions exert potentially damaging effects on the religious school endeavor. As discussed, parents holding negative views may distance themselves, physically and/or emotionally from the school. They may send messages, intentionally or not, to their children indicating a lack of faith in, or respect for, or encouragement of, religious school education. Not all parents exhibit the maintenance of negative schemata. Some show schema change—the development of more positive schemata about religious schools. Rather than becoming “turned off” by their own negative experiences, some describe what can be seen as a process of “sublimating” their own negative experience. Such parents talk about volunteering in the school, serving on a committee, giving suggestions, or otherwise getting involved as a way of making sure their children’s experiences do not replicate their own.

Leverage Points for Changing Preconceptions and Increasing Engagement

What are the factors that may lead a parent to either maintain a negative preconception or to move beyond it? The current data suggest leverage points for changing parent opinions and increasing their engagement in the religious school experience. These leverage points have the potential to break negative schemata, but can also reinforce such attitudes or even disconfirm positive preconceptions.

A Child’s Experience Can Provide Data That Affect a Parent’s Schema

Information suggesting that a child’s religious school experience is more positive than anticipated may disconfirm negative parental schemata. This proved to be the
Expectations, Perceptions, and Preconceptions

case for several parents, including the following mother, who compared her “not very good” religious education with that of her daughter: “She has much more of an experience now to learn more than I learned since she is going to school. . . . She’s going to learn so much more than I did. She will know more than me, I guess, at younger ages since she’s learning it now.”

Another mother, who described her own experience in negative terms, used the word “shocked” to characterize her reaction to her daughter’s having a positive time in religious school. Negative attitudes and low expectations can be changed by a child’s having an engaging or an exciting experience, or by the perception that a child is gaining from his or her education. “I think she’s picked up a lot of the Hebrew prayers very, very quickly and I really didn’t think she would. . . . She’s really starting to remember them, and I didn’t think she would.”

In this regard, the actual gains made by a child in a religious school can be important determinants of a parent’s attitudes. Parents discussed a range of reported student gains. On the one hand, there are parents who question whether their children have gained anything from the experience. On the other hand, there are parents who see gains for their children in such areas as learning how to participate in a synagogue service, how to perform rituals related to holidays, developing a general sense of themselves as part of the Jewish people, and forging a Jewish peer group.

Given this range of perceived outcomes, it is important to note that it is also possible that parents who come to religious school education with positive schemata may find that negative experiences with the school reduce their enthusiasm for engagement. Several parents reported that they themselves went to strong religious school programs (often in a large and well-regarded synagogue in a major Jewish population area) and see their child’s experiences as weak in comparison.

Perceptions of developmental norms   Opinions regarding child-developmental norms and how they relate to religious school education filter a parent’s understanding of a child’s experience. For example, parents may have expectations that Jewish education will engage a child less during the adolescent years than during early or middle childhood. As such, parents may interpret the statement that “religious school is boring” as expected from an adolescent, but more surprising from a younger child. Likewise, if they believe that younger children “naturally” like school better, they may be more impressed by an engaged adolescent than by an excited kindergartner.

Some parents hold a different set of expectations during the early years of religious schooling than they do for later years, closer to the bar/bat mitzvah. As evidenced by the words of the following mother, some parents see a gradual transition from “fun” to “work” inherent in the experience of moving through the grades of religious schooling: “[My daughter] thought of it as more fun when she was younger. As she’s gotten older and the expectations have gotten higher in terms of what she’s expected to do outside of class and all that . . . it has turned into drudgery instead of fun.”
The early-grade versus pre–bar/bat mitzvah distinction is exacerbated by the fact that many parents see increased expectations from the religious school playing out within the broader early adolescent context. The latter often contains major academic pressures from the child’s secular school, social demands of the peer group, and time constraints imposed by extracurricular activities (sports, arts, and so forth). Many parents described the amount of homework brought home by their children or the logistics of making sure their children are at the right place at the right time for their entire various academic, religious, social, sports, and arts commitments. The issue of multiple commitments seems also to increase as the child gets older, adding stress to middle school–aged children’s lives as well as to their own. Parents, in effect, become coordinators and chauffeurs to and from events. Local traffic was frequently raised as a challenge faced by parents and students alike. Several parents admit to their own ambivalence at placing much emphasis on their children’s completing their religious school homework, worrying that they are already overburdened. Given the time pressures, it is possible that more favorable parental expectations exist during the earlier grades because they meet only on Sundays, while the more advanced grades meet during the week as well.

There is evidence that some parents see their children’s increasing disengagement as a natural progression:

**Mother:** A lot of times he does not want to go [to religious school]. It’s not fun enough for him. He had a great teacher. We really don’t know [why it is not fun].

**Father:** I think that at a certain age, no matter what religion you’re teaching, I don’t think there is an intense interest at that age.

This father makes a general attribution (even crossing religious lines) about children’s lack of interest in religious education. What is important here is not whether such attributions are correct or incorrect. After all, there is evidence to point to the fact that children of all ages can find issues of religion and spirituality fascinating and be motivated to learn about them (e.g., Coles 1990), as well as literature and experience showing that many children become increasingly disengaged from the educational process (any educational process) as they get older. The belief that it is a norm for children, to be “turned off” by religious education is held by some parents, and this may help to explain the persistence of negative religious school schemata.

The timing of a child’s entrance into religious school is also relevant. Several parents discussed difficulties—primarily social—experienced by children upon entering school at a later grade because the family has recently moved to the area or because of transitioning from private school. Schools—particularly in transitory communities—should be aware of the social dynamics in cohorts of students, some of whom go through the program starting in the early grades. Likewise, there is potential for social difficulties when the school shifts from “optional” to “mandatory” attendance, in terms of the bar/bat mitzvah. This can represent the influx of new students trying to join a group that is already “in progress” and that has the added
advantage of having knowledge gained in the early years prior to the new cohort’s attendance.

Religious School’s Impact on the Family

Beyond the effect on their children, parents mention a range of impacts of the religious school experience on them as adults, or as a family. Parents discuss the impact of the religious school on several areas of their lives.

ENHANCEMENT OF RITUAL PRACTICE AND COMMUNAL INVOLVEMENT

Some parents talked about undertaking new rituals in response to material their children are learning, such as a parent who reported sitting down for a Shabbat dinner only once every month or two, but having done so “zero before the kids started getting involved [with the religious school].” Or, as another mother put it: “Because they talked about it in school and they bring home things. Let’s do this mom and let’s do this dad and . . . We’re not going to say no to it if they want to do something like that, but it’s nothing that [we] would institute without religious school.”

Other parents discussed the enhancement of a ritual practice. For example, a father who has two daughters who have been involved with the religious school remarked: “We were in services a couple of weeks ago. . . . I just remember very distinctly having a good positive feeling sitting between both of my daughters who knew the service and know the prayers and speak it fluently and with ease. It made me feel good. I obviously wouldn’t have had that feeling before they were in school. There wouldn’t have been a service like that.”

A number of parents reported that they have become more involved in the synagogue as a result of their child’s being in religious school. Some parents mention religious school “requirements” that they attend services occasionally, or feeling as if they need to “set an example” for what the children are learning in religious school as reasons for increased attendance at services.

PURSUIT OF ADULT EDUCATION

For some, a child’s being in the religious school served to initiate further adult learning. Parents described their children coming home with questions and information that they themselves felt unprepared to answer and process, and the sense of responsibility they felt for building their own knowledge base. For example:

My husband [is] going to Torah study now once a week with the rabbi which he never did before. . . . I think it was about two years ago when they [the children in religious school] were starting to do the parshas [Torah portions] and they would come back, and I wouldn’t know exactly what they were talking about. But . . . my husband said [we] have to start learning this. Then he went to a Torah study [class]. . . . I mean, if he couldn’t answer the questions, I was like, you know, that’s kind of sad. . . . My younger one was coming home with all these Hebrew words I didn’t know. I said, oh, these are basic and I don’t even know them. They handed me a sheet with definitions. I said,
OK, let me learn my letters, let me know some basics. So I took [a Hebrew] class. So I think we both started learning more.

One mother went so far as to attribute her decision to convert to Judaism as being sparked by an adult education experience that she undertook in an attempt to be more conversant with her children on topics they are learning in religious school. In fact, the theme of pursuing adult education was mentioned frequently by parents who had converted to Judaism. These participants spoke about the need to, in the words of one participant, “alleviate confusion with the children” by learning about, and becoming participants in, Jewish religious life.

Several parents also mentioned learning from their children, or as one father put it “we learn as they learn,” from the new information, materials, and rituals the children bring home with them. Finally, several mothers relate the experience of reading from the Torah (something they themselves might not have done while they were growing up) as part of their child’s bar/bat mitzvah, and discuss how meaningful this has been for them.

**SOCIAL IMPACT** A further category of family impact had to do with meeting other religious school parents: “[The religious school experience] introduced them to kids that they would not have met before. Consequently, it introduced us to adults, you know, parents of those kids. We do have one or two good friends or people that we socialize with that we would not have know if it wasn’t for the religious school.”

The social impact of schools on parents is particularly noteworthy given the potential for a parent’s social network to impact on his or her parenting behaviors (Cochran and Niegro 2002). In fact, when asked specifically about their friendship patterns, approximately half of the respondents report that at least half of their friends have children in the same religious school. More to the point, a slightly greater percentage reported that among these friends are those whom they feel they would not have known if not for the mutual association with religious school.

**POSSIBLE FOR NEGATIVE IMPACT** There is also potential for negative impact on the family. For example, the following mother’s comments reflect her frustration with her daughter’s complaints about religious school:

I honestly can’t tell you [about impact of the religious school]. I think she feels a lot of accomplishment on what she did by being bat mitzvah and I think ... being around more Jewish kids has helped. But as far as really a Jewish identity, a feel towards the importance of the state of Israel, really understanding all the Jewish heritage, I don’t know that she’s gotten any of it. I think she’s resented every day being there. It’s like, “I’m bored, I’m bored, I’m bored,” but I know from her report card that she participates when she’s there. She’s a good student. It’s like, is this a show for mom and dad? “Don’t make me go. Please can I skip it?” Her first thing was after her bat mitzvah, “I don’t have to go to Hebrew school anymore. Can I quit tomorrow?” It’s like, “No you can’t.”
Religious school attendance can be a matter of dissatisfaction to the child, though the mother above hints at the fact that her daughter may be having a more positive experience than she lets on at home. This experience can result in tension between the parents, who (like the parent above) may be advocating/requiring religious education and children, who may be resisting. This tension can be exacerbated by schedule conflicts between religious school and other activities (sports, clubs, and so forth). Parents noted a range of reactions to such conflicts, but they frequently reported what might be seen as a form of détente—enforcing religious school attendance, with some exceptions made if the conflicting activity is of particular importance. For example, a parent may not permit a child to miss school for a soccer game, but may allow the child to do so for soccer playoffs.

Religious school can come to be seen as just one more burden for an overextended child to shoulder, or another carpool for the parents to manage. The following mother described the increasing pressure on her son that spilled over into the family:

He [did] well in fifth grade because he had an hour and a half break between regular school and Hebrew school so it kind of worked out... But when he got into sixth grade... it became a nightmare because he went to school; he... was picked up straight after school at 4:15 p.m.; went straight to Hebrew school; and did not get home until 6:30 and then was faced with dinner and about three hours of homework a night... It just really put everybody over the edge. He was up to 10 or 11 o'clock on those nights doing homework and stuff... The middle schools don't get out until 4:00, and Hebrew school starts at 4:15. [He] wouldn't even have time half the time [to buy a snack].

Stress such as this is discussed by some parents as applying to their lives too, as they have to fight the local traffic (invariably described as awful) to get their children from place to place on time, and may have the effect of maintaining negative schemata.

Parents Emphasize Their Role in Their Children’s Jewish Development

Parents saw themselves as the primary agents of Jewish developmental influence. They discussed their family rituals as setting norms for, and sending messages to, their children.

FATHER: Children learn from parents and by what parents do more than what parents say... You’ve got to teach by example... I don’t mean you’ve got to stand up there every Saturday and preach it to ‘em and yell the words at ‘em. In my opinion, it’s more of a daily example of doing.

MOTHER: And I would agree with that... When they see us light the candles and do the blessings at Shabbat or go to services a couple of times a month, or, you know, participate in the holidays and stuff... they’re learning... by example to do that as well one day.
They also describe the importance of modeling through community involvement, volunteering, synagogue leadership and activity, and other Jewish pursuits outside of the home. Some talk about their role in structuring various Jewish activities for their children as a component of modeling. That is, they talk about their decisions to send their child to religious school, or a Jewish camp, as demonstrating to their children their own commitment to Judaism. Such views are consistent with research suggesting that parents exert influence not only through their direct interactions with their children, but also through serving as “coaches, teachers and supervisors as they provide advice, support, and directions about strategies for managing new social situations or negotiating social challenges or dilemmas. In a third role, parents function as managers of their children’s social lives and serve as regulators of opportunities for social contacts and cognitive experiences” (Parke and Buriel 1998: 46). In terms of learning prosocial values, the importance of “learning by doing” has been found to be a more effective method of family values education than “learning by telling” (Eisenberg and Fabes 1998).

Parents’ self-ascribed importance may complicate their engagement in the religious school. After all, if a parent sees him- or herself as the primary agent of Jewish development, why would the school matter? However, the fact that there are parents who take their roles seriously, and therefore may be willing to work together with a strong religious school to accomplish the desired ends, opens up the possibility of changing negative religious school preconceptions. Such a possibility is presaged by parents who talk about interconnected clusters of influences on Jewish outcomes. For example: “[I]f he [son] and we are successful in creating this bond with the synagogue and his friends, then just because the classes go away [post–bar mitzvah], that doesn’t mean that he’ll stop seeing his Jewish friends in synagogue on a regular basis and continuing to be friends with them. And also again, being in the school district that we’re in, a lot of the kids in the public school system here are Jewish and probably a lot of [the religious school] kids are together.”

This father speaks in terms of a constellation of Jewish influences, with family and friends as central points, but also encompassing other contexts. Kress and Elias have previously stated, based on data collected on influences on Jewish development, and on the application of developmental theories that stress the importance of interrelated contexts for development (see Bronfenbrenner 1979) that “it takes a kehillah to make a mensch” (Kress and Elias 1998). It may also be possible for negative parental schemata to change based on the perception that a school is engaging them in a partnership for the good of their children. Reinforcement of negative views may result from parents’ perception that either the school does not add to their own efforts or does not see a meaningful role for them.

The Relationship of Parents and the Synagogue

At one juncture in the interviews, parents were asked why they chose their particular synagogue. A recurring answer was that this choice was dictated by—to use a
phrase employed by many—a view of the synagogue’s being “warm and welcoming,” a place where they felt at home. The phrasing of this father is typical: “The rabbi was extremely dynamic and engaging and friendly, more than knowledgeable . . . you know, personable. He remembered who you are. He brings you into the fold and involves you. The atmosphere at the synagogue was very warm and friendly and inviting. . . . People just embraced you. It’s really a . . . I don’t know . . . but it’s a wonderful place.”

Several parents pointed out the difference between the welcoming way in which they experience their current synagogue with the memories they have of more detached synagogue experiences in the past. The sense of warmth is often attributed to the rabbi and described as imbuing the congregation as a whole. Another recurring factor is that they chose a synagogue where their friends also belong. Parents from the Reform temple who are themselves converts, or whose spouses have converted or are not Jewish, mentioned the welcoming stance of the rabbi, the congregants, and the synagogue in general regarding interfaith or conversional families. Some parents, particularly Conservative ones, reported that they were looking specifically for a synagogue within their own denomination. Also, geography often plays a role. Many decided to move to the suburbs (often citing the quality of the public schools) and joined the nearest synagogue that either “felt right” or was in their denomination.

What is the relevance of a parent’s perceptions of the synagogue on their relationship with the religious school? First, it is noteworthy that, although the interviews generally focused on the religious school and not on the synagogue, many respondents brought up the subject of the latter in discussing the former. For example, in answering a question about their contact with, and involvement in, the religious school and its personnel, one family responded:

FATHER: It’s a very down-to-earth synagogue, and they like parental involvement. It includes parents. Every other Shabbat is a [child’s program] where they have Shabbat for the little kids before Friday night service.
INTERVIEWER: Which professionals from the religious school do you generally have contact with?
FATHER: The rabbi, the cantor, and the teachers.
INTERVIEWER: Under what circumstances and what kind of issues does it usually concern?
FATHER: Mostly it’s for services. They’re pretty much there and all the additional, outside of the religious services, they’re there at all the . . . special events like . . . carnivals.

The close association in the minds of parents between the religious school and synagogue has the potential to cause a crossover of opinions. From the religious school’s standpoint, this can be a benefit. Many of the parents interviewed had a positive opinions of the synagogue, and this has the potential to “rub off” on the religious school. For example, the following mother was asked is she thought her
daughter’s religious school experience would mirror her own negative experience as a child. She replied: “No, I really didn’t because of the synagogue itself. I felt like they were going to have an advantage that I didn’t have [emphasis added].”

The synagogue/religious school overlap can work in the other direction as well. A few parents, in discussing their religious school experience, brought up conflicts they had with the clergy that seemed to color their general attitude about the synagogue and the school. Or, they reported feeling like “outsiders” in the synagogue and the religious school. Further, whereas a small number of parents described the religious school as playing a part in their choice of a particular synagogue, most first selected the synagogue and then sent their children to the synagogue’s religious school. Although they may have “shopped around” for a synagogue, they generally did not do so for religious schools. Part of the parental schema for religious school education appears to be the assumption that they will send their child to the religious school of the synagogue to which they belong (a schema supported by the fee-structures of many synagogues and religious schools). As a result, parents may not obtain enough information about the religious school, its curriculum, or its personnel before their child enrolls. This may have ramifications in terms of negative religious school schema development. Even if the current religious school experience is nothing like what they remember from their youth, parents who are not involved in the school and who chose the school as the logical sequence to their choice of synagogue, may not have enough information to change their minds.

Discussion and Recommendations

Several suggestions emerge from the results discussed above. Though grounded in the data, these recommendations are also drawn from educational theory and other sources of research and practice. These guidelines are broad in structure rather than being focused on specific content areas, in agreement with Schoem’s (1992) claim that changes on a small scale (a tweaking of curriculum or number of hours, here or there) will be insufficient to change religious schools, or to alter attitudes toward them. Instead, the challenge of improving religious schools lies in thinking broadly and working to bridge multiple systems.

A schema-based approach suggests that efforts to enhance parents’ engagement in the religious school endeavor should proceed along two lines: (1) enhance religious school education to disconfirm negative schemata; and (2) develop ways to increase parental exposure to schema-disconfirming data and provide multiple entry points to the religious educational enterprise. However, before either of these lines of analysis is pursued, modification of the negative preconceptions held by Jewish professionals regarding religious schools and religious school parents is needed. Are religious school parents, by definition, disinterested in their children’s Jewish education? There is certainly evidence to support a negative schema regarding religious school parents. However, schema theory points out that we are par-
ticularly attuned to information that supports our preconceptions. It is important
to be aware that religious school parents represent a broad range of care and com-
mitment, and to acknowledge the potential of religious schools to impact the lives
of children and families. The data presented here support the notion that there are
parents who take the religious school endeavor very seriously.

Rioux and Berla (1993), reviewing programs in general education, “found posi-
tive attitudes on the part of school personnel toward parents and an appreciation
of both the difficulties and problems many families experience in daily life and the
strength of the commitment and contribution to the education of their children” (332)
to be crucial for success in increasing parental involvement. Such a positive
mindset is seen in the approach of the leadership profiled in Reimer’s (1997) study
of Temple Akiba:

When a family decides to send their children to the synagogue school and to partici-
pate in temple life, even when some members of the family are not formally Jewish,
they are viewed as choosing a Jewish life. Given that many Jewish families in this city
and across the county have never chosen to join a synagogue or to provide their children
with a sustained Jewish education, the rabbis wish to acknowledge and celebrate this
choice and commitment. (79, emphasis added)

At a time when Judaism is being seen as less of an obligation than a choice (see
Cohen and Eisen 2000), the decision to send a child to religious school already
represents a commitment on a family’s part, in terms of values, time, and resources.
Looking back on these data, one should be able to read both ongoing support for
the conventional wisdom that religious school parents show limited concern with
their children’s Jewish education, as well as evidence that parents care about, and
have even been positively affected by, religious school education.

Parents are balancing various values, and the decision to send a child to religious
school rather than a day school should not be taken as a proxy for lack of inter-
est in Jewish outcomes. Parents who considered day schools or who enrolled their
children in day schools but switched them to secular schools were asked about
these decisions. A variety of explanations were given, with the same parents often
offering several. Many reasons had to do with finances or logistics (for example,
the day school was too far away). Almost all of the parents mentioned the high
quality of the local public schools, many saying this was a primary factor in at-
tracting them to this area. Some discussed their belief in the importance of public
school education and the value of exposure to diversity as preparation for the “real
world.” Several talked about their concern that day schools could not address their
children’s specific learning issues. Some were worried about the social ramifications
for their children, either because the school day was long and the peer group spread
out geographically, or because they saw day school families as cliquish or conceited.
Clearly, this is a complex, multifaceted decision for many parents, and not a simple
matter of deemphasizing Jewish outcomes.

Changing the set of assumptions regarding youth and their relationship to
religious concerns can also help motivate efforts to improve religious school education. Smith and Denton (2005), in their National Study of Youth and Religion, found data to negate the view that young people are disinterested in issues of religion and resistant to efforts to engage them in religious education. As these authors conclude:

...[I]n general, parents and faith communities should not be shy about teaching teens. Adults do not hesitate to direct and expect from teens when it comes to school, sports, music, and beyond. But there seems to be a curious reluctance among many adults to teach teens when it comes to faith. Adults often seem to want to do little more than "expose" teens to religion. Many adults seem to us to be almost intimidated by teenagers, afraid to be seen as "uncool." And it seems many religious youth workers are under a lot of pressure to entertain teens. In fact, however, we believe that most teens are teachable, even if they themselves do not really know that or let on that they are interested. Parents, ministers, and adult mentors need, it seems to us, to develop more confidence in teaching youth about their faith traditions and expecting meaningful responses from them. (267; emphases in original)

Once an acknowledgment is made regarding the potential for religious school parents to be caring and committed and to hold positive opinions about the process, and for youth to become engaged in religious education, we can turn to recommendations presented under the two broad headings suggested by schema theory—enhancing religious schools and bringing parents into contact with the religious educational enterprise.

Recommendation Category 1: Enhance Religious School Education to Provide Data to Disconfirm Negative Schemata

Draw from the methods and theory of informal/experiential Jewish education, and connect with informal settings. Parents tended to recall their own informal education experiences—camp, youth groups, and so forth, in much more positive terms than they do their formal Jewish education. Also, some suggested that religious schools and synagogues should become more involved with “informal” education by, for example, incorporating retreats for children to spend more time with clergy, or creating a better space for teenagers to “hang out.” The expectations articulated by parents (such as Jewish friendships, self-growth), overlap to a large extent with the goals of informal education. For example, Chazan (2001) lists among the characteristics of informal education, the ideas that it be “person-centered,” and “interactive,” that it includes “fun and enjoyment,” and that it focus on “the Jewish values, behaviors, and beliefs that we want Jews to internalize” (3). Reisman and Reisman (2002) add to this a social component, emphasizing the interaction among learners. Of course, religious schools do not meet a major criterion often attributed to informal education in that they are seen as compulsory. Regardless, it is worth considering the extent to which formal
educational models not only can be enhanced by making the approach more “informal,” but also that considering whether such a reframing in name and deed could prevent the activation of negative religious school schemata (or “school” schemata at all, for that matter) for children and parents.

Religious school is generally modeled after “school”—with teachers, classrooms, and assignments. What might a religious school look like if it were based more on an experiential education model? How might “activities and events,” rather than “assignments and homework,” frame learning? These questions are easier asked than answered. However, they suggest that a unit on Jewish holidays could be based on, for example, a project such as helping a local nursing home prepare for and celebrate a holiday—with concomitant visits, arts activities, use of technology for research, and so on, each incorporating the desired “Jewish content.”

A related issue is where religious school education is “situated” (Lave and Wenger 1991). Although religious school aims to socialize students into a set of Jewish values and behaviors, this education often takes place in a setting that from a standpoint of Jewish practice is artificial or removed from those activities into which the child is to be socialized. One can “learn about” driving a car in a driver’s education class, but one cannot learn “how to drive” a car until one is sitting behind the wheel with a competent instructor. Lave and Wenger discuss learning as a process of becoming acquainted with the sociocultural behaviors expected of an individual. This is clearly the case in religious school education (and Jewish education in general), where goals involve the learning of ritual and cultural practice. These authors suggest that “…issues of learning and schooling seemed to have become too interrelated in our culture in general. . . . More importantly, the organization of schooling as an educational form suggests that knowledge can be decontextualized” (Lave and Wenger 1991: 39–40).

Lave and Wegner also propose that sociocultural practice is better learned through a process similar to apprenticeship within communities of practice. A similar approach to education is stressed by noted educational psychologist Robert Sternberg, who claims that “direct learning experience is what happens when a parent or teacher teaches us a fact. It is important learning, but less important than mediated learning experience, which is the learning children do through adult interpretation of what goes on around the child” (Sternberg and Williams 2002: 177). A conceptualization of religious school education that is more consonant with synagogue services and rituals might help better situate learning in a setting where it can be “mediated” in real-life situations. Many schools have expectations that children will attend Shabbat services occasionally. However, generally speaking, what goes on in services is not coordinated with what goes on in school, or there is no attempt to provide “on the spot” education during services linked to the goals of the religious school, or letting students become increasingly involved in the service.

Learning can also be “situated” within the family context. Parents frequently described Friday night dinners and holiday observances as rituals that take place in
their homes at least occasionally. Schools might consider how to use these and other events as central themes around which to structure the curriculum, while at the same time educating parents about how their children can put their new knowledge to use in situ. Further, the bar/bat mitzvah “circuit” was cited by parents as an all-encompassing set of activities that, while potentially aggravating to parents, can be motivating to students. As students will be attending one another’s bar/bat mitzvah services, might the school be able to link this experience with the curriculum? The bar/bat mitzvah speech has the potential to be more than an academy-award-style “thank you,” and can actually provide an opportunity for the bar/bat mitzvah student to explore a topic of interest. Likewise, efforts can be made to scaffold the experience of the attendees, who can listen and learn from the speech of their peers, and who may be able to participate in a service they are attending anyway.

Religious schools should also forge stronger ties with already existing informal educational opportunities. Educational themes can be coordinated between the religious school and youth groups. To continue the above example, visits to a nursing home might be the youth group’s “turf,” although some of the preparation could take place in the religious school. An example can be found in Reimer’s (1997) Temple Akiba, where part-time formal education and youth activities personnel on the high school level have been combined into one full-time staff, resulting in “...more overlap between the domains and a more full-time youth director who also teaches in the high school. Further, the synchrony between formal and informal education extends down in age into the religious school, where children are offered a number of informal opportunities for involvement each year well before their becoming Bar or Bat Mitzvah” (86).

The coordination of formal and informal education can take place on a community-based level as well. Several parents described the time conflict between their children’s activities at the local Jewish Community Center and at religious school on Sunday mornings. While some temporal conflict may be unavoidable, increased coordination would not only ease stresses on parents concerning transportation and scheduling, but also send a message about prioritizing youth activities.

ATTEND TO THE SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL ASPECTS OF LEARNING, AND PREPARE TEACHERS TO FOSTER A POSITIVE CLASS ENVIRONMENT. The social and emotional aspects of religious school education are salient to the parents interviewed. They want their children to develop a peer group and feelings of connectedness to Judaism. Outcomes in the affective and interpersonal arenas are critical to Jewish educators as well. “This major Jewish value—that of being a ‘mensch’—has been one of the few constants among the shifting landscape of American Jewry” (Kress and Elias 2001:182).

Moreover, deficits in social and emotional areas manifest themselves in poor conduct in the classroom, a common problem for religious school teachers, parents, and children alike. Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) aims to develop an individual’s ability to understand, manage, and express the social and emotional
aspects of life in ways that enable the individual to successfully manage life tasks such as learning, forming relationships, solving everyday problems, adapting to the complex demands of growth and development, and forging an adult identity. SEL involves weaving opportunities to build self-awareness, self-control, and problem-solving and other skills into both curricular efforts and less structured aspects of education. In general education, an SEL approach has been found to produce improvements in relationships between students and teachers, attachment to school, student attitudes and motivation, and decreased nonattendance/drop outs (see Elias et al. 1991) and has been linked to academic achievement as well (Zins et al. 2004).

An SEL approach advocates that the emotional experience of the learner be taken into account. For example, students come to religious school following a full day at secular school, which for all students—particularly those in competitive schools—can be a rigorous and draining experience. During the school day, they experience academic successes and struggles, friendship and social rejection. SEL proposes that religious school educators acknowledge these facts, perhaps by changing the way students transition from the secular school to the religious school. Students may need help in refocusing and “shifting gears,” yet teachers offer few rituals of greeting and transition designed to ease a student’s emotional state.

The social and emotional competencies of religious school educators are also relevant. If it is a cliché to call teaching a “difficult job,” then teaching in religious school is uniquely difficult. Many teachers have received little or no formal teacher-preparation, and they confront students who may not be entering their classroom “ready to learn.” Since they have just a few hours a week to achieve their goals, how a teacher manages stress, communicates with students (especially when upset and angry), and handles “discipline” will not only impact on the child’s experience of the religious school, but also on the ability of teachers to effectively do their jobs. Staff development efforts can focus on the SEL competencies that educators bring with them to their work. A more positive social and emotional climate can manifest itself in the creation of a more caring learning community (Novick, Kress, and Elias 2002) and can thereby create additional positive data to disconfirm negative schemata.

Finally, “[a]dults should be aware . . . that better adult teaching of youth will require stronger adult relationships with youth. More important . . . than, say, new pedagogical techniques will be the building of sustained, meaningful, personal adult relationships with the teens they teach” (Smith and Denton 2005: 267). Efforts at relationship building face many impediments in the religious school context but should be taken into account in making decisions about how to structure the school’s time (for example, how can time be carved out for increased teacher-student interactions?) and professional responsibilities (for example, how can a religious educator can become part of a child’s life, perhaps in conjunction with the synagogue, outside of the few hours of instruction?)
Recommendation Category 2: Develop Ways to Increase Parental Exposure to Schema-Disconfirming Data and Provide Multiple Entry Points to the Religious Educational Enterprise

ATTEND TO “MARKETING” AND THE PROCESS OF INDUCTION There are many efforts in place to improve religious school education. Preservice training for educators and administrators is on the rise, systems-based interventions are being developed, and best practices examined (see Holtz 1993). Additional suggestions for improvement are discussed in the previous section. The notion of schema suggests that along with any changes and enhancements that a religious school undertakes, it is important to consider a parallel question: “Are the parents noticing, and if not, how might we get them to do so?” An implication of schema theory is that “marketing” is not to be left to potential synagogue or religious school membership. Rather, marketing—in the sense of providing data to parents that may help to dislodge previously held negative conceptions of religious school—must be an ongoing process through which, to paraphrase an automobile commercial, parents learn that “this is not your parent’s [or your] religious school.” Of course, this marketing must take place in the context of a strong program and/or ongoing improvement efforts.

Parents generally have minimal exposure to information about the religious school, so we cannot simply hope that a parent’s attitude about religious schooling will change, even in strong schools, based on the fact that “things are better now” or “our school has a good reputation.” Parents need to be surprised by increasing their exposure to what is new and novel about a particular program. Information must be disseminated in a variety of ways, including the Internet and the rabbi’s use of his or her pulpit to discuss improvements to or strengths of the religious school and the importance of religious school education.

Religious schools may do well to use the early grades to help break negative schemata. Although parents who choose to enroll their children before the entry point “required for bar/bat mitzvah” are already a select group, the positive experiences often attributed by parents to the early years in religious school may be helpful in showing parents that there is an alternate to their negative associations with religious schooling. The achievements and enthusiasm of the early grades can be publicized to the congregation by displaying art or involving children in parts of the service. Efforts at post-preschool retention should be intensified.

Although the parents interviewed generally expressed expectations about religious school, bar/bat mitzvah, and their children’s Jewish development outcomes, it appeared that many had not been confronted with this question before nor had they previously articulated their ideas about these issues. Educators should consider how parents (and students, for that matter) are inducted into the process of religious education. Often, such a process is marked simply by a “kick-off” event for parents in which general information is shared (that is, if it is marked at all; many programs simply begin when students are dropped off on the first day). However,
this entry point can provide an opportunity for an educational leader and/or rabbi
to engage parents in a serious discussion of their goals and hopes for their children,
what they want their children to gain from the experience, what they expect from
the school, and how they can help in the process of achieving these goals. This con-
versation can be repeated at various intervals and can even take place with students
(particularly at the older grades). Negative preconceptions, misgivings, or concerns
about time can be addressed as real issues and a process of joint problem solving
initiated.

Finally, a recurring view expressed by parents was the perception that “other par-
ents,” in contrast with themselves, “just don’t care” about religious school. Parents,
for example, often discussed with frustration the difficulty of enforcing attendance
when “everyone else” allows their children to skip religious school for sports or
other commitments. There was a feeling expressed of being a lone voice advocat-
ing an unpopular decision. Of course, such opinions may represent overly positive,
self-congratulatory assessments on the part of these parents. However, given the
self-selected nature of this sample, there is likely an element of truth, that the current
parents really are more committed than average. Even so, these parents do not seem
aware of other parents who are potential “allies” in their efforts to support religious
educational efforts. To the extent that parents perceive themselves as alone in their
views, the perception that “nobody cares” may become a self-fulfilling prophecy.
Parents may come to see futility in bucking the perceived trend and stressing to
their children the importance of religious school. Therefore, schools may benefit
by building on this core, putting forth effort not just to attract the less engaged, but
also to support the religious school boosters. Building networks among committed
families may create a solid foundation for changing norms.

Foster fluidity between school and synagogue, and increase
clergy involvement Synagogues are clearly the “point of entry” and ve-
cicle for connection for many of the parents in this study. Although parents may
have joined the synagogue with the knowledge that they would send their children
to its religious school, they generally picked the synagogue for reasons other than
the school. Parents find themselves at synagogue for a number of reasons, primarily
services, which many parents attend occasionally if not regularly. In the minds and
words of many of the parents here, the synagogue and the religious school seem to
meld—responses dealing with one often include discussion of the other.

The melding of school and synagogue is a point of potential strength for reli-
gious school education. As described in the ethnographic work of Reimer (1997),
synagogue leadership can work from a vision in which “community, worship, and
education can complement each other in an educating synagogue” (58). In Reimer’s
Temple Akiba, congregation and education come together in the way services are
run and in adult and family educational opportunities. Interestingly, the rabbi of
this synagogue takes a strengths-based view of the diversity of religious practice
and the religious makeup of the families in the congregation. In a quotation from
Reimer’s work, the rabbi’s perspective is that “given the tremendous temptations that Jews face to assimilate into American culture, ‘it’s kind of unbelievable that we have preserved as much Yiddishkeit as we have.’ In his view, the educational task of the synagogue is not to fight assimilation, but to ‘make Jews’—to positively contribute to people’s self-identification as Jews” (Reimer 1997: 79). A rabbi has the ability to set such a tone for a congregation, as well as to stress, by word and by deed, the importance of religious school education. Reimer’s portrait includes many aspects of the synagogue experience into which education is infused.

Reimer’s work also illustrates the potential for the religious school administrator to “function as both rabbi and educator. As rabbi he self-consciously symbolizes the connection between the synagogue’s religious and educational programs. He also takes a pastoral attitude toward the parents of the school. He reaches out and offers his time and attention to help them not only with school-related issues, but also with their own search to lead a Jewish life. They relate to him with that special respect that the title ‘Rabbi’ can carry” (Reimer 1997: 87).

Of course, not all synagogue directors are rabbis, but the example of Temple Akiba illustrates the power of a religious school director stepping out of the bounds of the religious school and being active in the pastoral and ritual life of the greater synagogue. As with all of these recommendations, there are systemic challenges to implementing the idea. For example, adult education (and particularly pastoral work) may not be within the skill-set of a religious school administrator, and there are other issues regarding time commitments of the administrator. However, the example does suggest that consideration be given as to how best develop a leadership model in which the educator is a visible presence and a voice in both the running of a synagogue and to the congregants who may have little connection to the religious school, and that the rabbi is a visible component of the religious school.

Together, a visible and vocal leadership team can have the ability to set priorities and create a vision for the synagogue, even in the face of cultural pressures against Jewish education. To continue with Reimer’s example, the rabbis and educators “will stand up for a more intensive Jewish education than was offered previously even against the calls for less” (Reimer 1997: 184). Reimer suggests that “perhaps this clear sense of collective identity helps explain why I rarely encountered bored children or adults in the many educational contexts of this congregation” (185).

**ATTEND TO PARENTS AS ADULT LEARNERS** Kaplan, Liu, and Kaplan (2001) found that parents’ sense of their own educational competence mediates the degree to which they become involved in their children’s education. Parents may have concerns about their own educational attainment, which spill over into their efforts to become involved, leading to the possibility that

parents with higher levels of negative self-feelings will, because they are strongly motivated to improve their self-feelings, more firmly embrace the areas in which they have
been successful and avoid the areas in which they have been unsuccessful. In turn, they may project their embrace of strong areas and avoidance of weak areas onto their children. In other words, while trying to work out their own intrapsychic difficulties, parents may provide ambiguous and inhibiting expectations for their children. (366)

Simply stated in relation to religious schools, parents’ concern regarding their lack of attainment might influence their attitudes about their children’s religious school education and prevent them from becoming more involved with the school (and thereby exposing themselves to schema-disconfirming data).

Kaplan, Liu, and Kaplan (2001) advise “considering the needs and capabilities of parents” (368). Synagogues and religious schools might heed this recommendation in more closely linking adult education efforts with the school curriculum, both in terms of content matter for adults and in terms of how parents can best “carry over” this information for their children in support of what is learned in school. The importance of the latter prong—working with parents around their role as religious educators of their children—is supported by the work of Zellman and Waterman (1998) who found that “how parents interact with their children is more important than the extent to which they are involved at school” (379), and may be particularly important in light of the importance that parents attribute to their own role as Jewish role models. “Jewish parenting” and “Jewish content” should go hand in hand as goals for adult education, in a way that is coordinated with the content of the religious school curriculum.

Involving Parents in More, and More Innovative, Ways Parental involvement is based on factors beyond simply providing an opportunity or invitation to get involved (Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler 1995, 1997). Building involvement requires us to ask whether parents consider it important to be involved in the school. Our data suggest that while parents acknowledge their role in achieving positive Jewish developmental outcomes for their children, they are ambivalent about their involvement in the school. Also, we must ask if parents feel that their involvement would make a difference to their child. If parents do not see their participation as meaningful (as one parent put it, with evident sarcasm: “I sliced tangerines last week, I guess that was participation . . .”), they will be unlikely to become more involved with the school.

Parent involvement as reported by the participants in this study mostly involves the passive receipt of communication (except around logistical concerns, when communication might increase) and occasional attendance at events and volunteer opportunities. Swap (1992) points out that a thoughtful, planned, sustained approach must be taken in organizing educational activities for parents with the goal of increasing their involvement in their children’s education. Such a procedure begins with an assessment of parental interests and involves the creation of a range of different activities (taking place in different formats to suit a range of parental preferences), with opportunities for parents to provide meaningful feedback about
the experience. Swap suggests avoiding multiple “one-shot” sessions on different
topics and prefers exploring topics over time to allow for increased depth. The same
type of sustained, planned approach can be applied to parent’s volunteer activities
in the school, with assessment of school needs and parents’ skills/strengths leading
to a meaningful matching with training/orientation of volunteers, feedback on
how things are going, and celebration of volunteer accomplishments (Swap 1992).
Religious schools may engage parents based on the strengths they already bring to
the table, for example, by inviting parents in to discuss any leadership or volunteer
work they do in the Jewish community.

The overall sense of the literature for public schools, and perhaps one can say “all
the more so” for religious schools, is that increasing parent involvement is a worth-
while goal, but difficult to achieve. Swap’s (1992) summary of suggestions in the
field suggests that “more of the same” will not create the needed change. Experts
suggest that even parent-school communication (such as notes and newsletters), a
major source of information to the parents in this study, need to be reevaluated in
order to “develop additional ways for parents and schools to engage in productive
dialogue” that is “frequent” and “positive” (Fleming 1993: 79). Although contem-
porary educators have the option to enhance communication through e-mail, a
structured approach must be taken here too. Teachers might need training in using
e-mail or in writing effective notes to parents. They may need access to comput-
ers and e-mail accounts. Parents, already recipients of an avalanche of e-mail, may
“tune out” those from the school. Educators must consider creative ways to draw
parents in (perhaps a Web-based contest, raffle, or game), and if the strengths of the
educational administrator are not in this area, then perhaps a parent or a student
can be recruited to help.

There is much to suggest that if increasing parent involvement is indeed a goal,
then piecemeal efforts will do little, especially given the harried lives of parents
and the potential for ambivalence about the religious school process. Some general
educational theorists (Comer and Haynes 1991; Epstein and Sanders 2003) suggest
that efforts should be made to involve parents at all levels of an educational institu-
tion, including shaping vision and setting policy. In Jewish education, an interest-
ing example of such an attempt is the RE-IMAGINE project of the Experiment
in Congregational Excellence (http://www.eceonline.org). Through this initiative,
professional leadership and lay people embark on a process of self-study for educa-
tional improvement that includes rigorous data collection from multiple constitu-
cencies and extended consideration of options. Such an approach allows parents to
become actively involved in the future of education at a synagogue.

Efforts to bring parents into the orbit of the school should not be limited to the
educational sphere but should also include social activities that build on existing
parent social networks. It is clear that for many parents, although the synagogue
and the religious school may not be the center of their social universe, they do tend
to have friends with children in the school and discuss the social atmosphere of the
synagogue. Stouffer (1992) suggests that “to improve parent involvement, especially
with those who have seldom if ever been involved, the initial thrust should be "social" (7). Synagogues might consider parallel activities for parents and children, in order to ease issues concerning child care.

Finally, an interesting yet underdeveloped source of engaging parents involves schools’ procedures for drop-off and pickup of students. In an article in the *New York Times* (Rubis 2004), a mother of a student in a suburban secular private school compares her school transportation experiences with those she encountered previously while living in New York City. In contrast to the "loitering, gossiping mommies" (15) who congregated in front of the city school, her current experience involves parents waiting anonymously in the "car line." This pickup/drop-off line was part of the experience of many of the parents in the suburban synagogues of this study. Synagogues varied in the ability of their parking lot layout to accommodate parents who might consider parking and entering the school. It was easy to see how a parent might feel discouraged from doing so, or even find it impossible had they wanted to. Synagogue educators might consider how to encourage parents to come a bit earlier to pickup, to enter the school. Might it be possible to offer refreshments? An exhibit of some kind? Also, as synagogues are designed or renovated, might this be a factor considered in the layout?

**Conclusion**

There are certainly many impediments to implementing, or even engaging in serious discussion about, the recommendations made here. One interesting dichotomy can be found between recommendations that illustrate the importance of synagogue educational leaders’ establishing a vision, and those that suggest parents be brought into the envisioning process. This presents a challenging balancing act for congregations in creating a "shared" vision while still keeping true to established goals and values. A process for discussion of these issues, if conducted in a climate of positive, constructive engagement, can be an important educational opportunity for both clergy and parents, as each group considers the other’s point of view. This type of paradox is seen as important to the empowerment perspective as articulated earlier. Rappaport (2000) points out that “… because different constituencies hold sometimes opposite preferences and expectations, the most effective organizations often perform in contradictory ways. This is, of course, a point of view that is philosophically consistent with the previous writing on empowerment, including the importance of divergent reasoning, the eschewing of single standards of competence, and of single solutions to social problems” (59).

On the broadest level, Jewish educational professionals must be willing to work with the paradox of disinterested, disengaged parents existing alongside caring and committed parents, and parents who voice both concern about the Jewish identities of their children and also ambivalence at the amount of effort expended to bolster Jewish identity outcomes. Changing parental attitudes and building engagement
may never be 100 percent effective. Jewish educational professionals must aim for these goals, while at the same time building an education that does not fully depend on parental involvement. They must respect the potential for parental engagement when their experience is that such an outcome may not be the norm.

There are, of course, more practical concerns involved in implementing the suggestions made here. Many synagogues are dealing with basic issues of staffing, getting classes “covered,” dealing with high turnover rates from year to year. School leadership may not have needed skill-set to address these ideas. This has implications for the training and preparation of religious school leadership, who should—in addition to knowing Judaics, pedagogy, and the basics of administration—also learn how to think of synagogues as complex organizational systems, how to reach out to different constituencies, how to manage the politics of synagogue boards, and how to develop their own educational board or committee. Involvement of the religious school administrator in reaching out to parents and becoming more involved in synagogue functioning comes on top of already existing duties. Synagogue educational leaders who are committed to educational improvement must realize that this process takes time and resources.

The interface of parents and religious schools has been a source of frustration to many Jewish educators and Jewish parents over the years. It is important to approach the issue from a strengths-based perspective, rather than attributing blame. The difficulties involved in raising children in modern times, in transmitting values and cultural norms, are not limited to parents of religious schoolchildren. In fact, the words of Garbarino, Kostelny, and Barry (1997), writing about development in “high risk” communities, may well ring true for parents and educators of Jewish children as well:

Internalization of values was probably much simpler when all outside influences were more or less consistent—when the messages about right and wrong, obligations to others, relationships, respect, work, and loyalty were relatively similar, whether they came from one’s family, school, church or other community or societal institutions. But today, few societies enjoy such a simple situation and children are likely to encounter strikingly different messages from the different sources that affect them. (315)

Psychologist James Comer has pointed out that this is the first time in history in which children receive the majority of their information unfiltered by adults, either through the media or the internet. A systemic perspective holds that the “fault” for difficulties in value transmission does not reside with any one area of influence. The difficulty of the challenge suggests that parents and educators must work together to meet it.

METHODODOLOGICAL APPENDIX

This project was undertaken in a southern community with a relatively large Jewish population. Two primary study sites (one Reform and one Conservative synagogue-based religious
school) were chosen based on criteria established by the research team (for example, age, size, and reputation of synagogue school). Parents with children in two age cohorts were specifically recruited for this study (though two parents from other cohorts who learned about the study were also included): early elementary (kindergarten and first grade) and middle school (particularly seventh grade). The thirty-four participant-units were drawn from a potential participant pool of approximately 165 family units in the two target age cohorts.

In order to better understand the local context, a focus group was conducted at an additional Conservative synagogue in an adjacent town, and two smaller focus groups (and two brief individual interviews) were conducted with parents of children in a local community day school. It is important to note that all participants were entirely self-selected, with concomitant implications for generalizability. As a further methodological limitation, one can make the case that the responses given by parents are a form of self-rationalization or a result of cognitive dissonance. Or, perhaps responses were subject to the effects of “social desirability.” These are of course legitimate concerns. However, there is evidence in some of the anecdotes and in the emotional reactions expressed by some of the participants that these data do reflect the deeply held beliefs of our respondents. For example, a mother came to tears during a focus group (in front of other parents and a researcher she had never met), while describing how her children, both of whom have learning difficulties and for whom education is a constant struggle, eventually succeeded at learning Hebrew. Even if such reactions are not representative of the broader population of religious school parents, it is worth noting that they exist at all.

Interviews were conducted by phone by the author or a trained research assistant. Parents were asked a range of questions focusing on their religious backgrounds; current Jewish involvement; expectations for gains from religious school; hopes for their children, Jewishly, in the future; and reasons for selecting their particular synagogue and schools. For two-parent families, both parents were requested to be interviewed. However, in many cases (slightly more than half), only one parent agreed, or was available, to participate. Because of the rich nature of the individual interviews, these will provide the focus for the data reported here. However, when relevant information is available from the focus groups, it will be reported as well. In general, trends are reported for parents as whole. The small number of participants makes it difficult to draw conclusions regarding subgroups of the sample. However, when trends emerge that differ by a particular factor (for example, denominational affiliation or the age of child), these are reported.

NOTES

1. The terms religious school, supplementary school, and congregational school (among others) are used in the literature and in general discourse interchangeably to denote a similar phenomenon: a form of Jewish education that takes place in addition to one’s secular schooling, most often at a synagogue, with classes generally meeting one to three times a week. The term religious school will be used throughout this chapter.

2. Of course, this is tempered by the statement that follows it: “Unfortunately, on closer inspection of the school, one learned that beyond survival and identification it was confusion, deception, ambivalence, and ambiguity that characterized the condition of the Jews with this culturally pluralistic setting” (139).
3. It is acknowledged that the language of empowerment in research is often applied to study “the poor, the powerless, the dispossessed” (Rappaport 2000: 58), and in terms of economics and other resources the participants in this study do not fit into this category. However, given the generally negative framework in which religious school education has been cast over the years, the categorization seemed relevant.

4. The methodology of this project is summarized in the appendix to this chapter.

5. The four categories of expectations described here (“Connection, Continuity, and Carrying-on,” “Jewish Social and Communal Experiences,” “Tools for Ritual Participation,” and “Positive Self-Growth” were those endorsed by approximately half of the respondents or more.

6. Notably, some parents—generally those who grew up in large Jewish population centers, particularly in the Northeast—articulated a positive religious school experiences in their past. These parents describe appreciating having learned much from their experience. Their more positive schema emerges in a higher set of expectations to which they hold their children’s current schools, sometimes wondering why their children are not learning as much as they did.

7. Also, in order for a child to be bar/bat mitzvahed at these synagogues, he or she must enroll in the religious school by the third grade. Therefore, parents with student in the youngest grades are particularly self-selected in opting into the system before they are “required” to enter it.

8. However, an argument could be made for saying that it is voluntary, at least to a degree. Attendance at a religious school (or day school) is often seen as “compulsory” for those wanting to have their bar/bat mitzvah in the host synagogue. However, there is no requirement that a bar/bat mitzvah needs to take place in a synagogue, or at all for that matter. Parents may have other options that make the religious school seem more “optional.”

9. One wonders about the connection of the difficult social and emotional aspects of the job of the religious school teacher, and the high turnover rate among religious school teachers.

10. Such as the REIMAGINE project that is based on a structure similar to Isa Aron’s (2000) approach to congregational revitalization.

11. It is notable that in many congregations, the rabbi’s children may not attend the religious school, but rather a day school. Rabbis should not let this stand in the way of their efforts to influence parents’ negative attitudes toward religious school.

REFERENCES


Education Means Asking Why

“See, part of the question is—what’s the goal?” says Sharon Feinman-Nemser, director of the Mandel Center for Studies in Jewish Education at Brandeis University. Pursuing her own question about the purpose of Jewish education for teenagers, she poses two alternatives: “Kids who can live in a complex, pluralistic community? Or kids who stay safely within the confines of every Jewish institution and will recreate that in their own adult lives?” One approach emphasizes pluralism and individual moral development, while the second emphasizes the dynamic replication of a minority religious culture in an open society.

This chapter presents new research on the impact of formal and informal Jewish education during the teen years. Statistical data (2000–2001 National Jewish Population Study, NJPS) show the power of Jewish education for teenagers: every additional hour of Jewish education past the bar/bat mitzvah makes the adults they become incrementally more likely to create Jewish homes of their own.¹ Such statistics reveal how effective Jewish education is, but not why. This original research analyzes interviews with sixteen Jewish educators, eighty-one teenagers, and twenty parents, confronting the reasons behind the quantitative facts, and exploring the ways in which Jewish teenagers, their parents, and their educators perceive diverse Jewish educational experiences and milieus. (For a complete description
of the methodology, see the appendix at the end of this chapter.) The interviews illuminate the decision-making process through which teenagers choose Jewish educational directions; the role of teens, their parents, and their educators in the decision-making process; and the impact of these choices on teenagers and their families, information useful in creating attraction and retention strategies.

Teenagers are engaged in the process of developing the parameters of their own lives—exploring and experimenting to discover meaning within the values, behaviors, and norms of their family of origin; the ethnic and religious cultures they have been exposed to; and the explicit and implicit American attitudes they learn from media, Internet, and print materials, and not least, from their friendship circles. Their parents experience intense confrontation with their own conflicting feelings about Jews and Judaism as they watch their teenagers wrestle with these issues. Divergent approaches characterize not only teenagers and their parents but also the elite cadre of Jewish professionals, who discuss the purpose of providing Jewish education and the purpose of nurturing Jewish identity.

For example, Barry Shrage, executive director of Boston’s Combined Jewish Philanthropies (CJP), looks for teen Jewish education programs that provide “an interesting experience that’s required to help a person become a Jew,” but he also has more modest goals—he hopes at very least “to have them leave without completely negative experiences.” Educator Amy Sands, who runs a nonsynagogue-affiliated alternative Sunday school program housed at Brandeis University, wants to give teenagers the intellectual tools of “knowing Jewish sources so they can deal with the things that really matter to them.”

Beyond these practical realities, when Jewish educators, teenagers, and their parents talk about Jewish education, their feelings are grounded in their own answers to an even more basic existential question, “Why be Jewish?”

**Studying Educational Profiles**

Education plays an important, documented role in the continuing distinctiveness of the American Jewish community. Although observers often lament the inroads of assimilation into American Jewish life, American Jews are perceived by students of ethnicity as the most successful group in preserving group identity in an ethnic community that does not face external boundaries. Thus, although the current rate of American Jewish intermarriage appears high in terms of Jewish history, an ethnic group that holds its out-marriage rate to about 50 percent despite constituting only 2 percent of the population is seen by scholars of ethnicity as remarkably successful. Jewish rates compare with ethnic intermarriage rates of 80 percent for U.S.-born whites and religious intermarriage rates of 42 percent for Catholics and 44 percent for ecumenical Protestants, far larger groups. Outsiders extol the unmatched range of educational and social institutions focused on inculcating Jewish identity.

Early religious experiences, whether through home-based interactions or more
formal, school-based educational settings, can have a lasting effect during a family’s religious evolutionary process. I argue that Jewish education throughout childhood and adolescence has a persisting impact and produces extensive Jewish human capital.⁴ That Jewish “capital” can then be “spent” by the individual creating his or her own Jewish connections in adult life. Formal Jewish education is a critical aspect of the creation of Jewish capital and is especially important for Jews living in open American societies, in which Jewish identity is not reinforced by separation from other ethnoreligious groups.

While examining the impact of Jewish education, it would be misleading to insist that the impact of education can be thoroughly disentangled from the impact of the family environment. Jewishly connected families are more likely to engage in activities that promote informal cultural transmission. Individuals who participated in childhood family celebrations of Shabbat and the Jewish holidays on a regular basis are more likely to replicate some of these behaviors as adults and more likely to marry a Jew. These families are also more likely to enroll children in Jewish educational settings when they are young and to encourage them to continue when they are teenagers. Nonetheless, research shows that when all other factors are equal, Jewish education plays its own dramatic role in creating Jewish capital and lasting Jewish connections.⁵ Informal Jewish education is also associated with higher levels of Jewish attachments and reduced levels of intermarriage.⁶ The interviews in this study reveal a hitherto unnoticed dynamic: the influence goes in two directions. Jewish educational decisions affect the Jewishness of the whole family, just as the Jewishness of the family affects educational decisions.

Are these incremental patterns the result of cognitive changes—students learning more and more about their tradition? Or do they reflect the redundant effect of primarily Jewish friendship groups? These questions must be asked, because a highly Jewish social network in high school and Jewish population density in the area where one lives have major impacts on intermarriage. Just as it is difficult to untangle the relationship between home and school, it is, similarly, also complicated to assess whether the impact of Jewish education during the teen years is primarily related to educational factors or to the extraordinary effect of Jewish friendship groups. It seems likely that both the home/school cluster and the Jewish friendship groups/Jewish education cluster are not only interrelated, but echo, complement, and reinforce each other, and give added value.

The values, behaviors, and norms of an individual’s friendship group can either reinforce or contradict the values of the larger American culture.⁷ Friendship groups become particularly important in the teen years, when children move out from the primary sway of their families to the influence of peer groups. People reporting most of their close friends were Jewish in high school are more likely to marry a Jew. People who have mostly Jewish friends in high school replicate that pattern in college and beyond. When they choose their mates, that person is also much more likely to be Jewish. The more people one knows from a particular group, the more one is likely to marry a member. For example, in NJPS 2000–2001, a highly Jewish
social network in high school is estimated to make the individual 83 percent less likely to intermarry than those with no Jewish social network, whereas a medium social network makes them 53 percent less likely. As with almost all multivariate models, the size of the effect depends on the variables used and should be considered a guide to the direction and size of the effect rather than a precise estimate.

Earlier interviews with in-married, conversionary, and mixed-married men and women reinforced these figures: Jews who had the most Jewish friends in high school tended to replicate that pattern in college and eventually to marry Jews. A clear division emerged between in-marrying and intermarrying populations: those who later married Jews thought highly of the Jews they encountered during their high school years, whether in public school, youth group, camp, or day school settings, remembering the “energy,” “articulateness,” and “talent” of their “cool” Jewish friends. In contrast, those who married non-Jews remembered discomfort with Jewish friends or institutions, describing the few Jews they associated with in high school as “weak” or “pushy.” They termed Jewish environments as “stifling” or “materialistic,” and recalled that they were “always different” or were embarrassed about being Jewish. Many talked at length about the sports abilities or other attributes of their non-Jewish high school friends.

One interesting corollary is that secular higher education is not a factor contributing to a drift away from Jews and Judaism. All other things being equal, Jews today with high levels of secular and occupational achievement are more likely to marry Jews than those with lesser education. This is statistically opposite of the way things were in the 1940s and 1950s, when the more degrees and the higher job status Jews had, the more likely they were to marry non-Jews. Today, college does not “steal” Jewish youth away from Judaism. As long as students attend a college with reasonable Jewish population density, college attendance is not associated with weaker or fewer Jewish connections in the adult years.

Many parents in less educationally rich areas of the country cite lack of availability as the reason that teenagers do not continue with their Jewish education. By placing this study in an area in which almost any kind of Jewish education is available, I sought to take that reason out of the mix and to determine what the other factors involved. Interviews were conducted in and around Newton, Massachusetts, a community that has rich options and offerings. Teens involved in the supplementary one- or two-day Prozdor program, in the New England Region B’nai B’rith Youth Organization (BBYO), or in day schools reflected on these educational environments and discussed their experiences in pre- and post-bar and bat mitzvah educational settings, including formal classrooms, youth groups, summer camps, and Israel trips, as well as talking about their homes and other aspects of their lives. Parents interviewed were also asked to discuss their children’s educational choices, along with their goals and their feelings about these choices. Educators were asked to reflect on their educational and institutional goals, and to define what success would mean to them.

Interviews revealed that some parents had chosen to live in Newton precisely
because of its strong Jewish presence. One parent who was a convert to Judaism, for example, said that after she studied at the Gerim Institute (a Conservative-run educational institution for potential converts), she and her husband started a “temple searching process before we bought the house.” Other parents, in contrast, seem to have located their families in Newton for reasons that have nothing to do with Judaism, including the excellent public school system.

Comparing formal and informal teen environments enables us to observe the perceived impact of formal Jewish education on Jewish teens and their families, beyond the social aspect that both programs share. The Prozdor and BBYO settings were particularly felicitous because they represent two very different paradigms of Jewish connections for teenagers—one with a formal Jewish educational component (indeed, Jewish education is the institution’s official raison d’être), and the other a youth group setting that exists primarily for the purpose of fostering Jewish social networks. Both of these settings function effectively as nurturing environments for Jewish friendship groups. Prozdor, with more than a thousand students, has recently become a “star” among supplementary Jewish educational institutions for teenagers and is a “best case scenario” for continuing formal Jewish education beyond the bar/bat mitzvah years in a non–day school setting. Hebrew high school programs at the area’s Reform congregations are Prozdor’s most persistent competitors. However even in congregations that have such programs, some families choose to send their teens to Prozdor. These programs vary in structure and curriculum, and several offer programs of choice similar to Prozdor. Generally larger temples have more fully developed high school curricula, but nearly all Reform temple schools have curricula developed through tenth grade, the typical year for confirmation. Some schools continue past confirmation with weekly or monthly programs that may include study with the rabbi or social action/community service opportunities as the core components of the curriculum.

BBYO plays an important role for many Jewish teenagers, especially those who do not continue with formal Jewish education after their bar/bat mitzvah. BBYO is one of the most nationally widespread youth movements, providing Jewish teenagers in far-flung locales with the opportunity to spend time together in social and other activities. New England Region BBYO currently has chapters in eight communities and had six members as of the beginning of 2005. It should be noted that denominational youth groups such as United Synagogue Youth (USY—Conservative), National Federation of Temple Youth (NFTY—Reform), and National Council of Synagogue Youth (NCSY—Orthodox) attract more participants in New England than does BBYO.

Conversations with Jewish Educators and Policymakers

Interviews with sixteen rabbis, headmasters, teachers, federation executives, professors of education, and educational thinkers and planners contextualize our much
more extensive conversations with teenagers and their parents, providing a sense of what the professionals think the programs should be accomplishing and how they might be expected to do it. Professionals working in the field of Jewish education are as diverse in backgrounds and interests as the programs they conceptualize, plan, and administer. Conservative Temple Emanuel Rabbi Wesley Gardenswartz, who also teaches classes for teens in the Prozdor program, described his primary job as a religious mentor, educator, and role model—“to draw Jews closer to God, Torah, and Jewish commandments,” which he does by “davening, teaching people in classes and informally.” Gardenswartz says he “dreams a big dream” of a Conservative movement “where its members take it seriously, the mission that God demands things from them.” He explains his perception that the movement’s reduced ability to educate its teens reflects diminished adult commitments: “I think that our movement’s failures with its teens is symptomatic of deeper failures. The fact that teens aren’t there is just a visible sign of the failures of the movement. Our people aren’t davening. Our people aren’t keeping kosher. They are good people, but serious religious observance is not what many people actually do. This is where this teen problem is rooted. I am all for solving it.”

Brandeis associate professor of Jewish education, Jon Levisohn, urged that all Jewish teenagers, both supplementary and day school students, be taught core intellectual curriculum components:

Number one, Hebrew language, and number two, Jewish philosophy. It’s kind of amusing given that those are the two areas which are poorly taught in many, if not most schools. The hypothesis about Hebrew language has to do with language and identity. I am thinking about language as—as important as texts are to me, as much as I love teaching text, and as much as I love studying text—here I am thinking not about biblical Hebrew or Mishnaic Hebrew, but in fact modern Hebrew. It does seem to me at the level of hypothesis that there is a relationship between language and identity which so deep that it pervades one’s other activities. It really raises questions about whether we should be spending a significant amount of time just doing Hebrew language as a core component, certainly much more than we do now in supplementary schools and even in day schools. . . . If we’re focused on Jewish identity, if they feel that going to Israel is going to be an experience that allows them to build on something they know, namely Hebrew, number one would be Hebrew language.

In contrast, Ron Saykin, administrator of youth programming in a Reform temple, freely admits that his background in Judaica is not intense but argues that experiential factors are much more important in successful teen programs:

I didn’t major in Judaic studies; I majored in theater and communications. Totally separate. But I knew what I was interested in, and in the Reform movement you don’t need to know the Torah like the back of your hand. You can learn, there are teaching materials, there are books, there are things you can do. I think if you’re exciting and can gain the material from books, teachers, and rabbis, then that’s what the kids are going to remember. They might not always remember the text, but they will remember the exciting moments.
Partially because Jewish educational professionals start from such different interpretive frameworks, they have very different ideas about the goals of Jewish education and what a “successful” Jewish education would look like. Cheryl Aronson, currently planning a federation-sponsored informal Jewish education initiative, thinks it is important to create a culture with internally advocated Jewish norms, “where everyone is learning and everyone is doing it and it becomes the thing to do.” Moving away from parochialism concerns the Mandel Center’s Sharon Feinman-Nemser. She is leery of Jewish education that makes teenagers too clannish, rather than citizens of a larger world: “The world is a pretty troubled place, and a lot of it has to do with particularism, maybe misguided ethnocentrism. Is the assumption the more teens in activities sponsored by the community the better? Not quality of life, quality of values, not how is it preparing you to live in this world? It’s not self-evident that the answer is more teens in programs.”

Jewish educational professionals, with their own diverse backgrounds and goals, are deeply aware that the teenage clientele they serve are even more diverse. Brandeis University’s informal Jewish education expert Professor Joseph Reimer categorizes teens as “the highly committed, the sometimes committed, and the rarely committed,” asserting that few programs will be attractive and interesting to all of these groups.

David Goldstein, who directs some CJP initiatives on youth education, estimates that fewer than one in five—about 18 to 20 percent—of Boston’s Jewish teenagers who received pre-bar/bat mitzvah education continue with teen programs afterward. He would feel that the “system is working if we saw 50 to 60 percent” continuing instead of “dropping out.” Goldstein believes that the system is not yet succeeding nearly as well as it might because the focus has been on “how can we better involve our teens in the synagogue, rather than “how can we meet their needs. And find out what their needs are in order to build or create programs. We need to funnel teens into that mix.” Goldstein describes the programming diversity he sees as necessary: “Teens need more options than any synagogue could possibly provide. We encourage a wide variety of programs. One of the things we can do better is offer different programmatic options; we will certainly not lose the highly committed, but we increase our chances of attracting the sometimes and rarely committed. They come once or twice for other things. They can be excited by things.”

The Boston-area approach to creating a broad spectrum of teen programs has involved working both on a centralized and on a decentralized, congregational model. Thus, under Barry Shrage’s Jewish education and Israel-oriented leadership, CJP has encouraged both community-wide formal (Prozdor) and informal (missions to Israel with large teenage components) educational ventures, as well as congregation-based youth initiatives. New community-wide initiatives include Noar, a comprehensive umbrella for teen programming, new teen summer programming, and a social justice program that incorporates Jewish text study. On the decentralized level, educational planner Penni Moss describes Yesod, grants that aim to reinvest individual congregations with the ability to provide high-quality programs for
teenagers: “The Yesod educators is a grant that the congregations apply to through Boston's Commission on Jewish Continuity. They are primarily working on youth education on an informal basis, as the youth directors of congregations. They teach in congregational Hebrew high school programs also, and are present as a resource for classrooms or teachers.”

Numerous educational professionals warn against the destructive effects of turf wars. Rather than helping each other and cooperating to create appealing programs, the suppliers of Jewish education for teenagers, like other segments of the Jewish community, often feel that they are competing for scarce resources—participants and funding. As Cheryl Aronson succinctly observed, turf wars continue because: “If you are invested in a program, you don’t want to see your target population leave to go to other programs; you see that as a failure.” In contrast, when looking at the big educational picture, teenagers who learn and grow Jewishly in a given program and then seek out a more intensive or rigorous program can be evaluated as success stories who are “graduating” to a higher level of Jewish education and involvements. Aronson continues, “You’ve just built a larger network of successes in your own community.”

Sometimes, however, turf issues arise because the attractive community program seems to represent less rather than more educational rigor. In particular, rabbis and educators with multi-day supplementary high school programs sometimes fear that Prozdor, with its one- to two-meeting flexible format, gives students fewer hours than within a congregational setting. Prozdor students sign up for a mandatory Sunday morning program but have a choice whether or not to take weeknight Hebrew classes as well. Prozdor’s energetic executive Margie Berkowitz explains the extended and delicate negotiation process, involving “yearlong series of meetings” and “some very hostile folks,” in which “basically we were blamed for taking away their kids.” Eventually, however, Berkowitz brought most of the Boston-area Conservative and some Reform congregations under the Prozdor umbrella by understanding and getting past turf issues, housing some of the Prozdor classes on congregational sites, and hiring congregational rabbis to teach their own students in some of the classes. She asked rabbis: “How can we better serve you? and created a process called Gesher in which representatives “from all our Hebrew schools will come together three times a year and give us feedback, and we’ll give updates. We work closely with regional USY on timing of events, and we have had a bus from our shabbaton to take USY kids to their boat cruise.” Berkowitz notes that although the majority of their students come from a Conservative Jewish background, “we don’t train kids to be Conservative Jews or Reform Jews.” Many teenagers saw Prozdor’s transdenominational setting as a definite plus, enabling them to spend time with friends from different congregations.

Directors of the most successful programs are distinguished by the way in which they can clearly articulate the educational vision of their programs. Amy Sands, for example, who runs the nonsynagogue-based Brandeis Jewish Educational Program (BJEP), which goes through middle school, organizes each year of Jewish educa-
tion thematically and seems to make the most of her Sunday morning time slot. BJEP serves many undereducated Jewish families, including many interfaith households, and Sands describes herself as a kind of benign dictator. Rather than asking her clients what they want to learn, she decides what they should learn, because she assesses them as not knowing enough to even know what to ask for. She especially likes to integrate materials on “the Jewish life cycle,” which she describes as including not only “birth, bar mitzvah, and death” but also “adoption, conversion, aging, and Jews with disabilities.” Each of these topics is taught “with reference to a Jewish text. I want them to study Jewish texts for the rest of their lives, to want to go on when they leave.” Each year BJEP feeds some graduating middle-schoolers into the Prozdor program.

Jewish educational professionals are exquisitely aware of the impact of ambivalent or apathetic parents, and the mixed messages they often send their children about connections with Judaism in general, and about Jewish education in particular. Cheryl Aronson argues that it is critical to engage parents in Jewish educational activities in order to reinforce teen commitments, because if “adults don’t value Jewish education they really aren’t willing to take the steps for their kids to continue.” Jewish educational programs, including many Israel programs, are expensive, Aronson notes, and often require adult permission. She is especially concerned about “parents who give a double message, who talk the talk but don’t walk the walk.”

Social Networks: Family, Friends, and Two-Directional Influences

Perhaps the most striking finding of our interviews with teenagers and their parents is the interrelatedness of positive Jewish elements in the lives of teenagers. For example, as I have noted, both quantitative and qualitative research suggest that having mostly Jewish friends in high school is predictive of eventually marrying a Jew and forging Jewish connections. In the interviews, teenagers talked about the ways in which their friendships with other Jewish teens were influential in their continuing in both formal and informal Jewish educational settings. Friendships have a positive effect on Jewish connections in and of themselves and also promote additional Jewish education. Similarly, Jewish education has an impact not only on the teenagers, but also on the ritual practices and other Jewish connections of the entire family. When teenagers stopped attending Jewish schools after bar/bat mitzvahs, they reported that their family Jewish observances and activities such as Shabbat service attendance gradually declined without the reinforcing effect of Judaic discussion in classes and invitations for holiday celebrations with classmates’ families. In contrast, when they continued attending Jewish schools after bar/bat mitzvah, family Jewish activities tended to remain constant. Jewish friendships affect continuing Jewish education and continuing Jewish education affects family ritual practice and synagogue involvement.
The more conventional understanding is that the impact goes in the opposite direction—family ritual practice and synagogue involvement affects continuing Jewish education and the likelihood that one will have Jewish friendship groups. Keysar, Kosmin, and Schechner, for example, assert that “it is the parents and family who make the difference, not the community or the wider social environment. Parents make the decisions regarding Jewish education for their children.” This study, however, finds that communal norms do make a difference and can be changed. Our interviews show that continuing Jewish education for teenagers can affect the family, just as the family affects whether or not that Jewish education will continue. Influence flowing from friendships to education to family involvements represents a new understanding of the power of social networks, particularly in the teen years, when peer relationships attain great influence over the behavior of individual teens.

The two-directional influence is very useful in making sense of the statistical predictive power of Jewish population density in childhood for the Jewish connectedness of adults. One should not underestimate the enculturating effectiveness of simply spending time with other Jewish teenagers in both formal and informal Jewish educational settings. Speaking about the Maccabi Games, for example, one teen raved about being on a Jewish basketball team: “It’s basically Jewish Olympics for kids. And everyone is Jewish and it’s wicked cool.” Formal Jewish education, no less than informal Jewish activities, provides settings in which Jewish friendship circles can be enhanced and in which not only the friendship circles but also the emerging sexual interests of Jewish teenagers can be channeled toward Jewish peers.

Jewish educators from other programs sometimes made fun of the social aspects of the Prozdor program, asserting that the powerful social pull meant that the program “isn’t serious.” This study shows that it is a mistake to deride those social aspects that bring teenagers to Jewish educational settings and keep them there, or to demand purity of motive when Jewish teenagers choose Jewish education after bar/bat mitzvah. Regardless of the diverse reasons indicated in my report below as to why Jewish teens stay in Jewish schools, Jewish education for teenagers blends incremental intellectual learning and affective Jewish experiences with opportunities to create and maintain Jewish social networks, of both the platonic and romantic varieties.

Making Decisions about Jewish Education

Teenagers and their parents were both asked to describe the decision-making process and the experience of teen Jewish education. The teen and parent descriptions that “matched” and those that contradicted each other were both interesting and significant. The areas of overlap, where teens and their parents in separate conversations agreed on the significance of a subject, included the following:

- The importance of a teen peer group and likeable Jewish friends
- The importance of good quality educational experiences
Teen Jewish education as a possible résumé or portfolio builder, or as a resource for networking for future career advancement

- Other extracurricular activities competing for teen time and energy
- The negative effect of bad Hebrew school experiences and the impact they had on decisions about whether or not to continue past bar/bat mitzvah

Teens (but not their parents) spent a lot of time talking about what aspects of the environments they found engaging or alienating, in their words, a “turn-off” or “cool.” Parents (but not the teenagers) talked about financial considerations in making educational choices, logistical difficulties in getting their teens to Jewish education, and the way in which communal norms vis-à-vis Jewish education have influenced them.

But perhaps the biggest difference between the teenagers and their parents is that the parents had much heavier and more complicated “baggage.” Many parents felt pulled between an ideology of diversity and a loyalty to the American public school system, and a commitment to “Jewish continuity,” their stated responsibility to transmit Jewish culture. Many parents felt profoundly ambivalent about who they were as Jews, and they were interested in talking about the ways in which decisions about their children’s education became a stage on which their own mixed feelings were acted out.

Jewish Education Competes for Time

Competing activities cut into “doing Jewish,” both in its educational aspects and in its home-based religious rituals. Teens say they are “swamped” by a plethora of extracurricular activities. Jewish educational programming competes with at least two to three hours a week for not-so-active students and seven to ten or more hours a week for very active students with extracurricular activities. The farther they get into their high school years, the more teens are looking for activities that look good on a college application. Community service such as blood drives, children’s hospitals, food pantries, and so forth is a big competitor of Jewish education. Attendance at services gives way to musical performances and sports practice. Hanukkah candles are lit quickly and perfunctorily. Many teenagers also work for pay during the afterschool hours. Teens and their parents think of both education and rituals as the time they are devoting to their Jewishness. They do not cut down on one when they increase the other. Indeed, just the opposite is true.

Evaluating Jewish Education

What teenagers most liked about their Jewish classes and youth groups was (1) studying and intellectual enjoyment; (2) substance—they disliked classes with no rigor; (3) sports with “Cool Jews”; (4) transdenominationalism—no barriers between different flavors of Jews; (5) being part of a group within a group—belonging; and
related to that, but not identical, seeing their friends from various places. One very common pattern is that initially parents encouraged their teens to join, and later the teens themselves took ownership and internalized education as a value. Being part of a group was a big plus for students. As one remembered: “I loved Hebrew school, but that’s because all my friends were there. We had such a great time, and we’ve all known each other forever. We called ourselves the Jew Crew.” In contrast, some teens suffered from being made fun of, as not cool. Feeling socioeconomically inferior was a devastating experience both for school-age children and teenagers. One young woman recalled that she “felt left out, since a lot of them had more money than me. They were going on ski trips, and they’d say, ‘Where are you going?’ And I’d say, ‘Uh, to my kitchen.’ It was just kind of intimidating.” Neither children nor teenagers learned much Jewishly if they felt they did not “have nice enough things.” Peer groups can attract or repel students, depending on how the students perceive their relationship with the group.

Inept, unprepared, thoughtless, or cruel teachers were well remembered and bitterly criticized, often as “idiots.” Interestingly, teens were not looking for and did not like undemanding settings. Not only did teens not complain about “being yelled at,” they did complain about not being challenged. Several said they would not bother with programs that only asked them “to draw pictures and watch movies about the Holocaust.” They liked rigor and substance. Students who were happy with Prozdor praised the quality of the teachers, for example, saying, “the teachers we had in Hebrew school weren’t as good as the ones we have at Prozdor. At Prozdor it’s like a whole other level of teacher. Instead of a regular person, you have a professor from Harvard [sic].” Teenagers want the substance centered on things they care about. One young woman praised Prozdor because it addresses “teenaged want-to-know issues—it isn’t just how do you say ‘dog’ in Hebrew. I know if I told my mom I wanted to quit, she’d let me, but it’s really not that bad. It’s more fun than normal school.”

Just as the statistics show, teen interviews vividly supported the fact that going to Jewish camps made one more likely to continue with Jewish schools. They are mutually reinforcing, not competitive. Here again social networks are key—one great motivator in continuing with supplementary formal Jewish education through the high school years is having the opportunity to do things with friends from camp who do not attend the same synagogue or live in the same neighborhood. Non-Newton students are attracted to Prozdor so they can see their Newton friends. This is another example of taking down barriers that is so attractive to teenagers.

Although it is perhaps surprising that students could be self-conscious about being Jewish on the eastern seaboard and in a society that seems to celebrate ethnoreligious difference, some teens talked about how little Jewishness was a subject of conversation in their public high schools. Sometimes students saw other students they knew from high school—but had not realized they were Jewish. Jewish educational settings were praised by teenagers for reinforcing good feelings about being Jewish, good tribal feelings. Teens said they felt comfortable identifying as Jews in
Generating Jewish Connections

a “safe” Jewish place. Both Prozdor and BBYO were praised for providing “Jewish community” and a “safe” space to gather and interact. Many teens who end up loving their Jewish high school classes—including classes at Prozdor—actually disliked their Hebrew school experiences. A significant portion of the student population especially hated learning Hebrew. They also really hated being tested. And when they were tested on Hebrew, their feelings were intense. This dislike of Hebrew study is troubling in light of the high emphasis put on Hebrew as a factor in Jewish identification by Jon Levisohn and others. On the other hand, some students specifically went on to high school classes to learn Hebrew. Because teens comprise such a diverse population, their comments, individually and cumulatively, add up to the need for flexibility in teen programs. In Prozdor, those who love Hebrew continue with their Hebrew studies on Tuesday nights. On the other hand, those who hate Hebrew can take English-language classes on Sunday mornings and not have to deal with Hebrew at all. Overall, students spoke highly of demanding, high-quality classes.

Teens had mixed reviews of their bar/bat mitzvah experiences. Having friends attend and activities that their friends enjoyed were key. Teens who celebrated with relatives out of town, far from their friends, had negative feelings. Similarly, those who did not have enjoyable activities for the bar/bat mitzvah and its immediate aftermath also had negative feelings. Bar/bat mitzvah seemed most meaningful to those teens whose events had combined religious significance and large numbers of friends at a big event, enjoying activities they considered to be fun. Once again, we see the impact of social networks. If one’s friends liked one’s bar/bat mitzvah, the whole event is legitimated.

Informal Jewish Education

For students who live away from Jewish centers of population, or whose families had dropped synagogue affiliation after the bar/bat mitzvah, or those whose families had never been affiliated, secular Jewish youth groups such as BBYO were extremely important sources of Jewish connection. For some teenagers, divorce had a negative effect on Jewish activities in the household, because of logistical problems or financial difficulties, as the single parent struggled to be in several places at once and to make ends meet. For these students as well, youth groups such as BBYO often emerged as a unpressured place to meet Jewish friends. However, it should be stated that Jewish families who send teenagers to day schools and to supplementary Hebrew high schools are also diverse and include many blended, divorced, or atypical families. Jewish teens come from many types of family environments, and all have a need for Jewish education.

Within youth group settings, many students preferred programs that let student participants—rather than group leaders—set the agenda. They especially enjoyed being able to take on leadership roles in student-run youth group settings. In youth group settings, as in formal classes, teenagers enjoyed the obliteration of
denominational and socioeconomic stratification. Teens often got involved with Jewish youth groups such as BBYO because their friends were doing it and talked about it in a very positive way. This is another example of social networks as reinforcement. In other words, it is not just the social networks themselves that make teens more likely to be Jewishly connected as adults, it is the collateral reinforcement of other Jewish activities.

Teens enjoy both Jewishly focused and ordinary secular activities within the rubric of their youth groups. Depending on the interests of the particular teen, there are strong preferences in both directions. One teen, for example, spoke in the same enthusiastic breath about “a Simhat Torah dinner . . . a cocktail night and boat cruise . . . fun stuff, like the limo scavenger hunt.” One specifically mentioned that she joined USY because of an apple-picking activity. Another teen in the same focus group, in contrast, said she avoided youth group secular activities and only attended those with Jewish content: “For some reason I don’t really go to the events that are like apple picking. I tend to go to the events that are more toward Judaism . . . [such as] a Sukkot set up.” It seems clear that to meet the preferences of their diverse participants—and to function effectively—youth groups need to continue to offer both types of programming.

Social life is of course an important factor in youth group activity. One young man put it simply: “I honestly joined for the girls. That was a big part of it.” Teenagers enjoy activities that provide an insulating bubble of activity with peers. Many spoke about “USY on Wheels,” for example, which won raves because “I like traveling and it sounds like a big road trip, and it’s almost like you’re a band touring, and it makes me feel cool,” along with its capacity to enlarge friendship groups: “You get to meet new people . . . lots of friends from USY on wheels . . . still close to them.”

The most effective experiential bubble of all is often attending Jewish summer camp. Jewish summer camps can be particularly influential because they isolate children and teenagers and provide them with Jewish experiences undiluted by apathetic families. Teens talked enthusiastically about Shabbat experiences in summer camp, for example, as they and their friends “got all dressed up and sang a lot in the dining hall.” Many teens noted that they are “more religious” in summer camps than at home. In contrast to the Jewish reinforcements children and teens get in Jewish summer camps and youth groups, they can sometimes feel isolated and self-conscious about their Jewish identity in non-Jewish settings. One teen remembers attending a YMCA camp and saying that “I was Christian and I loved Santa Claus and everything. Because I was afraid of how people would react.” Often these stories are never shared with their parents.

Many teens who have chosen to continue their Jewish education after bar/bat mitzvah have visited Israel, some multiple times. Those that have not gone are interested in going and have the “birthright Israel” option on their radar screens. Teenagers who have taken family trips look forward to a peer Israel experience as comprising a different way to see Israel. Some of these trips are offered through their schools or synagogues. Teenagers enrolled in a teen Jewish school like Prozdor had
the additional “value added” of being able to take a trip with their friends through their Jewish school. They were “really excited” about this prospect.

Some teens who had not yet visited Israel said that was their “biggest regret” in life. Teens who had been or wanted to go to Israel had more positive feelings about learning Hebrew in school than those who had not. Some teenagers said they were afraid to go to Israel. Some said they were not afraid, but their parents were. Other parents, in contrast, said that the “situation is bad but might get worse—so go now.” For some teens international antisemitism was actually a spur to visit Israel, even though they felt anxious. In general, parents who have not gone were more likely to say the situation was too risky to allow their children to go. Financial resources were cited by some teens as the reason for not visiting Israel.

The Impact of Parents and Judaism in the Home

Recognizing the importance of social networks does not imply a commensurate decrease in the importance of the parents and other family members in the process of educational decisions. On the contrary, parents constitute the primary social network and add to the significance of social networks in Jewish educational decisions. In their interviews, teens perceived their parents as being influential in the initial decision to continue—or not to continue—with Jewish education after bar/bat mitzvah. Parental encouragement was especially important in getting youngsters started in post–bar/bat mitzvah classes. Later the teens made the decision for themselves. But initially parental involvement and encouragement made a big difference.

Parents who would not take no for an answer affected their teenagers’ internalized values. Teens from those families were more likely to eventually choose to continue Jewish education on their own. In contrast, parents who dropped their encouragement for the continuation of Jewish education as soon as their children voiced complaints often seemed, in their children’s eyes, to be acting out of their own ambivalence. And indeed, as the interviews with parents show, parents had a dramatically wide range of responses to their teenager’s resistance to continuing with Jewish education, and that range corresponded to their own positive and/or negative feelings. Teenagers were quick to pick up on their parents’ negative or ambivalent attitudes.

In families that send their children to Conservative, Reform, or community day schools that terminate in the eighth grade, where to go to high school is a complicated decision. Some parents are still working with the assumption that their children must be in the public school system for some period of time in order to function in the real world. Although Newton has the attractive options of the community high school, Gann Hebrew Academy (the former “New Jew”), in addition to the modern Orthodox Maimonides, a substantial number of parents opt for public high schools not only for financial reasons but also because they do not want their children to be “handicapped” by not being in a mixed American environment.
Some were willing for their teenagers to be token whites in a black school—“they needed a few more white people to fill their ratios.”

Conversations about Judaism and Jewish experiences in the home were the venue where many teens shared personal and sometimes painful information about their Jewish lives. Intermarriage was sometimes mentioned, and, not surprisingly, had an influence on Jewish decisions. Family examples and family patterns were very important. Siblings were a very significant influence on many teens we interviewed. Teenagers whose parents went to classes and/or those whose older siblings had continued with Jewish education were more likely to have a good attitude about Hebrew high school and to continue their studies. As one teen put it: “My brother did it and he got confirmed and that seemed cool, so I did it too.”

Parental insistence made a positive difference. Teenagers reported on successful strategies, often of the sort that offers: You can clean your room at 3 P.M. or at 4 P.M.—which do you choose to do? One young man said: “My parents gave me a choice between our Temple Hebrew high school, which is like two hours a week, and Prozdor. I had a lot of friends going to Prozdor, so I just chose to go to Prozdor at Hebrew College.” Another recalled: “My parents said, ‘You can’t stop your Jewish education entirely.’ So it was, if you don’t go to New Jew [the Gann Hebrew Academy high school], you go to Prozdor.”

A surprisingly large number of teens reported that their parents had forced them to continue, and then, after a year or two, they had—grudgingly or graciously—come to enjoy the experience. As one teen recalled, he had demanded many times during his freshman and sophomore years in high school that he be able to stop attending Prozdor. But his mother simply would not allow it. “She would yell at me and say you need to have a Jewish education and stuff. And now I think I’m finally seeing why. It’s like especially on college campuses and stuff you absolutely have to be informed. Kids probably convert to Islam and what not, or become self-hating Jews, which is not good because we have to be strong.” Another said first: “I’m required to take Hebrew by my parents,” and then continued: “Yeah, I think my favorite class is Hebrew, I would say because it has more friends in it.”

One of the most consistent aspects of these discussions is the inconsistency of the Jewish lives of many teenagers. “Shul hopping,” and sometimes dramatic switches—from Orthodox to Reform institutions—were not uncommon. One quote sums it up: “We’re not members any more. We’re still Jewish.” The inconsistency of familial Jewish connections provided an additional explanation of the success of a transdenominational venue such as the Prozdor teen program: when teens are not sure where—or if—their families will have temple membership, a consistent setting where they can see their friends and study Jewish materials and have Jewish experiences becomes all the more significant.

Teens clearly appeared to enjoy the experiential aspects of Jewish culture, including structure, ritual, and tradition. Many of them talked in detail about their pleasure in Jewish holiday food. One encapsulated ideas expressed by many: “I tend to say the best part of Judaism is the music and the food. I like Jewish food a lot. I
like when Rosh Hashanah comes and we buy the little meatballs and the latkas and the pickles, and all the stuff you’re supposed to eat and we never get. And as for Jewish music the best part is singing the prayers and I’m in this chorus, Kol Rina, where we sing all Jewish music, and I like it.”

Teens like a peer society, in addition to family, to share their rituals with. When they do not have proximity, they use technology to create a virtual society, as indicated in the following conversation conducted at the Prozdor supplementary high school:

R1: It’s really fun to fast with friends. I fasted at camp on Tisha B’Av. I always fast on Yom Kippur too—well, since my bat mitzvah.
R2: On Yom Kippur I go online and I’m like “I’m hungry” and they’re like “eat” and I say back “I can’t.”
R1: Same here.
INT: So your family fasts on Yom Kippur too?
R3: Yeah, we all do. I write again and again, “I’m hungry, I can’t eat.”

Overall teens were influenced by whether the family felt satisfaction with Jewish institutions in general and with synagogues in particular. Finding a synagogue the family enjoys was a big factor in the frequency of family attendance; attendance as a family, in turn, made a difference in how teenagers felt about it. Conversations about family satisfaction with synagogues and other Jewish institutions opened a window into the importance of parental valuation—or denigration—of Jewish environments. Families who frequently had conversations about their dissatisfaction with Jewish schools or communal institutions or synagogues had a powerful negative effect on how their teens felt about spending time in those places. Sometimes the negativity translated out into how their teens felt about Jews and Jewish activities as a whole.

Families that enforced familial observances seemed to engender more satisfaction than rebellion among their teens. Teenagers who had family rules that they needed to “do Shabbat” with the family—however the family had defined it—seemed fairly content with these restrictions. Some were “not allowed to go out and do anything until Shabbat ends,” whereas many more spoke about a “Shabbat which takes twenty minutes to an hour to do but feels good because people have been doing it for a long time. We do the blessings and dinner every Shabbat.” Others described a general rule that “the weekends are for family stuff and the weekdays are for friends.” Teenagers seem to like these structures, speaking far more positively about their Jewish life at home than teenagers whose family observances were sporadic and inconsistent. As one (non-Orthodox) teen put it: “I like Hanukkah a lot, but my favorite is Shabbat. It’s the only night where my whole family is together, and we sit around the table and have a big Shabbat dinner and light candles. And that’s the one day we spend a lot of family time together.” Interestingly, even those teens who opted out of the Friday family night were glad to think that the rest of their family was doing it. As one teen put it: “Yeah, I’m not always home on Friday
because sometimes I’m at Chili’s or something, but the fact that it’s there I think is good.”

Deciding to Leave Jewish Education Behind

Negative experiences in Hebrew school were, not surprisingly, the most frequently cited reason for terminating Jewish education. One boy succinctly described this common experience: “I went to Hebrew school third grade through seventh grade. I dropped out right after my bar mitzvah. It was an all-around horrible experience. I hated the principal. He was a fraud. He talked the big game, but he didn’t know what he was talking about.” Intermarriage, sometimes complicated by divorce, had a dampening effect on the Jewish lives of some teenagers. One seventeen-year-old, for example, complained that her family now only goes to temple for a *yarzheit* (ritual observance of the anniversary of a death) since her father, who had originally converted to Judaism (and had a bar mitzvah when she had her bat mitzvah), has now converted to the Christian denomination of his new wife—“he got baptized for her.” Although her new stepfather is Jewish, the family’s Jewish activities are far fewer than they were in the family’s original constellation. For this teenager, BBYO and her Jewish summer camp are her main connections to Jewish activities and other Jewish teenagers.

Parents sometimes used the “you can quit after your bar/bat mitzvah” as a strategy to keep children in Hebrew school. Not surprisingly, the children confidently demanded to quit when the event was over. When teenagers did not attend classes every time they were given, parents sometimes pulled them out of teen programs because they did not think they were getting their money’s worth. Interestingly, some who had dropped out were sorry their parents had acquiesced to their demands. Later in life, they felt uneducated when they entered Jewish settings and encountered teens who knew more than they did. As one Israeli teen put it: “I dropped out in the second grade, because I bugged my Mom so much, saying, ‘This is boring.’ But that was such bullshit. I didn’t know stuff. When I first came into BBYO I was surprised at how much I didn’t know.” Perhaps surprisingly, some teenagers said they had not been told that continuing in Hebrew supplementary programs was an option.

Teenagers Reflect on Peoplehood and Jewish Futures

Participating teenagers asked to talk about what Judaism means to them and how they envision their own Jewish futures answered the question with references to peoplehood. Some talked about responsibility for Jews worldwide and the need to take care of Jews overseas and in Israel, sometimes in the context of “belonging” to the Jewish people:

There is something special and cool about being Jewish. I wouldn’t want my kids to miss out on that. If I could change my religion I wouldn’t.
There is something special about being Jewish, and it would really be strange to me to raise my kids in a different religion, because a big part of your life is your religion. It’s as big a part as you want to make it. When you’re little your parents control that.

Being Jewish is also a community thing. When you’re Jewish a community comes along with that. If you meet someone and they’re Jewish it’s like, Oh, you’re Jewish, I’m Jewish. Christian people don’t do that, you know.

Despite the strong sense of Jewish peoplehood that many teenagers articulated, however, they have coalesced American values in at least one very striking way: very few teenagers see a connection between raising Jewish children—which they almost universally want to do—and marrying another Jew. Saying that the only thing that matters is that they have a “stable, loving relationship,” such teens insist that “race and religion doesn’t matter.” Some said they would wait until their children were teenagers themselves to introduce them to religion, and then let them choose, or they would raise them “Jewish but not religious, in an open minded philosophy.” These teenagers have not only absorbed the idea that romantic love will conquer all conflicts, but also the new American ethos that normalizes the interfaith household. Teens, of course, are not alone in feeling confused, and some of them are simply reflecting their parents’ silence on these issues. Jewish communal norms have been inverted.

However, interviews with other teenagers reveal the simultaneous “good news.” The renaissance in Jewish education and an accompanying rediscovery by many families of a serious commitment to active Jewish living have a combined impact on the attitudes of Jewish teenagers. Just as a certain segment of Jewish parents simply insists that their children continue with Jewish education, some also speak openly and passionately to their children about why it is important to them that their children establish unambiguously Jewish homes.

Parents Talk about Jewish Education

Like their teens, Jewish parents interviewed spanned a fairly wide range, from their thirties to their fifties in terms of age, from Orthodox through the denominational spectrum to unaffiliated in terms of religious self-definition, and from large, first-marriage, intact families to “blended” families affected by divorce, single-parent households, and interfaith families. Parents discussed their diverse approaches to talking about dating and marriage as part of the general package of talking about why Judaism is important to them. Some parents were very clear about their expectations and hoped that their clarity would have an influence on their children. One woman who described her congregation as “small” and “Reconstructionist,” is undeterred by her teenagers’ acting like teenagers, and says that she echoes her own parents when she talks directly to her children about Jewish hopes and goals:
I think they think we’re too Jewish. . . . I think they understand that Judaism is important for our lives, and that it’s big for us. I think that they wonder whether it will be as big for them. Like, my girls, my older girls, if I say to them, “You know, I would really like you to marry someone . . .” [mimicking girls, in a blah-blah-blah voice] “We know, you want us to marry someone Je-e-wish!” Um, and I remember being the same way. I hope that we’ve given them enough of a basis that they can make a decision that has some understanding of what religion can mean in someone’s life.

Some parents talked about setting an example. They hoped that their own involvement in adult educational activities, both in Jewish educational institutions and at home, would show their children the ways in which Jewish learning can be gratifying and compelling for adults. One mother, for example, said her children notice that she and her husband study Torah reading with trope (traditional notation), and that they practice at home: “They say, ‘what’s she doing now?’” There was striking flow, or interrelatedness, from adult Jewish educational activities to their teens, and from teen Jewish educational activities to their parents. One mother said that her son’s learning Rashi script—and her inability to read it—caused her to register for a Me’ah class (a Boston adult Jewish educational network conducted in numerous temples and synagogues, and jointly administered by Hebrew College and the Combined Jewish Philanthropies) to learn it.

For many parents, adult Jewish education meant empowerment. Before they acquired new intellectual tools through adult Jewish education, they felt disempowered and incapable when they encountered Jewish texts—and that made them feel angry about Jewish culture. They often thought of Jewish culture as a kind of Sunday school fundamentalism, a take-it-or-leave it proposition that they could not relate to. After studying, in contrast, they have a much more nuanced sense of diverse ways of interpreting biblical and rabbinic texts, and feel engaged by Jewish culture and happy and excited about learning more. Often parental passports to Judaism included permission to be skeptical and still be part of the fold, not to think of themselves as transgressors. These parents talked to their teens about their engagements, and spoke clearly in the interviews about their studies as models of what they hope their teenagers can also achieve in terms of connections to Jewish culture:

This is my peoplehood. When I took Me’ah, it allowed me, and hopefully Jon will get to this point someday, to say, “Okay, so there’s this myth that there’s a God.” I know just enough Hebrew to be dangerous! I look at Yahweh, and I see the verb “to be.” And I say, “Okay—I love history. Past, present, future. Okay, that’s it.” Having Me’ah helps me say, “Okay, here’s this founding myth, that’s probably not true, okay?” It’s not true, but these are the people I’m connected with, and this is our story. So I have a choice. I don’t have to accept the story verbatim, but it’s part of who we are. So that freed me to take that position. Before that I would be angry.

For these parents, it was precisely having growing children that precipitated their desire to learn more about Judaism. As one parent said: “I had some Jewish education as a kid, but I didn’t immerse myself in it; I didn’t value it. And now, as an
adult, I’m coming back and loving learning. I take seminars and courses and lectures, when I can.”

Like their teens, parents had strong positive and negative feelings about Jewish institutions, including synagogues, schools, and other settings. Their feelings about their children’s Jewish education was often linked to these related experiences. Thus, parental relationships with Jews and Judaism revealed a powerful interrelatedness from one Jewish experiential realm to another. One young widow described how the rabbi in her thousand-member Conservative synagogue took an unexpectedly personal role in her six-year-old daughter’s education after her husband died, leaving her with two small children:

Even in this huge congregation of people who we hardly even really know, there was a connection to the rabbi and the cantor, and that connection began for Rachel when she was in nursery school. She would have a lot of questions, and after Milton died she was just this really thinking person. And I would take her to the rabbi, and he would just sit there with her and answer her questions. And they were questions that I had just never considered in my life.

One was something about a snake having legs. And she was really stuck on that. And I said, you know what, I don’t really know, let’s go ask the rabbi. And we’d make an appointment and go in. And he gave her wonderful attention and answers. He talked to her about metaphors and interpretations. And that really did it. And she always asked a lot of questions. And whenever we went the rabbi or cantor made a point of connecting to the kids.

This narrative is an excellent example of the phenomenon of the mentoring rabbi, which is also sometimes accompanied by the mentoring congregation. The mentoring rabbi and mentoring congregation are extremely important in serving as brokers connecting individuals and families to Jews and Judaism, especially when a family faces particular challenges. The warm educational relationship this widowed mother and her daughter found in conversations with the rabbi and cantor was echoed by other single, often divorced parents and by interfaith parents who established connections through brokering rabbis and congregations.

Just as it had in the teen interviews, the issue of parental insistence on Jewish activities came up repeatedly in the parent interviews. Parents’ being willing to force their children to participate was a subject that applied to informal as well as formal educational settings. For example, one mother in a family that regularly attends a Havurah Shabbat service recalled: “We go to Israeli folk dancing. Our sons also dance. They started about a year ago. Finally, after years of patient nagging, I just took them by the ear and said, ‘You’re going! If you hate it you don’t have to go again, but now you’re going.’”

Diversity among Families—and Day Schools

As day schools, and types of day schools, proliferate, the day school parent body becomes more diverse and choices about how to educate teenagers become more
complicated. Increasing numbers of day school parents are not Orthodox, and many of both Orthodox and non-Orthodox parents were not themselves day school educated. Frequently their public and supplementary Hebrew school experiences were one motivating factor in choosing day school. One couple with children currently at Prozdor, for example, explained that their strong bias in favor of day schools resulted from their “unhappy” public school and Hebrew school experiences. “My observation was that it hadn’t gotten better; it had gotten worse since I was a kid. There were two or three options, the Reform and Conservative day schools [elementary schools], and the Reform school seemed too small and ideologically inconsistent at the time. The Conservative school seemed to work.”

Logistics can also be a factor in the day school choice. Day school’s long hours can seem like a plus when working parents have long days themselves. Not just values are at play. As one day school father explained: “Besides the fact that both of us are committed to day school in concept, also logistically, Hebrew school isn’t going to cut it for us, because there isn’t anybody to drop them off.” He added: “Also, I didn’t believe you can really integrate that stuff into your life after school. It has to be part of every day.”

Parents were very concerned about typical American substance abuse issues in public school settings and in liberal Jewish educational settings, including day schools. It was not uncommon, for example, for day school parents who were wavering between two high schools, one more traditional and one community-based and more creative in its approach, to feel as if they were choosing in some ways between a day school and a free-wheeling public school, in terms of the advantages and disadvantages. Selecting more Jewish education thus often meant choosing less of something else. Sending children to a school that offers more traditional Jewish values, rather than a day school that offers more scope for artistic, creative expression, these parents are struggling with factors not unlike the choices of parents who opt for supplementary school over ballet or music lessons, or those who choose a Jewish summer camp rather than a camp of the arts. These were not easy choices for parents at any point in the denominational spectrum of our interview population.

Those parents who valued creativity rather than traditionalism often sought creativity in the way Judaic studies are taught as well. In general, schools that stress the transmission of classical cognitive knowledge, such as mastering traditional liturgy and texts, often devote fewer resources to the arts and to creative teaching in general. It is not necessarily accurate that creative readings are more emphasized at the liberal than at traditional day schools. However, the perceptions of parents, which are then passed on to the teenager, indicate that the creative approach for which the one school is noted is characteristic not only of its secular studies but also of its Judaic studies.

The day school interviews emphasized the fact that Orthodox, as well as Conservative and Reform parents, demand choices in their educational decisions. Nor do they downplay the importance of social networks: parents who had decided in favor of day school for their teens talked about the close social networks that were
often a corollary of day school attendance. As one said: “There is a big group of
Newton X kids who hang out together for Shabbat and go from house to house.
And watch movies together and they’re very comfortable. So that’s a very nice
thing for them. He does enjoy that.” These same teens often went to Jewish summer
camps together as well.

Logistics and Economics

While parents struggle with a variety of substantive reasons for their educational
decisions, convenience is a factor for many as well. Educational decisions are some-
times made despite the quality of Jewish experience, rather than because of it. Like
convenience, compromise was frequently mentioned. If parents and teens disagreed,
sometimes an option neither of them loved or hated was chosen. Money also was
an important consideration for parents as they thought about all types of Jewish
education for their teens but especially when they thought about day school. Some
parents who thought about—but decided against—day school said that “diversity
was a factor—but it was really, you know, the huge amount of money involved.”
Parents who had decided that “day school was the first priority” said they denied
themselves and their children other things they wanted, such as “vacations,” “addi-
tions to the house,” “expensive cars,” lavish bar mitzvah parties, or “sports camps.”

Parental Perceptions of Children’s Educational Choices

Parental reactions to their children’s educational choices, as they described them,
indicated the way teen decisions could play a role in drawing parents closer to Jewish
connections—or to reinforcing their own ambivalence. One couple was thrilled to
see their young teenage daughter drawn to Judaism through her classes at Prozdor.
Rather than seeing her enthusiasm for Jewish study as competitive with her interest
in history and her artistic talents, they hope she will find a way to combine them:

MOTHER: Josie gravitated to these things right off the bat. And we didn’t decide to
pull her back, because she loved, I mean, she has such a passion for it. So, at least
speaking for me, I got such a great delight, and here she’s following history, yet
it’s like her hands are still on that pole. She’s still so connected to being Jewish. It’s
something that’s so important to her.

FATHER: I wouldn’t be surprised if someday she integrates all that stuff together.
You know, her love of history and museum work, and Jewish stuff.

Parents who shared these values often indicated that their children were at-
tracted by the intellectual content of the classes. Significantly, each of their teens
were attracted by different types of classes. Thus, one parent said of his teen: “He’s
a very intellectual and curious person; he’s taking *pirke avot* [Ethics of the Fathers],
and he likes that.” Another talked about one son “working with kids with disabili-
ties on Sunday mornings and he really values that,” while a second son “is involved
in their arts program.” Another teen was described by a parent as taking “the course on Jewish humor.” Parents like these agreed with the father who said: “They have found different avenues that make it a very rich experience for them.” These parents often added that their children “wanted our approval”—thus acknowledging that their children knew that they wanted them to like their Judaic studies.

Parents who did not find Judaic text study appealing, in contrast, basically agreed with their teens’ sense of being alienated by what seemed to them like the rigorousness of Prozdor. One couple, for example, thoroughly understood why their daughter might find all the Hebrew and Torah study alienating, and why she would prefer sports activities or even shopping with other Jewish teens: activities should be “fun.”

When they think back over the factors that influenced their children to make the educational choices they have made, parents often mention the powerful pull of social networks, both in drawing teens into an educational program and keeping them there. One parent talked about his teen’s pre–bar mitzvah experiences in “a huge religious school” with “horrible teachers.” Despite these unfortunate educational experiences, his son was going to supplementary school with “kids he really liked.” When “a number of them continued at Prozdor,” his son decided to go as well and has been happy there. Similarly, another father talked about his son’s continual complaining that he wants to drop out of Prozdor. “He would probably say that I force him to go,” the father muses, “which is funny, because I’ve never told him that I’ll force him to go.” He admits that attending “really cuts into his schoolwork, and at this stage it’s a sacrifice,” but feels that the friends he has are one reason his son stays despite the complaining.

Looking Ahead to the College Campus

Parents were as divided on the subject of the guidance they gave their teens about college as they were in their attitudes about teen Jewish education. Some parents reinforced their children’s looking for a campus with dynamic Jewish life, as one father remarked: “A big Jewish population on campus is absolutely key.” Another mother insisted she “wouldn’t send them to a school where there weren’t only other Jews, but also a community. The thing with colleges is it isn’t enough that there are Jews in the school . . . there has to be a Jewish community where there’s stuff going on, where there are other Jews who find Jewish things important.” For another large group of parents and their teenagers, in contrast, Jewish life on campus plays virtually no role in decision making. One father, when asked by the interviewer “what part did Judaism play in his college search, if at all?” said definitively: “Not at all.” When questioned if there “was any thought to applying to schools with Jewish resources?” he answered: “All of the colleges he applied to had some Jewish population. But it wasn’t a big thought.” Some teens—like their parents—feel ambivalent, not wanting Jewish isolation, but also not wanting a college campus that seems “too Jewish.”
Thus, as teenagers and their parents look ahead to the future and the college years, patterns established in high school repeat themselves. Students who enjoyed friendships with Jewish peers because they were involved in Jewish educational settings are more likely to look for college settings with Jewish opportunities. Parents who urged their children to continue Jewish education after bar/bat mitzvah are unambivalently ready to urge them once again, if they feel their teens are not realistic about Jewish life on campus. As one mother put it:

When I was growing up and looking for colleges, Barron’s books did breakdowns by religion. Now they break it down by sex and by race and by which area from which most students come from. So, yes, that probably will be a direction in which we point Sarah. If you put children in a situation that they don’t have the resources for you are really setting them up for a failure. I had a friend—this is years ago—they have a child my Sarah’s age, and they didn’t send their children to Hebrew school, they didn’t have a bat mitzvah, and they rarely did holidays. My husband said to the father, “If you don’t do something soon, don’t come to me when they don’t marry Jews.”

Conclusion: Jewish Behaviors and Maps of Meaning

Recent studies demonstrate the profound extent to which American Jews, with the possible exception of the fervently Orthodox, are incorporated into America and incorporate America into their lives. A recent study by Jacob Ukeles shows that even among the New York Orthodox population two-thirds highly value a secular University education. Thus, the specter of American Jews who are isolated from participation in American culture is the obverse of actual challenges facing Jewish educators. The question is not really how Jewish education can teach teenagers how to be more participatory in American culture but how it can foster a desire to be more countercultural.

This discussion began with a critical challenge: what constitutes “success” in Jewish education for teenagers? Jewish educational thinkers and planners we interviewed suggested three possible answers to this question: (1) facilitating positive experiences that help teenagers internalize a desire to create and maintain lifelong connections with Jews and Judaism; (2) transmitting cultural materials, making possible the replication of religious-cultural behaviors and values; and (3) creating more meaningful lives and more moral human beings. For those who understand the educational task as the first or second approach, success can be measured in the extent to which the next generation, in maturity, participates in Jewish behaviors and cherishes Jewish values. But if the purpose of Jewish education is composed primarily of universalistic ideals, then perhaps research assessing whether Jewish adults marry Jews; participate in Jewish rituals; join and attend synagogues; celebrate Jewish life-cycle events for themselves and their children; give their own children Jewish education; read Jewish books and periodicals; engage with Jewish
cultural expressions such as film, fiction, music, dance, and art; and visit and express support for Israel has focused on measuring parochial outcomes.

For educational thinkers who perceive the goal of Jewish education for teenagers primarily within the realm of universalistic morality, positive Jewish experiences and cultural transmission are only a means to an end rather than desirable ends in and of themselves. Indeed, in the American context, it is very tempting and it feels more natural to suggest that particularistic religious and cultural experiences and knowledge may not be necessary at all, as individuals can move toward higher consciousness and moral seriousness without the intervening steps of religious culture and lifestyles. This American assumption is often articulated as an accusation against Jewish particularism, along the lines of: “You put too much emphasis on cultural transmission, but you have little or no vision of a final goal. What, after all, is the use of religion, and passing religion on to the next generation, if you are not producing better and more thoughtful human beings?”

One answer is that Jewish education ameliorates Jewish cultural illiteracy. American Jews as a group are distinguished by their commitment to a passion for education. Most do not regard secular education exclusively as a means to an end, but also as an end in itself. The vast majority of American Jews would not dismiss the study of particle physics or Mozart or Shakespeare or history if they do not improve character: to be cultured or “educated” is a goal in itself without instrumentalizing secular education and measuring the extent to which that education is a humanizing influence.

It has often been argued that this American Jewish dedication to secular education derives, ultimately, from the traditional Jewish commitment to sacred study—and the idea that study is a sacred activity. In traditional Jewish societies, the study of sacred texts is regarded as equal to and leading to all other commanded behaviors, both those related to spirituality and those related to social justice. American Jews have arguably transferred this commitment to secular education. They have also often transferred their conviction that education fosters spiritual enhancement and social action commitments to the secular realm. However, in contrast, among many such contemporary American Jews it is acceptable to regard Jewish cultural illiteracy with equanimity. For some, this apathetic attitude toward Jewish education is accompanied by a belief that Judaic knowledge has no intrinsic value. Both Jewish education and Jewish ritual observance are sometimes asked to justify themselves with a kind moral quid pro quo: to what extent do the study of Jewish texts and the observance of Jewish rituals, a participation in Jewish culture, and a celebration of Jewish life-cycle events make one a better person?

My analysis has been built on an assumption that Jewish cultural transmission is worthwhile regardless of its moral impact. I have taken as axiomatic that Jewish religious culture has intrinsic value, that it has the capacity to enrich and enhance the lives of Jews. At its best and most successful it may function as a process or path to moral seriousness. I propose that Jewish education that does not result in Jew-
ishly engaged adults has failed, however kindly and courageous these unengaged Jews may be.

Some have suggested that the purpose of religion, including Judaism, is to serve as a precipitating factor encouraging individuals and societies to take their actions and values and behaviors seriously, to act existentially as though their choices have meaning. Although human nature inevitably routinizes even rigorous demands, at their best, Jewish lifestyles provoke spiritual self-consciousness. However, whether or not these ultimate aims are achieved, I espouse the view that the goal of Jewish education for teenagers is to transmit particularistic Jewish information and to create strong emotional connections with the Jewish people and a desire to share in a Jewish destiny. From that interpretive framework, teen years that incorporate formal classroom education, social networks primarily composed of Jewish peers, and socializing experiences at home and in other informal educational venues are the most critical factors in creating the next generation of committed American Jews.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The research team for this work includes Beth Cousens, Nicole Samuels, Rebecca Hartman, and Suzy Klein.

METHODOLOGICAL APPENDIX

The methodology of the original, qualitative research that is the subject of this chapter is as follows. The discussion is based on an analysis of interviews and focus group conversations in 2004–05 with eighty-one teenagers, twenty parents, and sixteen Jewish educators and educational thinkers, conducted in and around Newton, Massachusetts, a suburb of greater Boston that is estimated to have approximately 50 percent Jewish population. Participating teens included both those who chose to continue their Jewish education past bar and bat mitzvah into their teen years and those who have not continued. Newton was chosen as a primary site of exploration because of the rich plethora of educational offerings in this location. Unlike studies that expose the lack of availability of educational choices in many places, this study explores the decision-making process in an environment in which educational opportunities are manifestly available.

Teenagers and their parents volunteered to participate, responding to written advertisements in school, institutional, and synagogue bulletins. The teenage participants and parents received incentives consisting of Amazon.com coupons. The Jewish educational professionals did not receive incentives. Some interviews and focus group discussions were conducted after hours at Prozdor, a supplementary Jewish high school program on the grounds of Hebrew College in Newton. Others were conducted at a B’nai B’rith Youth Organization (BBYO) conference at a hotel in the area. Still others were conducted in a variety of school and home settings. Day school teenagers and their parents were also interviewed, in particular those who had chosen the Gann Academy, a recently founded nondenominational community Jewish high school program, although this study’s focus is on the supplementary school population.
Interviews and focus groups were taped, transcribed, and analyzed by the research team using the NUDIST qualitative research software.

NOTES


Generating Jewish Connections


10. This brief review of the historical and current situation of the Prozdor high school program at Hebrew College in Newton, Massachusetts, was prepared by Brandeis graduate student Nicole Samuels. For a history of Hebrew College in Boston, see Joseph Reimer, “Passionate Visions in Contest: On the History of Jewish Education in Boston,” in Jonathan Sarna and Ellen Smith, eds., The Jews of Boston (Boston: Combined Jewish Philanthropies of Greater Boston, 1995), 283. Following is a brief discussion of the Prozdor program and its recent success: The Prozdor supplementary high school program at Hebrew College in Newton represents an archetypal transformation in American Jewish education. Attracting ever more numerous and diverse students each year, the program is viewed by many as an extraordinary success, as its current enrollment moves toward one thousand students. Others, who remember the smaller but very intense program of earlier decades, critique the program because at one or two class meetings per week it seems to them to be a symbol of the reduced seriousness of supplementary Jewish education. Prozdor began in 1923 as the secondary school of Hebrew College, which was founded two years earlier, with the intention of providing a rigorous curriculum in Jewish history, text study, and Hebrew. In the early years, before day schools were widespread, Prozdor educated generations of Jewish religious, communal, and intellectuals leaders. Students were required to complete achievement tests to enter. In the 1950s, only graduates of five days per week supplementary schools could attend, and if students interested in attending had completed a three days per week school, they had to meet standards before gaining admission. In the 1970s, encouraged by Boston’s Jewish federation, called the Combined Jewish Philanthropies of Greater Boston, Prozdor shifted gears to appeal to a wider, non-Hebrew-speaking clientele. In the 1980s, the Hebrew high school program was reduced to three days per week, and in the 1990s, the program was modified to two days per week. Shira Garber, Abbie Hirsch, Joshua Lipshitz, and Caroline Musin, in “Strategic Management Consulting Project” (unpublished paper, Heller School for Public Policy, April 26, 2004), discuss the current, dramatic explosion of the program: in the 2004–5 academic year, 973 students were enrolled in Prozdor, and preenrollments for 2005–6 indicated that there would be more than 1,000 students. Students travel to Prozdor from more than sixty different towns in New England, but well over half of the students reside in Newton (32 percent), Brookline (15 percent), and Needham (12 percent). In the 2003–4 academic year, 95 percent of Prozdor students attended the school for four or six hours a week. During the same year, at least 350 students were enrolled in Hebrew-language instruction classes. Classes meet on Sunday mornings and Tuesday evenings, many of them held at Hebrew College in Newton, with the additional satellite locations at synagogues in Needham, Marblehead, Canton, Natick, and Lexington, Massachusetts, and Nashua, New Hampshire. Nearly two-thirds of the students (65 percent) report that they or their families are affiliated with Conservative synagogues. Reform synagogues account for 16 percent of students and their families, while 5 percent and 3 percent of participants affiliate with
Orthodox and Reconstructionist synagogues, respectively. Nearly 8 percent of students affiliate with a synagogue or chavura with no denominational affiliation, while 4 percent of the population does not belong to a synagogue or similar institution. Like most adult Jewish education, the teenaged student population at Prozdor is primarily female; girls outnumber boys nearly two to one. The population overwhelmingly comes from supplementary school settings (75 percent) whereas 17.4 percent attended a Jewish day school at some point during their K–8 education. Interestingly, many students who decide not to attend Prozdor have the impression that “you have to have gone to day school to attend Prozdor.” For students who do not attend, the school has a reputation for intensity. In their paper, Garber et al. cite several elements in Prozdor’s rapid growth since the end of the past decade, including extensive course selection and social networking opportunities for students, as an attractive option for teens. The school’s financial health is also a factor, as the broad student base leads to greater revenue and therefore the opportunity to run different programs (Shabbatonim, ski weekends, and trips to Montreal, London, and Israel).

11. This brief review of the historical and current situation of the New England Region BBYO was prepared by Brandeis Ph.D. candidate Beth Cousens, January 14, 2005, in a report and analysis for this study. Factual materials are drawn from http://www.bbyo.org and http://bbyoner.tripod.com. BBYO has chapters in Australia, England, Bulgaria, France, Ireland, and Israel. It has 38 regions, 750 chapters, and more than 15,000 members. Because BBYO is not affiliated with any synagogue group and exists even in areas of the country where there are few Jewish options for young people, teenagers from small towns in the South, the West, and other areas with sparse Jewish populations regard BBYO as their Jewish lifeline. According to its institutional online materials, BBYO emphasizes leadership development as its highest priority. The functioning of the chapters is entirely up to the youth participants, who plan and implement their own activities in six areas: community service, social action, Jewish heritage, recreation/social events, creativity, and sisterhood. Boys and girls are separated into chapters: the boys’ group is Aleph Zadik Aleph, or AZA, founded in the 1920s; the girls’ youth group is the B’nai Brith Girls, or BBG, founded in the 1940s. Although they can plan programs together, the chapters are all-male or all-female entities. Nationally, BBYO is divided into regions and promotes regional identity in a variety of ways. Participants meet other youth from a wide geographic area, especially at an “International Convention,” where international elections are held. New England Region BBYO covers Rhode Island, Massachusetts, Vermont, New Hampshire, and Maine. All regions start and close chapters on a regular basis based on membership strength (chapters operate with anywhere from ten to fifty members). Currently, the region has chapters in Cranston, Providence, and Newport, Rhode Island, and Acton, Attleboro, Framingham, Newton, Boston, Worcester, and Sharon, Massachusetts.


13. For the concept of coalescence, see Sylvia Barack Fishman, Jewish Life and American Culture (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2000), 15–32.

14. Fishman, Double or Nothing, 147–51.

15. The concept of the broker, who creates a connection between two sets of people and two sets of value systems and behaviors, is drawn from social network theory. See Kadushin and Kadushin, Introduction to Social Network Theory.

III The Communal Dimension
Imagine a stadium in which a dozen or more teams are engaged in a variety of sports events. Players run pell-mell through each other’s space and haphazardly lob baseballs, basketballs, footballs, tennis balls and other paraphernalia suitable for their particular sport, with little conscious attention paid to other events being staged on the same field. A few referees frantically attempt to organize the anarchy in the stadium. In the stands, a significant number of people sit with their backs to the action, while a vocal minority of fans cheers for their favorite teams. Some team owners and their wealthy friends are busy negotiating deals to fund sporting events; a few are also working to bring some order out of the chaos unfolding below them. This is how the field of Jewish education in the United States might well appear to an observer somewhere above the fray.¹

Local Jewish communities around the country typically contain an impressive array of educational institutions and programs that rarely interact with one another, let alone intersect with those in other communities. In a typical middle- or large-size community one can find most, if not all, of the following forms of Jewish educational offerings: a few all-day Jewish schools, often reflecting the denominational orientation of different sectors of the local populace, educate a minority of Jewish children. Most synagogues run their own supplementary schools at least through the bar/bat mitzvah years, and sometimes through high school, which serve the majority of children obtaining a Jewish education.² Both synagogues and Jewish Community...
Centers (JCCs) offer early childhood programs with some Jewish content. Then there are youth movement activities for teenagers, sponsored either by the denominations or individual synagogues; of late, more of these are organized by a community-wide agency. In many localities camping programs—both overnight and day camps—are sponsored by the JCC, congregations, and private entrepreneurs. And quite a few local federations of philanthropy also organize and heavily subsidize teen trips to Israel that have a strong educational component. Not to be overlooked are educational programs for adults that take the form of family education offered by synagogue schools and day schools, adult education classes provided by congregations and JCCs, and in recent years, more systematic courses following curricula developed outside of the local community by the Wexner Heritage Foundation based in New York, the Florence Melton Adult Mini-Schools developed in Jerusalem and Chicago, and the Meah curriculum devised by Boston Hebrew College.

All of these are voluntary organizations: they operate in a competitive environment, recruiting learners and enlisting financial support through fees, donations, and other forms of philanthropy. Educators must be savvy to consumer needs and must market their educational programs. This quintessential American template is one of the factors militating against centralized planning. A chief concern of this chapter is whether voluntarism and competition also discourage efforts to achieve new levels of coordination in the way learners are channeled from one program to the next, in the way educators at one institution regard their counterparts at others, and in the way schools and programs relate to one another.

With the exception of the adult education offerings, most Jewish educational programs have emerged through the independent efforts of local individuals and institutions—that is, without any coordinated, let alone central, planning. Federations of Jewish philanthropy, the natural organizing agent in local communities, long shied away from active involvement with Jewish education, thereby creating a vacuum to be filled by others. The post–World War II suburban boom also played a role in the splintering of Jewish education: whereas quite a few communities in the decades between the world wars had a communal system of Jewish education at least for youngsters, that structure collapsed when congregations insisted on offering their own supplementary school programs and Jewish populations moved ever further away from central gathering places. The same era also marked the emergence of Jewish day schools through the initiative of interested funders and parents. Even communal day schools were largely organized and supported privately. Some reversal of these centrifugal pressures occurred in the closing two decades of the twentieth century, as federations or other funding agencies began to experiment with community-wide programs, mainly in the realm of informal, rather than formal, education for teens either locally or on Israel trips. But the historical trajectory of Jewish education over the past sixty-five years has been toward diffusion rather than coordination, let alone integration.

If any local institutions are likely to work at the task of educational integration, they are the federation and the central agency for Jewish education (which is often
an arm of the federation). The federation of Jewish philanthropy, an umbrella for fund-raising and allocations to local agencies, through the power of its purse, could work to persuade local schools, programs, and other educational institutions to coordinate their efforts. Furthermore, as the planning arm of the local community, the federation could foster reflection about Jewish education, which, after all, is about an investment in human resources, especially for the next generation. Central agencies, for their part, might also play such a role, if for no other reason than that they act as partners with educational institutions: they generally work with educators, particularly with school heads and teachers, offering in-service training programs and curricular assistance. By virtue of their connection with a wide range of institutions, they have unparalleled entrance into local institutions of Jewish education, and their staff members are likely to see the “big picture” of local Jewish education.

On the national level, a few organizations potentially could play a coordinating role too: departments of Jewish education sponsored by the major religious movements and agencies supported by the federation world or major donors might have the resources to understand the larger scene, but given the wide dispersal of U.S. Jews in hundreds of localities around the country, it is difficult for national agencies to reach into communities very effectively. At best, such agencies work with a particular type of educational institution—for example, the Partnership for Excellence in Jewish Education, based in Boston, works with day schools; other newly focused agencies work with the sleep-away camps or early childhood programs or schools with a particular denominational orientation. Ultimately, these national umbrella bodies are limited in their reach and effectiveness because, to borrow a phrase from the late Democratic Party power broker, Tip O’Neill, all Jewish schooling and educational politics are local. That is where the actual work of educating takes place and where the organization of Jewish education must occur.

Mindful of that reality, this chapter seeks to understand how local communities go about the business of ensuring the support and stability of local programs of Jewish education. To what extent do they coordinate the work of various institutions? Do they conceive of Jewish education locally as a linked network of educating agencies or rather as a set of loosely connected, if not entirely uncoupled, schools, programs, and institutions? Have some communities created models of integration, and if so, have those efforts made a difference to the learners, educators, the educational programs themselves?

In order to examine these questions, I selected seven Jewish communities of various sizes and in different regions of the United States for analysis and comparison. What follows are portraits of how each of these communities “does” Jewish education, and how a range of historical, regional, and cultural factors have shaped their particular approaches. Among the issues to be discussed are the role of the local federation as a champion of Jewish education, the constraints placed on local bureaus of Jewish education and their efforts to transcend their limitations, the presence of other players who take Jewish education seriously, the impact of national institutions on local affairs; and the role of foundations and other potential
champions of Jewish education. The focus will then shift from the unit of the individual community to broader challenges confronting the Jewish educational enterprise across the country and the factors that affect the ability of communities to develop a measure of coordination in their systems of Jewish education. (Readers who are less interested in the historical and cultural factors shaping the way specific Jewish communities conduct themselves are welcome to skip to the more general and comparative reflections, commencing with the section titled “One Size Does Not Fit All,” immediately after the discussion of the San Francisco community.)

A Tale of Seven Communities

Atlanta

A visitor to the Jewish community of Atlanta cannot but be struck by its boom-town atmosphere. In 1995, an article in the American Jewish Year Book estimated Atlanta’s Jewish population as numbering 67,500 souls; by 2004, the same annual reported a population of 86,000. Some locals are convinced the number is closer to 100,000 Jews. With a growth rate of anywhere between 30 and 50 percent in less than a decade, Atlanta’s Jewish community has been buoyed by its rapid expansion. Equally important, the institutions of the community have grown in number and membership. The Marcus Jewish Community Center has expanded from a few thousand members to more than seven thousand. Over the past few decades, the number of synagogue supplementary schools shot up from seven to more than thirty. During the 1990s, day school education expanded with the addition of a Reform day school, a community high school, and Haredi schools.

This growth in itself would have engendered a sense of positive momentum, but the larger culture of Atlanta has further inspired a mood of optimism. The city itself and its environs see themselves as the capital of the “New South,” and, indeed, the emergence of affluent neighborhoods has spurred an ethos of boosterism. Atlantans talk up their city; optimism is in the air. As one longtime resident put it: “There is a sense that this community is good and works well.” Some who are a bit more self-critical also talk of a culture of “superficiality” that pervades the South—“be nice and make others look good” are the watchwords. Still, the communal disposition is sunny. And all this has rubbed off on local Jews who speak just as glowingly about their community.

Growth, however, has not been an unalloyed boon for the Atlanta Jewish community. Even as it has brought a sense of positive momentum and the promise of exciting new initiatives, it has sorely stretched the capacities of communal institutions. As Jewish families move further away from the city to northern suburbs and with no river or mountains to curb their geographic dispersal, the Jewish population is gravitating ever further from the orbit of central institutions. This has placed great strains on the federation, Jewish Community Centers, and also day schools,
even as it has also eroded the membership of some of the older established synagogues in or near the city itself. A new demographic study of the northern suburbs released in 2004 reports that a third of the households in those areas are intermarried and only 41 percent belong to a synagogue, even as nearly two-thirds assert that being Jewish is “very important” to them; many Jews in those suburbs claim they would join a Jewish Community Center if one were built nearby, but there is no such facility as yet.⁴

When an outsider asks locals to identify the center of gravity in Atlanta’s Jewish educational scene, the usual response is a look of bafflement. The federation regards itself as a convener (of educators, lay leaders, and so forth) but not as an initiator of change. This, as we will see, is fairly typical of federations in other parts of the country. Critics of the federation’s educational efforts point to two glaring symptoms of a more glaring failing. One occurred when two day schools, the Epstein School (a Conservative day school in the Solomon Schechter network) and the Weber School, a community high school, each needed to expand and talks were held to resettle them together on a single property. The effort failed, thereby denying both schools of potential cost savings, and some of the blame for the failed partnership has fallen on the federation leadership. The federation is also regarded as aloof from the concerns of synagogues. It does not fund synagogue-based Jewish education and is seen as stand-offish regarding the difficulties faced by synagogues. (Those who are sympathetic to the federation note that every time it tries to involve itself, it gets slammed for meddling.)

Atlanta is unusual in that it functioned for a number of years without a central agency for Jewish education. As part of the larger agenda of North American federations in the 1990s to promote “Jewish continuity,” the Atlanta federation’s Continuity Commission assumed responsibility for educational decision making. The Bureau of Jewish Education was deemed irrelevant, and, in the words of one local, was “assassinated.” After five years without a central agency, it became clear that the community needed an advocate of Jewish education. The tasks of several small educational programs were combined under the umbrella of a newly organized Jewish Educational Services. Aside from providing resources and services to educators, the new entity will also tie together some loose ends: it will sponsor teen programming, oversee a school for the learning disabled, and run the Atlanta supplementary high school. Thus far, it has played no role in either accrediting schools or attending to the licensing of educators. The oversight of schools comes from demanding parents, not from any formal community agency. It remains to be seen whether the newly created Jewish Educational Services will serve as a coordinating and accrediting body for Jewish education in the area, let alone as an agency capable of raising new funds for the field, or whether it will be marginalized, as was its predecessor.

Despite the absence of a central leadership for Jewish education, there is considerable strength in key local institutions. The Jewish Community Center has taken a leading role owing to the forceful leadership of its professional staff, beginning with its top executive. Aside from the usual complement of early childhood pro-
grams and summer camping, what distinguishes the Marcus JCC is its active role in the promotion of adult education. The JCC has imported the Florence Melton Adult Mini-School system, serving as the purveyor of this two-year program. In recognition of the positive track record of Atlanta’s Melton program, the Avi Chai Foundation designated the community as one of the recipients of pilot grants for special Melton classes aimed at parents of preschool children, a program based on the belief that Jewishly educated parents make better informed decisions for their children’s education and will also serve as stronger role models for their children. Within the community, observers of Jewish life already claim to see a measurable impact of the Melton program: “The learning circles back to every type of institution,” notes one educator, as the program’s graduates enrich the community.

Atlanta’s Jewish day schools are another source of local educational strength. Atlanta boasts lower schools spanning the spectrum from Haredi to modern Orthodox, Conservative, and Reform. It also has several Orthodox high schools and a community day high school. Roughly 2,200 children attend these diverse schools out of a total Jewish school population of approximately 5,700 enrolled children. Most observers agree that these schools are all outreach-oriented to one extent or another in that they appeal to parents who themselves were not products of a day school education. Most would also agree that enrollments grew in part as a result of desegregation and the rise of a private school culture in the area. As Jews move to northern suburbs, it remains to be seen whether day school enrollments will keep pace in locales where the public schools are considered more attractive.

As is the case in other communities, the high costs of day school education creates serious challenges to families who wish to enroll their children and to the federations, which have finite resources. The day schools of Atlanta are the primary recipient of federation funding to Jewish educational programs, with roughly one-quarter of local allocations by the federation going to day schools. Still, the average per capita grant by the federation is now $775, as compared with $803 just a few years ago. (The funding formula to arrive at each school’s per capita allotment varies greatly depending on the age of the school; not surprisingly, the discrepancies provoke suspicion on all sides as to who is getting preferential treatment from the federation.) With most of the day schools eking out a bare existence, local observers are convinced that the federation would not rescue a fiscally failing school.

Beyond the JCC and the day schools, Atlanta boasts an unusual source of educational energy and talent—the local Orthodox Kollel, or school of advanced study for ordained rabbis. Founded as an offshoot of the Ner Israel Yeshiva in Baltimore, the Atlanta Scholars Kollel provides a cadre of men and women as teachers for the entire community. Unlike other such institutions, the Atlanta Kollel strongly encourages its fellows to participate in the educational life of the community. Members of the Kollel teach in venues across the city, including in private homes, business offices, non-Jewish private schools, and a Reform temple. Proudly proclaiming its mission as transcending the classroom, the Kollel boasts: “Whether you’re Reform, Conservative, Orthodox, unaffiliated or somewhere in between,
Cultures of Jewish Education


Scholars Kollel . . . is your most vibrant source for Jewish learning in Atlanta.”⁵ The Kollel’s home base is a synagogue, popularly known as the “Kollel Dome,” that offers Orthodox religious services but also keeps its parking lot open on the Sabbath for worshippers who drive to the synagogue.⁶ The fellows—and their wives—in short, are part of the pool of Jewish educators on which the Atlanta Jewish community draws.

One additional asset of the Atlanta Jewish community is the relative lack of turnover among its key personnel. Rabbis and educators generally remain in the community for a long period, largely because of a conscious effort to retain people. In the view of one longtime educator, the community has felt itself to be a backwater not always capable of picking and choosing its personnel. Rather than dismiss educators and rabbis who were professionally weak in some areas, the lay leadership mentored with them patiently, teaching them how the community operates and what professionalism demands. It is hard to know how well this approach worked, but Atlantans extol the quality of their educational and professional leaders, who through their energy and talent make up for the fact that the community has not as yet pulled its educational programs together with any coherence.

Boston

If the Atlanta Jewish community is characterized by rapid and recent population growth, the heady atmosphere of the New South, and a set of institutions in the act of self-creation, the Boston Jewish community is rooted in far older, established traditions. It has a venerable history, having been the first in the United States to organize a federation, the Combined Jewish Philanthropies (CJP) in 1895. It also boasts several major institutions of higher learning, most notably, Brandeis University, one of two U.S. universities founded under Jewish auspices, and the Boston Hebrew College, one of the oldest Jewish teachers colleges in the country. Boston’s Bureau of Jewish Education can properly claim to be “the first truly communal agency for Jewish education in the United States,”⁷ a bureau renowned in the early decades of the century for its pioneering work in the teaching of Hebrew language skills and a sophisticated program of five-day-a-week supplementary education offered in a communal, rather than synagogue, setting.⁸ Its teachers’ and principals’ associations were among the oldest in the nation, as was its Orthodox Maimonides School, founded in 1937 by Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik and his wife, Tonya, among the first day schools outside of New York City.⁹ In brief, Boston is a community with an educational infrastructure that can boast of having deep roots.

Insiders are convinced that the traditions of Boston itself have greatly influenced the way the community operates. With a large array of institutions of higher learning, Greater Boston prides itself on its commitment to ideas. So too, writes historian Jonathan Sarna, “what is distinctive about Jewish Boston . . . [is] its enchantment with the life of the mind.”¹⁰ This appreciation for serious ideas extends to all sectors of the community and certainly characterizes the modern Orthodox
sector, which was nurtured by the late Rabbi Soloveitchik, who impressed a strong Litvak (Lithuanian) stamp on his Orthodox followers. Professionals who have moved to the community note the cerebral proclivities of Boston’s Jewish population as compared with their counterparts in other localities.

Bostonians also value their distinctive culture and insist on inventing their own models. Not accidentally, Boston’s Jewish community has eschewed national efforts toward Jewish educational and religious revitalization—such as Synagogue 2000 and the STAR initiative in the realm of synagogue transformation or the ECE program in Jewish education—in favor of homegrown programs. To be sure, there is also an element of elitism in the Boston way, and not surprisingly, its Jews have gravitated to key charismatic personalities at critical turning points in the community’s history. Ideology and leadership have long been the hallmarks of the local Jewish culture, and also of Boston.

New England forms of governance also have shaped the way the community functions. Just as local towns insist on having their own police departments and conducting business their own way, so too do Jewish institutions vie for independence. This inclination has no doubt complicated efforts to coordinate and systematize Jewish education, but it also has led to some competition between educational institutions to try something different. For these reasons, innovation is not feared, but embraced, despite the self-awareness within the community of its own historical lineage.

It is virtually impossible to conduct a conversation about Jewish education in Boston without coming back to the major role played by the Combined Jewish Philanthropies and its longtime chief executive, Barry Shrage. Even well beyond his own community, Shrage has captured attention as a cheerleader and champion of Jewish education. Beyond the sheer exuberance of his boosterism, Shrage has seen to it that the Boston CJP has enshrined his perspective in its own literature. The most recent Strategic Plan for the CJP (issued in 1998) defined a tripartite mission for the Boston Jewish community, the first of which is to serve as a “community of learning”: the study claims that the “community has reached broad agreement about the need to vastly expand Jewish literacy and learning and facilitate a Jewish cultural renaissance through increased support for formal and informal Jewish education for people of all ages and increased attention to emerging institutions of Jewish culture.” The plan goes on to call for a communal program to “promote life-long learning,” “strengthen and transform our educational system to make Hebrew schools, Jewish day schools and Hillels more exciting, attractive, alive places of learning and community,” and “create opportunities to experience and express Jewish culture” (15–16). Although the plan makes a specific reference to the need for “strengthening and transforming our educational system” (17), it is silent about how to coordinate various programs in order to create an integrated system, rather than an uncoordinated assemblage of discrete institutions and programs. Significantly, the plan sets a goal for the CJP to serve as “a communal broker that uses its financial resources, as well as its networks of influence, human resources,
organizational relationships and access to knowledge to create a sense of common direction, shared purpose and vision to reinforce the bonds of community” (28). In other words, the CJP aims to strengthen the field of Jewish education through the power of its words, its clear sense of direction, and its connections.

In fact, this has been the hallmark of the new “Boston system,” a term once employed to characterize the program of Jewish education that held sway in the first decades of the twentieth century. The new Boston system has worked with relatively meager financial resources and few champions of Jewish education among the wealthy laity, yet nonetheless the CJP has launched a series of initiatives that were sharply focused, thoughtfully conceived, innovative—and that few people believed would actually succeed. But in some important ways, they have worked.

The engine driving much of the change was the Commission on Jewish Continuity and Education established by the CJP in 1989. Although the commission has evolved over time, it has throughout consisted of key lay leaders who have a strong interest in the range of Jewish educational ventures—family education, Israel trips, teen programming, day schools, congregational schools, camping, and other types of Jewish education. As time has gone on, the commission has served, in the words of one participant, as a vehicle “for champions of Jewish education to have an avenue for their championing.”

The first initiative was in the arena of Jewish family education, then the rage in other parts of the country. The CJP established the Sh’arim program in cooperation with the Bureau of Jewish Education to create full-time family educators to involve parents in their children’s Jewish education. By 2005, it employed sixteen full-time family educators housed at a dozen congregations, two Jewish Community Centers, and two day schools, and the program claimed to have reached ten thousand Jewish families. Next, the commission moved on to adult Jewish education, playing a role in the founding of the two-year Meah curriculum coordinated by the Boston Hebrew College. By 2005, it reported running twenty-one classes in thirty-six institutions with more than 1,700 students and more than 1,700 graduates. In 2004, the commission on its own founded a pilot program at five sites called Ikarim that targeted parents of preschool-age children for a version of the Meah program geared to the specific needs of young families. The goal was to shape the thinking of parents who were on the verge of making Jewish educational decisions for their young children. Another initiative called YESOD, the Youth Educator Initiative, employed fifteen full-time youth educators and four part-time ones by 2005, who offered shared services to a number of different institutions. Most recently, a new venture called NOAR aims to involve teens in community planning, and a second program, the Leadership Development Institute, helps synagogues develop their own leadership. The total CJP allocations for these programs rose from $2.8 million in 1993–94 to $6.5 million in 2003–4.

In the most recent summary of its current strategic goals, the Commission on Jewish Continuity and Education pays attention to the need for greater integration: it speaks of integrating pre- and post-Israel experiences for teens, and it describes
a goal for a newly created Day School Advocacy Forum (DAF) as developing and implementing “a strategy for a synergistic relationship between synagogues, preschools and day schools.” Implicitly, it recognizes that for all its achievements, the Boston system lacks a clear transition from one type of institution to the next.

The CJP and its commission have developed most of their programs in collaboration with several other important institutional players. One is the Bureau of Jewish Education of Greater Boston. As noted earlier, the BJE had a venerable history in the first half of the twentieth century, developing an educational system that insisted on curriculum, compensation, and school standards. By the 1940s, this system began to fail with the movement toward suburbanization, which scattered the Jewish population, and the growth of the Conservative and Reform movements, which ran their own supplementary schools, rather than encouraged their youth to attend communal schools. The bureau endured tough times in the third quarter of the twentieth century but could also draw on a distinguished history when the time for rebuilding came in the 1980s.

The current bureau runs a variety of programs especially aimed at school directors. Whereas the bureau once focused primarily on teachers and licensing, teacher accreditation is currently a low priority in the field, and school administrators are regarded as the educators of teachers. Hence the BJE works with school principals and mid-level people. The BJE also offers services to institutions such as camps, JCCs, day schools, and supplementary schools, helping them develop their committee and board structures. It also gets good grades for convening day school directors, who range across the spectrum from Haredi to Reform. Despite its role as a provider of this panoply of services, the bureau, like its counterparts in many American communities, struggles to carve a niche for itself in a community with strong federation committees involved in educational planning and a constellation of other competing institutions. Given its limited resources and the strength of other institutions in the Jewish education arena, the bureau has difficulty making itself heard above the din of competition, let alone to play its former role as the czar of local Jewish education. The bureau’s advocacy in behalf of content, skills, and knowledge also appears staid in a community eager for Jewish passion, if not razzle-dazzle.

A major winner in the reconfiguration of Jewish education in Boston undoubtedly is the Hebrew College. The CJP turned to the college to develop the Meah curriculum, and that investment now has yielded rich benefits. Not only has the program raised the local profile of a once sleepy institution, Meah is now going national, with eight sites in communities such as New York, Baltimore, Cleveland, and Orlando. Its franchise operation may well continue beyond the two-year course of study, as the college has developed a Meah Graduate Institute to take graduates of the Meah program on diverse tracks, ranging from the study of classical texts to Jewish thought, cultural history, and spirituality.

The Hebrew College has also won kudos for its revitalized Prozdor program for high school students. For many decades the Prozdor was known as a program
intensely Hebraic in focus and instruction. As that program languished and a new community high school began to siphon off students, the Hebrew College was challenged by the CJP to develop a new model. The new Prozdor makes the study of Hebrew language entirely optional and offers a menu of formal and informal education, as well as options to study for two, four, or six hours weekly. The range of choices has captured the imagination of young people (see the essay in this volume by Sylvia Barack Fishman). Suddenly, close to one thousand high school students now descend on the new campus of the Hebrew College each week.\footnote{16}

Boston also supports fourteen Jewish day schools, ranging in denominational affiliation from Reform to Haredi and Chabad, with quite a few communal schools. Among the latter, the Gann Academy, founded in 1997 as the New Jewish High School, is regarded as the most recently added jewel in the communal crown. Housed on a large new campus, boasting an attractive and spacious school building, as well as expansive sports fields, the Gann Academy created a revolution through its sheer ambition. It set the pace by raising a significant amount of money for its campus. Recently, the CJP announced a new $45 million mega-gift from two donors to create “peerless excellence” in the three denominational lower schools—Maimonides (Orthodox), Schechter (Conservative), and Rashi (Reform). The gift represented a break from past tradition when day schools were very much on their own and could hope for only modest support from the CJP. (In fact, the CJP per capita contribution for day school children still ranks in the lower third of federations across the country.) But the CJP did play a role in developing the gift, and in the process has set a standard of moral support that other communities now feel some pressure to match.\footnote{17} (Day schools in Boston also benefit from the local presences of a day school advocacy committee connected to the CJP, called DAF, which promotes and markets day schools, and the Partnership for Excellence in Jewish Education, a national organization supported by major funders from across the country that offers marketing and other consultative services for day schools.)

Two other vehicles in the community for the delivery of Jewish education are the Jewish Community Centers and the synagogues. The former offer the usual preschool and camping programs, but barely register on the communal radar screen as important players in the field of Jewish education. They are perceived as overly concerned with appearing too Jewish, and of mounting no serious educational initiatives. Interestingly, the synagogues are also seen as secondary. True, they support large supplementary school programs. And they have also benefited from the adult education of their members through the Meah program, the teen education offered by Prozdor, and the Sh’arim and Ikarim programs aimed at their families. But rabbis are generally not perceived as significant voices in communal discussions about Jewish education, and the programs offered by synagogue supplementary schools are not pointed to with pride. Quite the contrary, Prozdor is often depicted as a success because it could provide for teens what their own synagogues could not offer.\footnote{18} But if the community has been so successful in raising the banner of Jewish education, why have synagogue supplementary schools not benefited as well? And if the Meah
program, which self-consciously is designed to foster the transformation of local Jewish institutions has been such a smashing success, why have its many hundreds of graduates not transformed Jewish education in their own synagogues? The larger question all this raises is: What has the new Boston system wrought?

The sobering answer is that for all the significant effort invested, the results are still mixed. To take one fact, despite all the talk about becoming a community of learning, fewer than half the eligible Jewish children in the Boston area were enrolled in any form of Jewish schooling in 2001–2, some 17,139 out of an estimated population of children between the ages of three and seventeen numbering some 40,000 youths. (There is no reason to assume that the proportions are significantly different elsewhere.) There is also no evidence as yet of an increase in synagogue participation by Meah or Sh’arim alumni, and indeed the programs do not regard the improvement of synagogue or Hebrew skills, let alone religious transformation, as one of their goals. There is also still no documented evidence to indicate that Meah graduates are more impassioned advocates for their own children’s Jewish education, although a few prominent Meah graduates are often cited for their newfound activism on behalf of Jewish schools. An evaluation of the Sha’arim program claims that 45 percent of respondents say their attachment to Judaism and commitment to Jewish life have increased, as has attendance at religious services, but, as the authors conceded, it is unclear whether this reflects the impact of the program or the tendency of parents to get more engaged as “part of the developmental process of families with children in religious school.”

Moreover, despite the optimism and local pride in the innovative programs launched in Boston, it is remarkable how many professionals and lay leaders remain skeptical about the deeper impact of what has been accomplished. There is a sense that for all the talk about Jewish education, hardly any new money has been directed by the community to synagogue schools or even to day schools (the “peerless excellence” gift being a major exception that may or may not turn the tide). And despite the presence in Boston of a distinguished cadre of Jewish academics, intellectuals, and rabbis, no think tank environment has been constructed to tap the expertise of such people when it come to the big educational issues. The community, moreover, has only begun to think systemically about its offerings in Jewish education: How can it channel preschool children to formal Jewish education? How can teen groups, Prozdor, summer camps, and Israel programs create synergies among their adolescent populations? How can day school educators and supplementary school teachers work effectively with camp directors? And how can a coordinated effort be launched in this community to address the rising costs of Jewish living that are a deterrent to parents who are considering enrolling their children in educational programs?

To pose such questions is to hold the Boston Jewish community to a standard that no Jewish community can meet. But it needs to be said that even in one of the best focused Jewish communities, where all the right messages are delivered regularly and a remarkable infrastructure of Jewish education is in place, much work
remains to be done. It is noteworthy that well-informed insiders recognize the limitations of what they have achieved. They talk about the small sums of serious money flowing into Jewish education. They talk about the fixation of philanthropists on the new, even as they permit core programs to languish with little support. They talk about the incomplete system currently in place, with a continuing divide between the synagogue and federation worlds. And they talk about the sheer luck that made it possible for certain programs to succeed in the absence of serious funding. The revitalization of the Prozdor program is described by its own director as a lucky success that few anticipated; the same is said of the Meah program, which was a grand experiment whose designers were skeptical of its power to succeed. The frequent refrain I heard about so many of these programs is that “no one anticipated what would develop.” The same was said of the Gann Academy, formerly known as the New Jewish High School.

Viewed in comparative terms, the Boston effort is unquestionably exemplary and impressive. With an articulate spokesman at the helm of the CJP, eager to advocate on behalf of the virtues of Jewish learning, with some capable professionals to develop programs, and with an environment that fosters connection and engagement and that values ideas, the Boston Jewish community has taken major strides, often despite serious self-doubts. There is perhaps as much to be learned from the risk-taking in Boston as from the actual system developed through the CJP.

The Boston system represents at least a short-term triumph, because the community built new programs and people have come. Some synergies have developed to date between the mix of educational interventions for people of different ages. And the positive “can-do” spirit has taken on a life of its own. By repeatedly invoking success and trumpeting the crucial importance of the “community of learning” model, a new reality was created in Boston where people believed that these programs were successful and meaningful. And despite concerns expressed by many about whether the system is sufficiently inclusive and has reached into all sectors of the community, enough cooperation has been built across institutions that leaders have come to believe that all ships are rising together on a tide produced by the CJP and its charismatic leader.

Chicago

The system of Jewish education in Chicago, as is true of the larger communal enterprise of Jews in the so-called Second City, is a tale of perplexing contradictions. On the one hand, the community has been able to generate quite significant resources for Jewish needs; on the other hand, its educational institutions are lackluster. On the one hand, its federation acts as a powerful force in the community; on the other, there is much diffusion of energy, needless competition, and duplication. On the one hand, there is more talk in Chicago than in any of the other communities studied in this report of raising significant endowments for day schools; on the other, hardly any funds for this purpose have been generated, despite the demonstrated
capacity of the community to raise funds. On the one hand, educational and religious leaders privately refer to the federation as the “Darth Vader” in town, a force that no one wants to battle; on the other, Chicago is probably the only community in North America with three separate central agencies for Jewish education, an almost anarchic situation. On the one hand, the community can boast the longtime presence of two major Jewish institutions of higher learning, Spertus College and the Hebrew Theological College; on the other, most observers regard their contributions to Jewish education as negligible, if not nil.

The contrast with the Boston Jewish experience is quite dramatic. With a population base estimated to be less than 5 percent larger than that of Boston, the Chicago federation generates more than two and a half times as much money in its annual campaign. And the assets of its endowment fund are almost four times greater than that of the CJP in Boston. Like Boston, the Chicago Jewish community can boast of venerable institutions and a serious history of Jewish education. Its Orthodox community, which in most communities is disproportionately invested in Jewish education, constitutes 10 percent of the Jewish population, twice its percentage in Boston. And yet the community has not generated new educational ideas or programs comparable to what Boston Jewry has launched with far more meager financial assets, and it seems not to have tried to develop coordination in its system of institutions. It has even been slow to import programs developed in other communities.

Local observers attribute the Jewish pattern to the larger Chicago culture, claiming that midwestern traditionalism permeates the thinking of Chicago’s Jews. The community values stability, as is evident from the fact that its hundred-year-old federation has been guided by just four chief executives. The Jewish community also prides itself on its successful absorption of newcomers: half the Jewish population was born elsewhere. And the local federation, the Jewish United Fund (JUF), is one of the few to maintain its high level of giving for international Jewish needs. At a time when most federations have slashed their funds for Israel (the Boston federation is a case in point), the JUF continues to allocate $27.5 million to international needs, almost as much as the entirety of Boston’s annual campaign. Unquestionably, support for Israel is the top priority of the Chicago federation and reflects the determination of the community to stay the course rather than bow to fads.20

The federation prides itself on its strategic thinking and planning role, too. Driven by professionals rather than lay donors, the federation has promoted several new ventures in recent years:

1. A universal entitlement program covering a trip to Israel for all children between the ages of eight and fourteen.
2. A fund to give children who go through educational programs the opportunity to attend Jewish residential summer camps.
3. The federation has created two endowment programs for day schools.

The Jewish Day School Guaranty Trust collects money from individuals
who do not wish to designate a single school and then invests those gifts in a pot of money that all the schools can tap; the federation also matches such gifts up to 10 percent of their value. The Individual Day School Endowment Foundation is a support foundation for all day schools, but the moneys are targeted by donors to a school of their choice. Here too the federation offers a match of up to 10 percent.

4. The federation has been working to bring together all professionals working in the area of preschool education.

The JUF demonstrates its commitment to the field by channeling nearly $7 million annually to educational institutions (and that does not include some $6 million to Jewish Community Centers, which also offer some programs in Jewish education). The per capita giving for day school children has now fallen to $500 per child enrolled in lower and middle schools and $1,000 for upper-school students in a network that educates approximately 4,600 children enrolled in the fifteen day schools in the metropolitan Chicago area (an enrollment figure that has remained steady in recent years). To be sure, this represents a declining portion of the day school budgets, but that is only because school costs have risen considerably.

Certainly, one of the more noteworthy features of the Chicago system is the existence of three separate central agencies for Jewish education that do not interact with one another. The Bureau of Jewish Education dates back to 1923, and just six years later, the Orthodox community broke off to form the Associated Talmud Torahs. From the perspective of some, this structure made sense because the right-wing Orthodox would not work with the rest of the community, and the division of labor made it possible for all groups to connect with a central agency. Matters grew more complex in the 1990s after a federation continuity commission urged the creation of a new foundation for Jewish education whose task it would be to raise new money for Jewish education. After a few years of feuding between the new foundation and the bureau, the federation decided to disband the bureau entirely and was promptly sued by the latter. Eventually, a modus vivendi was reached whereby the three agencies work on parallel and somewhat overlapping tracks—but do not talk, let alone coordinate their work.

The Bureau of Jewish Education primarily runs preschool programs and a learning resource center. It is not supported by the federation. The Associated Talmud Torahs (ATT) works with traditional schools, including some Conservative ones, but mainly with Orthodox schools. It is primarily connected with the day school world to which it channels federation funds, but it also runs a supplementary high school program. It offers consulting services to its schools and works with a range of Orthodox camps, youth movements, and other vehicles of informal Jewish education. The Community Foundation for Jewish Education is engaged with supplemental Jewish education and informal Jewish education. It is a key organizer of Israel trips for people of all ages; it runs programs for supplementary educators; it offers an extensive program of adult Jewish education, including Hebrew
Ulplan programs; and it advises public high schools that provide Hebrew-language courses to fulfill foreign language requirements. Taken together, these three agencies cover a significant range of services, but the fact that they do not communicate with each other is symptomatic of the highly diffuse Chicago network of Jewish education.

Similarly, adult education in the community is uncoordinated. The North American office of the Melton Adult Mini-Schools is located in the city, and not surprisingly there is local interest in the program. But rather than consolidate the effort, the community allows three separate Melton programs to function—one sponsored by the BJE for teacher education, a second for lay people run by the Community Foundation for Jewish Education, and a third by the federation itself for its own leadership. The same curriculum, in short, is employed by three separate organizations operating in the same community, independently of one another.

The Chicago federation invests a significant sum in its system of Jewish Community Centers, but these provide remarkably little Jewish education. The only formal Jewish education offered by the centers is through their early childhood programs. The camps do little in this area, as their staffs are not committed to an educational mission. Remarkably, the Chicago JCCs were among the first to move the JCC movement toward a commitment to Jewish education, and they continue to have a reputation as friendly to the enterprise. But the network offers only weak programming, if any.

Synagogues too are players in the field of Jewish education, but they are rarely mentioned as significant shapers of the community. Rabbis are viewed as aloof from communal educational questions and preoccupied with the day-to-day work of managing large congregations. And while some of the congregational schools draw on denominational support, they seem disconnected from a larger enterprise. To illustrate, one informant spoke of a pulpit rabbi whose congregations sent more than forty youngsters to a JCC camp but who was nonetheless unprepared to pay the camp a visit and do some teaching.

For all the talk about the strength of the federation, the reality is that the Chicago community does not function in an integrated fashion. To be sure, the geographic spread of the community is daunting—and becoming even more so as highly mobile Jews settle in ever more distant suburbs. But there also is no concerted effort to tie the disparate institutions of Jewish education together. Territorialism has prompted schools and institutions to fend for themselves rather than work together. Rabbis feel disenfranchised from the larger enterprise. And even the new initiatives of the federation tend to stress the individual institutions rather than a common good or coordination. It would seem that in Chicago traditional ways of doing Jewish education have been coupled with a culture of dissociation to produce a highly fragmented system. The system is not indifferent to the virtues of Jewish education, but it has failed to produce strong champions of the field, an appreciation for the value of coordination, and a vision for how to connect institutions and people to a whole Jewish educational enterprise greater than themselves.
Los Angeles

A recent article on Jewish education in Los Angeles referred to the “geographic and philosophical sprawl” of the local Jewish community and invidiously contrasted the community’s approach to the vision displayed by the Boston Jewish community and also the Chicago federation’s ambition to establish serious day school endowment funds. These, it was argued, were models to be emulated. The top federation official in Los Angeles conceded his community’s failings: “I think we are at a very different level of community development. We are grappling here with trying to forge a vision that has broad-based consensus so we can move from our historical patterns of support to something that would address contemporary realities. . . . It’s taken a long time for Boston to get to this point, and the challenge in Los Angeles is longer term. But that doesn’t mean you don’t undertake it and don’t try to achieve it.” Here in a nutshell are the great challenges in the country’s second-largest Jewish community: it serves a population scattered over vast distances; it has shallow roots and little history; it can boast no track record of significant Jewish fundraising; and it has not developed coherence and unity of purpose.

The Los Angeles community consists primarily of newcomers whose families arrived in the period after World War II. Its major Jewish educational institutions—the University of Judaism, the Los Angeles branch of the Hebrew Union College, the Simon Wiesenthal Center, and the Yeshiva University schools—were established in the postwar era, as were almost all of its day schools. Like many newer communities with a history of recent immigration, Los Angeles Jewry has low rates of affiliation and woefully low financial support. With four hundred thousand more Jews than Chicago (or a population two and a half times as large as Chicago’s), the Los Angeles federation raises only slightly over half of what the JUF of Chicago brings in annually. Despite the substantial wealth of the community, it has produced few steady funders and champions of Jewish education (unless one counts the enormous sums raised by two major museums—the Museum of Tolerance and the Skirball Museum—both of which mainly direct their programming at non-Jews).

It is therefore all the more remarkable that Los Angeles boasts a strong network of Jewish day schools, many of which are housed at and sponsored by synagogues rather than run in a neutral, communal setting. Altogether, the thirty-six day schools in the area educate 9,600 students, accounting for about one-third of Jewish children. Los Angeles has also been described by one observer as “the liberal day school capital of America.” One of the largest day schools in the United States is run by the Stephen Wise Temple, a leading Reform congregation; its Milken High School alone enrolls eight hundred students. And there are additional day schools at other Reform temples in the area. The same is true of leading Conservative synagogues, which run large day schools. And then there are a range of communal day schools with a “liberal” orientation. Few locals doubt that the impetus for day school growth came primarily from developments outside the community:
desegregation, the poor quality of public schools, and the flourishing of a private school culture in the Los Angeles area prompted an interest in Jewish day schools, as much as anything else. (Fifteen percent of Jewish children in Greater Los Angeles attend a non-Jewish private school.) The choice for many parents is to decide which private school to select for their children—and thereby Jewish day schools have become an option, in fact, often a less expensive option.

In recent years, day school enrollments have been declining outside of the Orthodox sector. As the price of tuition continues to rise and public schools have improved, fewer children are being enrolled in lower schools; the expectation is that as the current bulge of high school students moves through the system, the overall number of day school enrollments will drop significantly. In fact, the five-year trend since 2000 has seen an annual drop of some 200 to 250 students in K–8 classes, a trend only slightly mitigated by increases of 100 students a year at the high school level. The federation has done little to combat these trends. It does channel some $2.25 million to day schools annually, but this amounts to a per capita level of support of about $225 per day school child (less than half the allocation in Chicago). Given that annual budgets of the combined day schools stands at approximately $116 million, the federation contribution plays a negligible role. (This is also true, of course, in New York, the community with the largest number of children enrolled in day schools.)

The majority of Jewish children receiving a Jewish education in the Los Angeles area attend congregational religious schools. Some thirteen thousand children are enrolled in sixty religious supplementary schools and another seven thousand in sixty-one early childhood education centers under Jewish auspices. (It is estimated that a quarter of local Jewish children never are exposed to any formal Jewish education.) These children receive only indirect communal support in the form of special programs run by the local Bureau of Jewish Education. In addition, programs for educators also help strengthen the supplementary and informal education spheres of local education.

The key arm in Los Angeles for dispensing funds and supporting the field of Jewish education is the Bureau of Jewish Education, an institution that gets high grades from most observers for accomplishing much with relatively sparse resources. The ratio of professional staff at the BJE to the number of students enrolled in schools under its purview is quite low. Still, even with a small staff, the bureau has managed to develop and maintain an accreditation system with few parallels elsewhere. Using the power of the purse, it dispenses grants to congregational supplementary schools based on their number of students and the quantity of instructional hours the schools offer. It also has set a salary scale for teachers, a structure that educators appreciate. Using these levers, the BJE has coaxed schools to engage in self-evaluation and undergo a reaccreditation process every six years. Over the previous decade, seventy-five BJE-affiliated schools have engaged in such a self-study process.

The BJE also runs four principals’ councils for early childhood directors, synagogue religious school principals, Orthodox yeshiva heads, and non-Orthodox day
the bureau also runs consultations for teachers (including youth professionals) and administers special program grants—specifically, for Family Educators. Finally, the BJE works with foundations to raise funds for Jewish education. Its most glaring weaknesses lie in its limited staff so that when particular problems arise in supplementary or day schools, the bureau cannot provide consultation, and in its inability to develop curricular resources. On the other hand, the bureau is the only agency in a highly diffuse community to have a sense of the larger system, but by its own admission it has succeeded only to a limited extent to coordinate the diverse programs of the system. Even in its capacity as the distributor of some $3 million from the federation and foundations to Jewish educational institutions, it has not managed to develop the clout to play such a coordinating role.

Aside from the BJE, one of the key agencies to initiate new programs is the Jewish Community Fund. The $480 million in the endowment fund is money primarily restricted by donors, but a bit over $2 million a year may be allocated by the Community Fund to local organizations at the discretion of the fund’s directors. The largest allocations have been set aside for the Israel Experience Program, designed to enable Jewish teens and college-aged adults to visit Israel ($1.7 million), with smaller funds benefiting cultural programs.

Los Angeles has a range of other institutions that could contribute richly to its offerings in Jewish education, but remarkably few have made an impact. The Whizin Institute at the University of Judaism runs programs for Family Educators all over the country, but its expertise has not been tapped very much by local institutions. The same is true of the faculty at the Rhea Hirsch School of Education at the Hebrew Union College, which engages in pioneering work in quite a few communities but is not utilized for an important role in local Jewish education. The Jewish Community Centers of Los Angeles have fallen on hard times and are not regarded as players. Camping programs run by the JCCs are not having an impact; the Ramah Camp of the Conservative movement and the Brandeis-Bardin Institute have done better. And more generally, informal education programs are not high on the list of priorities, although a new initiative of the BJE is trying to leverage the concern of high school students to beef up their college applications with evidence of service work, as a means to draw more teens into informal Jewish education—this in a community where barely 20 percent of teens engage in Jewish study.

Jewish education in Los Angeles is considerably more developed than one would guess from the small sums the community invests in the field. The inhospitable public school environment has helped to promote day school enrollment (although there is no assurance that this will continue at the same intensity in the future). The BJE has worked well with the federation to maximize its meager funding, and the community has invested strategically in a few programs. None of this can offset the lack of serious funding for Jewish education in a community with pockets of great wealth. The head of the Jewish Community Fund put it well, if plaintively, when he asked rhetorically: “What kind of individual do you need to find [who] has the vision, the openness and the understanding . . . to put dollars
into a communal pot and understand that on every level, across the board, the community is enhanced by students being educated in a Jewish environment?" And one may add: what is needed for a community of such sophistication and size to begin to think systemically about Jewish education and take full advantage of its considerable assets so that its geographic sprawl does not have to lead necessarily to "philosophical sprawl?"

Philadelphia

In the closing months of the twentieth century, a hard-hitting report about the civic culture of Philadelphia was issued by the Pew Charitable Trusts, a local philanthropy." The report was sharply critical of the leadership in the city, decrying political and business elites as having a "second-class mentality," a "change phobia," and "a reflexive inferiority." "Here people don't set goals and get together on them," the report's author declared. "Here there seem to be no real believers and leaders and sources of initiative." A bank vice president was quoted as follows: "We just have never had a tradition here of business stepping forward and taking the lead on great civic matters." In conversation, it is evident that some local Jewish leaders share this critique: some speak of the flat and undistinguished skyline of the city as symbolic of the limited ambitions and self-effacing modesty of local Quaker culture. And they portray a Jewish community with few true leaders prepared to play an active civic role, let alone a leadership role in Jewish communal affairs.

It is not as if the Philadelphia Jewish community has no important history to draw on. On the contrary, as one of the first colonies with a Jewish community, Philadelphia numbers among the oldest Jewish communities in the country and has a synagogue that dates to the colonial era. Its historical role in Jewish educational initiatives is hardly to be dismissed. Rebecca Gratz established the Hebrew Sunday School Society of Philadelphia, which then was imitated by several other communities; the leadership of Philadelphia Jewry was instrumental in the founding of the Jewish Theological Seminary in New York; and one of its rabbis served as the first president of JTS. Gratz College was the country’s first Jewish teachers college. And to the present day, the community boasts of having a rabbinical seminary, the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College, and the presence of important Judaica professors at the University of Pennsylvania, Temple University, Gratz College, and other such places. The Jewish Renewal movement is housed in the community. Still, it is remarkable how limited is the impact of this community on the larger field of Jewish education and how starved the community is for funds and leadership.

The Philadelphia Jewish federation maintains itself on a shockingly low level of communal support. With a population of some 286,000 Jews to draw on, the federation raises only $13.7 million dollars annually, which is $3 million less than what the Atlanta Jewish community raises from one-third the number of Jews. A communal system so lacking in financial resources can hardly be expected to organize an effective educational effort. Its problems have now been compounded by
the rapid geographic dispersal of its population far from its important institutions and spread over an area that from end to end is eighty-six miles long. Not only is the federation badly underfinanced, but it also must address entirely new challenges to its delivery system created by mobility.

The strategy of the federation is to reverse its fortunes by developing a strong strategic plan that will galvanize supporters. Toward that end, its key planning staff and lay people have developed a detailed “Strategic Philanthropy Plan for Revitalization of the Greater Philadelphia Jewish Community.” The plan calls for ambitious future initiatives to expand the circle of Jews of all ages who engage in Jewish study, especially among teens and adults. Planners are encouraged by their success in raising new funds once they sharpened the focus of an Israel Emergency campaign that had originally aimed to raise $2 million but actually raised $13 million. They are convinced that a clearer focus and articulation of strategic goals will increase the resources of the federation. Until the plan is implemented, though, it is impossible to judge how well it will succeed. But it is indicative of a serious effort by the federation to rethink the entire enterprise of Jewish education—and other communal goals—in Philadelphia.

The prime force for current initiatives in Philadelphia is the Auerbach Central Agency for Jewish Education, which operates as a beneficiary of the federation but also raises considerable funds through grantsmanship and other efforts. One community insider describes the past relationship between the federation and the CAJE as “low-grade warfare.” It appears that this has eased somewhat as the central agency has successfully recruited influential board members and has established a track record of achievement. This happened, however, through a deliberate effort on the part of the central agency to raise serious money on its own and not rely solely on federation's allocation of slightly more than $750,000.

The major focus of the central agency's attention is the supplementary school. The CAJE offers a teacher resource center; engages in teacher training and curriculum development; works on teacher recruitment, certification, and evaluation; and convenes principals and other educational leaders to partake in group councils. It also administers some programs, such as the Passport to Israel Scholarship Savings Program, and scholarship assistance.

In light of its limited resources and small staff, the CAJE has focused its energies on working with roughly 1,000 local teachers (893 who teach in supplementary schools and 108 who work as Jewish studies teachers in local day schools). The Auerbach CAJE has invested itself in tracking enrollment trends in its schools, and part of its motivation has been to demonstrate that supplementary schools are underserved, given the large majority of Jewish children they enroll. The central agency, in short, has embraced the supplementary school as its primary constituent.

One of its important initiatives is called NESS, Nurturing Excellence in Synagogue Schools. Mainly directed at school directors, the project aims to help them develop a school environment that will be “engaging, meaningful, and enjoyable,”
and specifically one that encourages young people to continue their Jewish education beyond the bar/bat mitzvah years. The 1.5 million-dollar project is jointly funded by the federation, private donors and foundations, and a nonprofit organization that provides technical assistance to schools, school districts, and other educational and community organizations. CAJE eventually plans to share its findings with other Jewish communities. If things go as planned, the Auerbach CAJE with its tiny resources hopes to make not only a local impact but also to teach other communities. On another front, the CAJE is also working on teacher recruitment in a field that is finding it ever more difficult to recruit the necessary trained personnel. Again, these are ambitious efforts for a small, poorly funded enterprise, and they serve as a model of how much can be accomplished with ambitious and energetic educational leadership.

Another important resource in Philadelphia is its network of day schools. Between 1946 and 1980, seven schools were established in the community and two more have been added since then, as well as extra campuses for existing schools. (About 15 percent of Jewish children enrolled in local Jewish schooling attend a day school.) The largest of these is the Perelman School, a member of the Solomon Schechter network of Conservative day schools, which enrolls more than 650 children on its four campuses.

Akiba, a transdenominational school founded in 1946, is the community high school. Unfortunately, the natural complementarity of the Schechter school, which had been K–8, and Akiba, which was a high school, has exploded into feuding and rivalry once Akiba opened a middle school to compete directly with the Perelman School. The schools are now engaged in a tuition war to undercut each other, and the Perelman School is threatening to open its own high school. To the dismay of many—and the delight of the local press—all this infighting is taking place with little or no federation mediation. Meanwhile, both schools are experiencing a decline in enrollments.

Philadelphia has the usual complement of congregational preschools and lower schools but also still maintains a small communal system of supplementary education. Elementary schools in this communal network are suffering from an ongoing decline, with enrollments perhaps only one-quarter what they had been six years earlier. By contrast, the Jewish Community High School, sponsored by Gratz College, continues to attract more than 750 students. One of the unusual challenges faced by Jewish early childhood programs is competition from Quaker Friends schools. Such schools are so desired by many Jewish parents that they enroll their children even in preschool programs at the Friends schools in order to reserve a spot for them in the lower school. Thus an important, potential portal into the Jewish community is closed to an unusual number of young Jewish families.

Gratz College, as I have noted, is a school with a century of history; unfortunately, as it looks to the future, Gratz is also a school in search of a mission. At one time, Gratz effectively served as the bureau of Jewish education in Philadelphia, but was stripped of that role when the Auerbach CAJE was founded in the late 1980s. Its most successful program is its community high school, and in fact Gratz...
is consulting with other communities and helping them develop a similar model. Gratz also runs a small cantorial school, but most of its students are preparing for work in the field of Jewish education: some are graduate students who seek positions in day schools, family education, or educational administration; others are teachers who want credentials; and still others come from outside of Philadelphia for an M.A. in Jewish studies. Unlike some other Jewish teachers colleges, however, Gratz receives insufficient federation funding to keep its tuition low, and that has cut into its enrollments.

It is instructive to view the Philadelphia story within a comparative framework. It is, after all, a community with energetic leadership in its central agency, and it boasts a range of institutions of Jewish higher learning and a network of synagogue and supplementary schools. But it is also a community acutely self-conscious of its limitations. Gratz may have a long history, but its future viability is unclear. The Reconstructionist Rabbinical College seems to evince no interest in Jewish education at all. And the federation is severely constrained by its limited resources and its acute awareness that the Jewish community it serves is dispersing ever further from central institutions. Rabbis are neither involved in educational efforts beyond their own congregations, nor do they seem to be engaged by the federation in its work. Where once Har Zion Congregation, a Conservative synagogue, viewed itself as a guardian of Jewish education throughout the community—and acted accordingly by founding and funding various schools—it no longer plays such a role, and no other congregation has replaced it. Given the size of its Jewish population and proud history, the Philadelphia Jewish community should be a leader in the field of Jewish education; instead, it is struggling to make ends meet.

Saint Louis

The smallest of the communities under study, the Saint Louis Jewish population numbers only some 67,000 souls. Were this population cohesive and clear about its communal priorities, it could potentially serve as a model community. Saint Louis, after all, can boast of a set of institutions within close proximity of one another. It is relatively easy for a visitor to travel over a five-mile radius, spending time at the JCC campus (which also houses a home for seniors and key communal offices), and then move on to visit a range of synagogues and also the campuses of day schools. The relatively compact geographic layout of the community, however, belies its fragmentation. To begin with, the Jewish population has been dispersing and lives at an ever greater remove from the central institutional structures. According to one estimate, three-quarters of the Jewish population now lives to the west of the important institutional campuses. Moreover, the community is not well integrated and is fractured along denominational lines.

The Jewish population of Saint Louis is overwhelmingly Reform (some 70 percent). For much of the twentieth century, classical Reform held sway, and only recently have temples hired rabbis who are leading them to a different conception
of Reform. About half the children receiving a Jewish education in Reform temples attend just once-a-week Sunday school programs, a minimal exposure to Jewish content. The rest attend Hebrew school, which meets twice weekly. Early in the twenty-first century, a new day school opened under Reform auspices, and it is generating some excitement because of its innovativeness in a community where Reform Jews, particularly, “feel guilty” about not sending their children to public school. Supporters of Jewish education are hoping that a successful Reform day school will change the attitudes of key federation leaders, who tend to be unsympathetic to such schools and regard them as mainly of concern to the Orthodox.

The Conservative community is in demographic decline: its synagogues are losing members, and its congregational school enrollments are plummeting. In recent years, two of the three local synagogues entered into merger talks. (When news of the talks filtered out, the conversation came to a halt.) Even before these discussions, the synagogues already had combined their supplementary school programs. The Conservative population is eroding mainly among its younger populations, with those who remain in Saint Louis opting to join Reform temples and the more committed to Conservative Judaism moving away. In addition to its congregations, the Conservative community revolves around the local Solomon Schechter day school. Indeed, some adults claim they send their children to the Schechter school so that they can partake of the “surrogate community” created by the parent body. There is no day high school option in the city outside of Orthodox schools, but in truth, the middle school of Schechter suffers a significant drop-off of students whose parents rush to place them in the “right” public and private schools that will then lead to the “right” high schools. In other words, the drop-out process already begins after grade 5.

The community also has a small Orthodox community, consisting of both modern and Haredi types. Their lives revolve particularly around a modern Orthodox day school and two Haredi schools, as well as synagogues that are closely networked to these day schools. It does not appear that Orthodox Jews are especially connected to the larger Jewish community, although school principals and rabbis may make an appearance at federation or BJE-sponsored events. After all, they do get some limited funding from these institutions. But the Orthodox community seems largely in a defensive posture. It is small and unable to attract more members from other communities. In fact, quite a few Orthodox families send their high school children away from Saint Louis to acquire a Jewish education in communities as distant as Baltimore and Milwaukee.

Educational efforts in the community are also shaped by a set of deeply rooted historical perspectives. To begin with, the community long was lead by people who regarded decentralization as the ideal way to address educational matters. “The Reform old guard,” writes one historian, “felt that religious education was the decentralized province of each congregation, whether Reform, Conservative, or Orthodox. East European tradition put that responsibility in the community at large—a kehilla perhaps—through a centralized educational structure.”35 The older
Cultures of Jewish Education

perspective has been hard to overcome, and the community was late to establish a central agency for Jewish education. Even more seriously, Saint Louis Jewry suffers from its own “poor self-image.” Long accustomed to viewing themselves as a Jewish backwater and comparing themselves invidiously to Chicago Jewry, communal leaders have little confidence that they can attract strong educational leaders to town. Some key figures in the field of communal and educational leadership are convinced that at best Saint Louis lags five years behind the rest of the American Jewish community.

Morale is not improved by the flat campaign of the federation over the past decade. In fact, the annual campaign took in the same amount of dollars in 2003 as it did in 1995, which means that with the rise in the cost of living, considerably less money is available. Unlike many other communities, the Saint Louis federation cannot draw on funds from a separate Community Fund because foundation funds are kept in-house. Federation leaders talk of their philanthropic base as giving little priority to Jewish causes; under the circumstances, they view it as an achievement that 20 percent of local allocations go to the central agency for Jewish education. With an ever growing population of intermarried families who are accepted without question in the community, it is unsurprising that Jewish education is a low priority. The community strives to maintain a connection with the Jewish population, but is not particularly interested in educating them—or in raising uncomfortable questions. In the late 1990s, the federation developed a priority plan: social justice and support of the elderly were deemed the two highest goals, with Jewish education coming in a distant third. Matters are not helped by the fact that strong opponents of day schools serve on the executive committee of the federation.

Still, the federation does offer day school assistance through a need-based formula. In years past, the system of allocation was based on the average enrollment of schools, a system that favored the older Orthodox schools and certainly did not benefit new ones. Then the system was altered to a needs-based formula, with families receiving as much as $1,000 per year for up to two children, based on financial need. Some 70 percent of federation funding for day schools goes to this aid program, with the rest earmarked for bloc grants if schools apply for them.

To the extent that there is any institution or group of people in Saint Louis concerned about the Jewish educational system, the CAJE is the central address. In recent years, the CAJE has been able to attract board members who have some wider credibility in the community, and it has acted as the local convener in the area of Jewish education. The CAJE brings together day school teachers and school administrators; it provides for adult Jewish education (the Florence Melton Adult Mini-School program) and administers Israel trips, teen programs, and especially Jewish Family Education. A local historian has given the CAJE high marks for addressing “‘turf protection,’ personality clashes, and curricular and administrative disorganization.”

One of the more unusual efforts of the CAJE has been its role in creating two separate task forces, one on Conservative Jewish education, and one on Reform
Jewish education. In the case of the former, the CAJE was instrumental in bringing about a “collaborative and integrated Conservative Hebrew and Religious schools system.” It helped congregations coordinate and consolidate their offerings. The Reform commission focused instead on credentialing and raising the quality of teaching and recruiting new people for congregational schools. The CAJE developed a system to offer professional excellence grants to schools.

The larger CAJE agenda, then, is to improve the quality of supplementary school education in the community. It works intensively with school principals and trains family educators. It also offers a supplementary high school program in conjunction with the Conservative synagogues. There is much to admire in the tenacious efforts of the CAJE to strengthen local Jewish education. But there is no gainsaying that it is up against tough odds. According to its own planning report, only one-tenth of Jewish teens in grades 8–12 are involved in either Jewish youth groups or in formal Jewish education. It works with a federation leadership that has other priorities. And the general spirit of educational decentralization still pervades the community.

To the outside visitor, those concerned with Jewish education in Saint Louis appear to be engaged in an uphill battle. The JCC is almost without an impact in this arena, especially because more than one-third of its members are not Jewish. High rates of intermarriage militate against developing strong educational programs. The federation does not regard Jewish education as a high priority. And the denominations and their schools go their own way, even as all appear to be weakening. It may be worth studying whether this state of affairs characterizes many other smaller- to intermediate-size communities or is the outcome of idiosyncratic local circumstances. But the challenges facing those engaged with Jewish education in Saint Louis are certainly colored by the realities of demographic decline, severe shortages in financial resources, and institutional fragmentation.

San Francisco

The Jewish population of the San Francisco Bay area has grown dramatically over the past two decades, largely through the migration to Silicon Valley and its environs of newcomers from all across the country and also from Israel. According to the latest demographic survey, the Greater Bay Area Jewish population now numbers in the neighborhood of five hundred thousand—about a hundred thousand fewer than in Los Angeles. These newcomers have catapulted the Bay Area into the ranks of the largest half-dozen concentrations of Jews in the country. Moreover, despite the wide geographic dispersal of these Jews, some of the inner suburbs closer to San Francisco now have fairly dense concentrations of Jews, thereby making institutional life more feasible.

This new demographic reality was but one aspect of a significant makeover of the Bay Area Jewish community. On most measures the community had lagged far behind others of a comparable size and indeed was a Jewish backwater. It had a lay
leadership with generally low levels of Judaic knowledge, who seemed more concerned about social acceptance than serious Jewish living; it was widely dispersed with no area of particular population concentration; it lacked a college of Jewish studies or other program to train educators; and its educational programming was tepid. Perhaps what distinguished the community most was its sense of itself as “Jewishly unique.” Not surprisingly, it attracted unconventional rabbinic leadership: its Conservative rabbis tended to be among the most liberal in the country (one made a name for himself as a student of Buddhism), and two of the three largest Reform temples hired women as their senior rabbis, enabling them to break the “glass ceiling” that still obstructs female rabbis in other parts of the country. But Jewish education was not an area of communal attention—until recently.

The character of this Jewish community closely approximates the style of the larger Bay Area. Jews in this part of Northern California tend to be liberal, diverse, and experimental in temperament, with family configurations that do not conform to any single model: the population encompasses large numbers of young singles who have sought their fortune in the rush to Silicon Valley, a relatively high percentage of intermarried Jews, same-gender families, couples where spouses are of disparate ages, interracial families, and the like. Only 22 percent of Bay Area Jews claim to be affiliated with a synagogue, an unusually low level. Jewish educators are acutely conscious of the particular challenges that arise from these circumstances. Family educators especially report tensions rising to the surface that are traceable to the heterogeneous nature of the parent population.

The community, moreover, consists of a goodly number of free spirits who lack a sense of rootedness in the area and do not feel obligated to conduct business as usual as understood by the established community. The new arrivals, after all, were drawn to the region by its innovative and entrepreneurial spirit, and the high-risk and high-stakes world that characterizes the new technological frontier of Silicon Valley. Not surprisingly, they bring the same disposition to the work of Jewish education. They talk about “strategic investments” in philanthropy and envision their giving as a form of “venture philanthropy.” These predilections translate into a new style of giving, one that is impatient with the federation bureaucracy and is unwilling to live with long-standing constraints.

As a consequence there is a sharp divergence between the federation leadership and the new class of philanthropists. The former have displayed little consistent interest in Jewish education and in the view of many insiders seem to have no clear sense of priorities at all. It appears that the federation has not engaged in a priority-setting process in more than a decade. Living for quite a few years with flat campaigns and under enormous pressure from social service agencies not to alter allocations, federation leaders have virtually no new resources to commit to the field. The only source of new revenue is the $750 million endowment fund, but it consists mainly of restricted monies and the assets of supporting foundations whose interests lie outside the Jewish community. Still, the chief executive of the endowment fund can and does advise donors and has brought some new unrestricted funding
into the education arena, including capital grants to most day schools in the area. Not surprisingly, this officer is widely regarded as the most powerful force in the community by virtue of her access to new money.

Given this vacuum, donors, in the words of one informant, “are driving decisions in Jewish education like never before.” Several contributors have become staunch champions of Jewish education—and ignore or work around the federation to make things happen. They have forged ahead to create new institutions and programs, despite the lack of interest of the federation.

The founding of new day schools is the most overt expression of this new philanthropic spirit. Over the past six to eight years, two new communal day high schools and a several new lower schools have been established, many with sparkling new facilities. In contrast to the day schools of Los Angeles, Bay Area day schools are predominantly non-denominational. Because the Orthodox population in the region is small, day schools are also not heavily influenced by Orthodox Jews. The day schools, however, are not strongly religious in their mission; rather, they focus on Jewish culture and Hebrew language (perhaps the sizable Israeli parent body plays a role in this regard). Many of these schools also offer some restricted Jewish studies fare, an unusually sparse number of hours devoted to Judaic study. The schools are also particularly preoccupied with the social challenges raised by the high number of interfaith families in the parent body.

When asked to explain how interest in day school education developed in the community, participants cite the influence of outsiders rather than developments internal to the Bay Area Jewish community. One frequently cited inspiration was the Wexner Heritage Program that created a network of people, usually parents of young children, who were galvanized by the program to build more intensive institutions of Jewish education. Despite the high quality of public schools in Silicon Valley, parents informed themselves about the strengths of Jewish day schools. The second external support credited by school founders was the Partnership for Excellence in Jewish Education (PEJE), which aided inexperienced lay people to launch new school efforts. This is not to say that internal resources were entirely lacking: the presence in the area of Israeli families had a profound impact on the thinking of school founders. (In fact, some networks of families soon began to vacation together in Israel during the summers.) Key Jewish studies professors at Stanford University offered know-how and Jewish perspectives. And then there was an unexpected development: to the surprise of many, the adult children of federation leaders who themselves were not particularly interested in Jewish education and more concerned with social acceptance, began to evince a strong desire to engage more actively in Jewish life. Day schools became their vehicle for such engagement. And as one observer put it, federation leaders who had been anti–day school because they had feared charges of dual loyalty and parochialism are now watching in amazement as their grandchildren, nephews, and nieces enroll in day schools.

Family foundations, some representing old-guard families and others established with new money generated during the boom years of the 1990s, have helped fund
several additional new initiatives. These include an ambitious program costing $1.5 million to train teen workers; a scholarship fund that assists more than two hundred children each year to attend an overnight camp under Jewish auspices; a voucher program enabling families to afford tuition at the Kehilla Jewish High School;⁴ and a newly established consortium for day schools designed to provide marketing and recruitment advice. In each instance, a family foundation was enlisted to help support the new program. Like a good many programs with such funding, these initiatives were subject to the whims of the supporting foundations, which are notorious for their “short attention spans”—that is, their interest in the quick fix. The re-funding of initiatives depended less on their actual success than on the subjective decision of the foundation about whether it was interested in something new and ready to move on. In short, the advantage of venture philanthropy is that it is bold and acts decisively; the disadvantage is that foundations tend to be unreliable long-term partners because they like to move on to new ventures and have no compunction about abandoning successful programs. The further challenge posed by a system heavily supported by foundations is that however much a central planning agency such as the federation identifies a need, there is no assurance that foundations will decide to address that need. In San Francisco, for example, the community foundation was determined to create a community-wide day school fund based on the Chicago model, but the lead family foundation they approached preferred a teen program.

The Bureau of Jewish Education serves as an important partner of the federation and family foundations. Indeed, whereas most federation funding for Jewish education has declined over the past five or six years, allocations and grants to the BJE have risen significantly in the same period. Its flagship operation is a family education center that produces material employed in other communities around the country. It also has served as a collaborator on Israel educational initiatives, including a program to bring educators to Israel. And it has been a partner in developing teen programs. But primarily, the BJE has served as a coordinating agency and an institution that builds educators rather than works with individual schools.

Perhaps, the most striking feature of Jewish education in the Bay Area is the extent to which innovation has been spurred from the bottom up. It is not that the federation and the bureau are unimportant participants; rather, the energy and money flow from networks of people outside the official organizations. After the success of the first Wexner Heritage Program, local individuals took the initiative to found a second group. Much of the energy for establishing new day schools derived from these groups; and, in turn, the parents drawn to the day schools have created their own community—often independent of synagogues—to engage in other forms of Jewish service.⁴ Funding too is driven by individuals outside the system with a division of labor whereby donors serve as the spark, and staff members at the Endowment Fund or the BJE staff the new initiatives. The community still lacks a coherent plan for Jewish education. “No one is thinking about the big picture of Jewish education in the Bay Area,” flatly declares a leading foundation person.
who has funded some initiatives. But considering its undistinguished history in the arena of Jewish education, the Bay Area can point to important successes initiated by a new generation of activists and champions of Jewish education who have powered and financed change, despite the virtual indifference of the official communal leadership.

One Size Does Not Fit All

This Cook’s tour of seven communities highlights the extent to which Jewish educational arrangements vary greatly by community. To begin with, historical and cultural circumstances have conditioned a particular set of predispositions. The culture of the Midwest exerts a powerful grip on Chicago Jewry that seems to impede educational innovation. The self-effacing Quaker culture of Philadelphia retards the emergence of flamboyant and exciting new leadership. And the inferiority complex of Saint Louis Jewry does not encourage more forward-looking approaches. By contrast, the spirit of innovation and entrepreneurial derring-do of Atlanta and San Francisco have produced innovation and a sense of forward movement. But to focus exclusively on the heavy hand of history is to simplify matters too much. It is not as if Atlanta and San Francisco have Jewish communities with no history. And Los Angeles, which is in some ways the youngest of the communities under study because so much of its infrastructure and Jewish population date to the post–World War II era, is hardly the most progressive community, despite its relative youth.

Perhaps, then, the crucial variable is the recency of a large population influx. In communities such as Atlanta and San Francisco, which have attracted proportionately large groups of newcomers since the 1990s, it may be that the size of the migrant groups relative to the older population has been sufficient to remake or at least challenge the local Jewish culture: between the boomtown atmosphere pervading those communities and the energy of key communal leaders, innovation has trumped the tried-and-true. It is harder to remake long-entrenched systems, as we have seen in communities such as Philadelphia and Chicago, where historical ways of conducting business constrain change and the newcomers are integrated into the existing system. And yet, the experience of Boston also illustrates that a community with older cultural traditions can gradually remake itself—provided that it builds and sustains a well-developed process of change, has strong federation leadership favoring change, is open to new ideas, and can enlist a cadre of talented educators who are prepared to innovate. The weight of history and local culture, then, makes itself felt but is not necessarily immovable if other forces coalesce. Those forces can be galvanized by an influx of new populations who are not wedded to the old ways of conducting business; they can take the form of new ideas and new money; they can derive from a leadership intent on breaking with entrenched ways.

Size counts too. In the larger communities of Los Angeles and Chicago, the sheer number of institutions and the wide geographic dispersal militate against
change. Undoubtedly, in both communities local culture plays a role as well. In Los Angeles, high rates of nonaffiliation and relatively low rates of philanthropic giving deter action, even in a community that prides itself on its cutting-edge nonconformism. In Chicago, the stolid midwestern traditionalism seems to weigh heavily on the community, stifling efforts to innovate. But beyond these considerations, one senses that when the population is so large and so widely dispersed, leaders are frustrated by an inability to get their hands around the far-flung institutions.

One additional aspect of local culture with a bearing on these matters is the “culture of giving” that has developed in each community. I have noted, for example, the extent to which new forms of “entrepreneurial philanthropy,” volunteering, and civic engagement in the area around Silicon Valley contrast sharply with the “loosely connected” civic culture of Philadelphia, which partially accounts for the relative low levels of giving by Jews in the city of Brotherly Love. The efficiency of fund-raising in Chicago (and other midwestern cities) stands in marked contrast to the relatively low levels of giving in Los Angeles, a comparison made all the more dramatic by the relative size of each community. Despite its vast numerical advantage and the deep pockets within the Jewish community of Los Angeles, philanthropic support for the local federation in that community is dwarfed by the fund-raising prowess of Chicago. It is hard to escape the conclusion that the overall patterns of giving in each metropolitan area are mirrored by their Jewish communities.

But there is a second implication to the comparison of Los Angeles with Chicago, and that concerns broader cultural outlooks. The stolid midwestern adherence to tradition has also enabled the Chicago community to develop in a stable fashion; in Los Angeles, the relative newness of the population and the low levels of affiliation also affect attitudes toward investment in the local community. As Robert Putnam has observed, just as a repotted plant needs time to root itself in new soil, so too transient populations require time to establish roots in their communities, and hence are less likely to invest through giving and volunteering.⁴⁴ But there is a limit to how far this analysis can explain patterns of involvement. It is noteworthy, for example, that the newer arrivals in the Bay Area are far more energetic and engaged in educational investment than are the old families. Saint Louis is also a midwestern community with multigenerational families, but it achieves only low sums of funding. Clearly other variables are at work. Young families in the Bay Area have demonstrated a strong interest in developing fine day schools for their own children; they are remaking local Jewish education not through a concerted plan along the lines of Boston but rather by building the system from the bottom up, school by school, program by program, for the benefit of their own children. The Saint Louis community also shows some strength in the range of its day schools. But neither community can be described as having a strong Jewish educational system.

The types of commitment to Jewish life deeply affect the way a community addresses Jewish education. The predominantly Reform community of Saint Louis, with its roots in classical Reform, seems for the most part unmoved by the needs of the Jewish education. By contrast, in other communities, such as San Francisco and
Boston, Reform Jews are more likely to be active in support of Jewish education. It appears that certain interventions have swung people in a more positive direction. In the Bay Area, the role of the Wexner Heritage Program was widely cited as making a big difference; in Boston, the Meah program also has influenced some key champions of Jewish education. The effectiveness of Orthodox Jews and engaged Conservative Jews also makes a difference. Chicago Orthodoxy, for all its insularity, nonetheless shapes the crucial institutions of Jewish education and runs its own central agency. Similarly, Conservative Jews in Chicago, for all their weaknesses and lack of coordination in other areas, have succeeded in creating some strong day schools and an influential Ramah camp. The role of the Atlanta Kollel also illustrates the extent to which an assertive and outgoing Orthodoxy can shape the larger communal discourse. Denominational patterns, in short, vary by community and are shaping influences.

And then there are the serendipitous factors, usually related to the influence of a few critical people who happen to take a strong interest in Jewish education. Much of the educational commitment of the Marcus JCC in Atlanta is attributed to the forceful dedication of its chief executive and the staff he has assembled. In other communities, JCCs are regarded as marginal because they exert no influence and make no serious effort to move the population to greater engagement with Jewish education. Yet here too the story is complicated by local values and traditions. In several communities, key federation leaders who wanted to invest more resources in Jewish education were thwarted by advocates of the social service agencies; they could not move the system, despite their best intentions. It is therefore not only a matter of having the right person in place who makes Jewish education a priority, but that individual also must work within a communal support system receptive to educational investment.

Beyond historical and cultural patterns and also communal priorities, this survey of seven communities also highlights the vast differences in the types of educational programs that are supported and encouraged. In most communities, day schools receive the lion's share of funds for Jewish education, whereas congregational schools benefit from virtually no communal assistance. A number of the central agencies I have encountered deliberately understand their mission as one of aiding congregational schools, because the latter are treated as stepchildren by the federation. This certainly is the explicit agenda of central agencies in Philadelphia, San Francisco, and Boston. Some of these bureaus will admit that they are not set up to aid day schools because the community never gave them the resources to reach into day schools in a serious fashion. Others will justify their investment in congregational schools by noting that for too long such schools were left to their own devices, even though they continue to educate the majority of Jewish children.

There are also differences in the way communities address informal Jewish education. Some invest heavily in preschool programs, while others promote adult education; and some focus on both areas, regarding preschool children and their families as the best investment for educational outreach. When it comes to pro-
grams for the post-bar and bat mitzvah set, some communities invest most heavily in Israel trips for teens, whereas others have worked to bolster youth programming or summer camp opportunities. Few communities consistently invest in all three options. Indeed, the way in which communities channel resources to the range of informal educational programs and the type of program each favors most are among the distinctive features of the various cultures of Jewish education I have studied.⁴⁵

To conclude this comparison of the differences among these communal cultures, a word is in order about what remains to be studied. We need to know more about the cluster of circumstances that make for higher rates of day school participation in a few communities as compared with others. Relatively high rates of day school attendance in Los Angeles, for example, are often explained as a consequence of the poor public school systems; and in most localities, desegregation of schools and busing of children are identified as the historical catalysts prompting parents to send their children to day schools. It would be worthwhile to learn how internal Jewish factors—adult education programs, charismatic leaders, networks of parents—drew more people to day school enrollment. In San Francisco, those internal factors are cited as far more important, because public schools in many neighborhoods of the Bay Area are of high quality, and parents nonetheless have opted for day schools. Similarly, more work needs to be done to explain why in some communities supplementary high school participation has increased dramatically. Certainly, some programs have refashioned their curricula and have worked with congregations, as is the case with the Prozdor program in Boston. But we need to learn more about how the post-bar/bar mitzvah dropout syndrome has been reversed in some communities. Finally, the relative success of some communities in enrolling a higher percentage of children in Jewish education in comparison with other places warrants attention. Why are the percentages of children between the ages of three and seventeen who receive a Jewish education different from one community to the next?

What These Communities Have in Common

Despite the varied approaches of communities to Jewish education and the idiosyncratic structures they have created to address the needs of the field, a visitor to these seven localities cannot but be struck by the common challenges they face. In community after community, certain challenges recur.

The ever widening dispersal of Jewish populations stresses the system. In every community under study, one of the first issues raised by federation leaders and educators is the new challenge arising from the wide geographic dispersal of Jews. In most communities, federation leaders literally talk in terms of square miles within their catchment areas or the furthest distance between Jews
residing in their communities. All federations are grappling with the challenge of how to deliver services as Jews live at an ever greater remove from the key institutions, especially from schools. Some talk of establishing satellite schools; others think in terms of constructing new buildings—JCCs, schools, synagogues—in those areas. The well-documented phenomenon of Jewish geographic mobility is placing great stress on central institutions and those responsible for planning and coordinating the delivery of services.

THE RELATIVELY FLAT ANNUAL CAMPAIGNS OF FEDERATIONS OVER THE PAST FIFTEEN YEARS ARE TAKING THEIR TOLL  With quite a few federations unable raise even enough money to keep up with the rising cost of living, planners are forced to make tough decisions about funding cuts. In Atlanta, Philadelphia, San Francisco, and Saint Louis, Jewish educational programs experienced a drop in federation support from 2002 to 2003; in several communities in this sample, central agencies have been receiving lower allocations compared with just a few years before. Some of these declines are attributable to fluctuation in grants and other forms of special funding, but the challenge of keeping up allocations when revenues are declining is having an impact on funding for Jewish education. Day school scholarship money has also declined in a number of communities. Most federation officials note matter-of-factly that their annual revenues are fully earmarked even before campaign money has been raised; the only opportunity for new funding comes from foundation grants or from interest thrown off by unrestricted funds in the communal endowment fund. Not surprisingly, given these circumstances, the Bay Area witnessed the emergence of new day schools almost entirely through the largess of private donors, and with little help from the federation. When new philanthropy is forthcoming in communities, it is generally directed to capital projects, not new educational programs. The weakening of centralized campaigns severely constrains new educational programming, and although in some communities, champions of Jewish education are stepping forward, they are relatively few in number.

THERE IS A DEARTH OF CHAMPIONS WHO FIGHT FOR THE NEEDS OF THE FIELD  Most, though not all, of the communities under study can boast a few philanthropists who have invested in Jewish education. In Boston, there are the donors to the $45 million fund for “peerless excellence” and the Gann family, the supporters of the New Jewish High School; in San Francisco, the Lent, Lauder, and Bernstein families have made a major difference to individual day schools; in Los Angeles, the Milkens helped fund a huge day high school and the Lainer family has invested in creating new schools; in Philadelphia, the Perelman and Kimmel families have made their mark on two day schools; and so too the Crown family in Chicago. As this listing demonstrates, the most popular causes for those who are significant donors to Jewish education—and the largest gifts to Jewish education—have gone to day schools. In each of these communities, lesser sums fund
innovative programs, for example, those to train teen educators in the Bay Area, to provide scholarships for summer camping, or to enable teens to go on a trip to Israel. It appears that the lowest priority of contributors is support for educators in the form of in-service training for teachers, Israel trips for educators, and the development of new curricula. And insofar as such funds are even made available, they are in the form of grants that, more often than not, are nonrenewable—not because the program has failed but because the attention span of the donor has drifted to something more “innovative” and “cutting edge.”

**FEDERATION LEADERS GENERALLY DO NOT PLACE HIGH PRIORITY ON JEWISH EDUCATION** Typically, lay leaders who rise in the federation world identify most strongly either with support for local social service agencies or with projects related to Israel. As a result, education generally comes in a distant third in the rankings of priorities of federations. A recent strategic planning study conducted by the MetroWest (West Orange) New Jersey federation (not one of the seven communities under study here) illustrates the problem.⁴⁶ When the federation’s trustees were polled on their own strategic priorities for the federation, the top three items they chose were supporting Israel and the diaspora, enhancing identity and continuity, and reprioritizing Jewish education. By comparison, they concluded that the community itself ranked supporting Israel and the diaspora the highest, and then caring for an aging population, followed by financing Jewish human services as the top three items. The gap between what leaders individually believed was of highest priority and what the community actually supported was greatest in the area of caring for the aged and investing in Jewish education. (The former was given significantly greater priority than the latter.) Entrenched allocations priorities seem to trump the perceptions of leaders as to what is really of greater importance.

More generally, social service advocates continue to outmaneuver champions of Jewish education. In a few of the communities under study, professionals at central agencies self-consciously are working to cultivate up-and-coming leaders in the hope that they will move from serving on the board of the central agency to key federation positions, and in the process will transform discussions so as to reflect the actual needs of young people. That shift is coming slowly, but in the meanwhile, Jewish education has not risen as a priority.

**CENTRAL AGENCIES ARE NOT EQUIPPED WITH THE RESOURCES AND AUTHORITY TO PLAY A LARGER ROLE** In the course of the interviews, leading staff members of the central agencies proved themselves the most knowledgeable and best connected when it comes to matters of local Jewish education. Unfortunately, these officials are generally in no position to act on their knowledge. Bureaus have come in for hard times over the past fifteen years. Quite a few have been disbanded and then reorganized; most are under enormous pressure to do more with less. Bureaus are in the impossible situation of dependence on federations for funding, but are given inadequate resources to do their work. They cannot have
a serious impact on day schools, which has driven bureaus to devote most their energy to working with supplementary schools. Because this field too is highly diffuse, the central agencies limit their work in general to in-service training for educators, especially school directors. But this type of work is poorly understood by noneducators and underappreciated.

The strength of central agencies is precisely that they are perched at the center and therefore have a wider grasp of the educational configuration in the community. Central agencies might be the logical coordinators of local education. But since they are largely if not entirely dependent on federations for their funding, they have little authority—except if the federation cedes such authority. But why would a federation do so? And so, the central agency is unable to play a decisive role. Its staff members have the expertise, but not the authority, resources, or control to bring the community together to address educational needs.

Communities Have Not Clearly Identified the Key Players in Jewish Education or Their Roles  In each of the seven communities, a mix of educators, communal professionals, and volunteer leaders were asked to identify the pivotal local actors in the field of Jewish education. Whereas most people interviewed spoke mainly about the part of the Jewish education elephant that they themselves touched, bureau people had a greater sense of the whole. In some communities, federation planners were knowledgeable and appeared to care about the state of the field. And then, of course, there were the academics who worked in some communities on Jewish education, as well as some heads of specific programs. Only in a few communities, such as Boston and Philadelphia, did it appear that a few lay leaders were well informed about the whole.

More surprising were the individuals and institutions omitted when I asked about the prime players. Most glaring was the paucity of references to rabbis. True, rabbis work within their own congregations to better Jewish education. But rarely were congregational rabbis perceived as champions of Jewish education or as forceful advocates for it within the broader community. One would have expected rabbis to serve as proponents of Jewish education and as knowledgeable advocates. They seem not to play a strong role in communal conversation about priorities. Why this is the case is a subject deserving of further inquiry: is it that rabbis are not versed in how to negotiate their way through the communal maze? Is it that they are too preoccupied with running their own institutions? Or is it that federations and communal agencies have not been receptive to rabbinic participation in the planning process?

Also striking was the lack of importance attributed to denominational organizations. One congregational rabbi of a Reform temple claimed that until recently fewer than 10 percent of Reform congregations bothered to use curricular materials produced by the Education Department of the Union for Reform Judaism, a situation that only in the past few years had improved. In Conservative synagogues there was little talk about the support and materials offered by the Education De-
partment of the United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism. Insofar as national organizations were mentioned at all, PEJE was cited as a great help for some fledgling schools, as were loans provided by the Avi Chai Foundation.⁴⁷ The curricula and classes offered by national programs in the field of adult education received high grades. Particularly influential was the Wexner Heritage Program, often described as transformative. The Melton Adult Mini-Schools came in for accolades, as did the Meah program in Boston. (Surprisingly, the consulting work of the Jewish Education Services of North America did not come up in interviews, nor did the Conference on Alternatives in Jewish Education, perhaps because the latter mainly works with teachers, who were not interview subjects, and the former because JESNA consults with small groups within communities.)

All of this points up the extent to which communities rely on their own local talent, curricular planners, bureau staff members, and educators to make Jewish education happen. Jewish education remains largely a local phenomenon. The sobering question is whether it is particularly good for Jewish education that each community, and more often than not, each school, reinvents the wheel anew. Presumably, all these institutions and communities are engaged in the same process to provide a Jewish education, but the weakness of most of the national agencies and the absence of new ones poised to make a national impact suggests that there is no common national Jewish culture or vision furthering Jewish education.

Building a Network of Jewish Education in Local Communities

The great historian of American education, Lawrence Cremin, urged his colleagues to think beyond the role of individual institutions to consider “educational configurations.” By this he meant that “each of the institutions within a given configuration interacts with the others and with the larger society that sustains it and that in turn affected it.” No school is an island in this view, and no educational program operates in a vacuum.⁴⁸ Rather, education transpires in the interplay between various educative institutions.

Extrapolating from this perception to the case of Jewish education, it behooves us to consider the range of local schools and programs as a potential network that might link together and, if properly connected, amount to more than the sum of its parts. Imagine that early childhood programs were strongly connected with synagogues, congregational schools, and day schools, and that the educators of preschool children worked with parents to lead them to what might be the next step in their children’s Jewish education. Imagine that schools, synagogues, summer camps, youth movements, and Israel trips were coordinated so that the child would be seen as moving naturally between each of these institutions and that each was therefore responsible to link its program to the programs of the others—and not duplicate them. Would not such a system of configurations be far more effective
and reinforcing of Jewish education? Moreover, if the unit of analysis is the family and how well it moves through the educational system, rather than the strengths or weaknesses of individual schools and programs, the educational configuration looms larger. Would not coordination of schools and programs help the parents/consumers make their way through the system far more efficiently than is currently the case? And would not the schools and programs themselves also benefit from linkages to one another, so that educators could hand off learners, exchange curricular information, pool resources, and plan for greater efficiency in delivering services?

None of the communities under discussion has anything remotely resembling such a coordinated system. Quite the contrary, diffusion of resources, energy, and personnel characterizes much of local Jewish education. The question is why: Why have communities failed to develop a system that is configured to maximize the Jewish education it delivers rather than diffuse it through a large number of disconnected institutions?

There are several serious impediments, of course, to developing such a system. Who, after all, is the proper convener of Jewish education in a community? If it is the federation, there are quite a few programs that are only minimally connected to the federation—particularly those based in congregations, which for the most part are loosely connected to the federation. It might be hard for the federation to bring all these groups to the same table. If it is the central agency, there are turf rivalries. Why should the central agency, which raises relatively small sums of money, assume the role of educational czar? Why should it get the credit, if the federation is doing the heavy lifting of raising the serious money? And why should various schools and programs that were founded and are funded independently take their orders from a central agency that played no role in their creation and maintenance? Alternatively, perhaps a federation continuity commission should play the coordinating role, as is the case in Boston. But such commissions generally consist of lay people plus a few key staff people. Why give so much power to the staff people? Ultimately, then, the critical question is how to create legitimacy and confer authority on one of these institutions so that it can serve as the convener.

A second major impediment to achieving coordination is the vacuum in leadership. Somebody within the community would have to work hard to address the multiple turf rivalries, mobilize financial resources, and persuade people to come together for the greater good of families and children. There is a serious challenge here in the area of community-building, and few localities are up to that challenge. When the Mandel Foundation launched its project called the Council for Initiatives in Jewish Education (CIJE) in the early 1990s, it initially spoke of creating “wall-to-wall” coalitions within its so-called lead communities. It worked to bring the various players aboard in an agreed-upon plan to cooperate. The hope of forging such cooperation was quickly dropped, as the CIJE project focused on other goals, perhaps more attainable ones.

Most important, some would argue that coordination is neither feasible nor desirable in the American environment. Given the entrepreneurial, individualistic nature of American society, coordination would prove the exception, and compe-
tition and duplication would be the expected norm. Given the larger American educational context in which there is no centralization, no standardization, and little capacity to build cumulative learning, why imagine that Jewish education could be any different? Given the free marketplace of religion in American society, how could Jewish religious institutions operate in a cooperative, rather than competitive mode? And given the successful emergence of schools and programs of Jewish education without centralized help, what would be the advantage of a more coordinated approach? Perhaps, the current anarchic system described at the opening of this paper is not only the best we can hope for but has actually served the Jewish community well.

Although these objections merit serious consideration and should discourage a serious effort at educational centralization on the national level, they do not overshadow the serious drawbacks to the current anarchy in the field of Jewish education. Jewish educational programs and schools have limited resources. Why should they not cooperate to maximize those resources, to share curricula and ideas, to purchase supplies and educational materials in bulk, and to work together on priorities that are otherwise scant? And as to learners and their families, much can be gained if they are not lost in the shuffle from one institution to the next. Greater coordination and planning can enhance the educational experience. After all, if the Jewish community did not believe this, why would it maintain a federated system? And if federations believe in the virtues of their approach, why would they not work to improve coordination in the area of Jewish education?

Despite the serious impediments and potential for turf battles, American Jewish communities need to revisit the CIJE ideal of building “wall-to-wall coalitions”—or at least strive to align the various schools and program of education. Under current circumstances, students are often lost in the transition from one stage of Jewish education to the next. Families often do not have the necessary information to determine how and where their children should enroll to enhance their educational experience. And the linkages between programs are so loose that there is much unnecessary duplication and incoherence from one to the next. That each Jewish community has its own distinctive “culture of Jewish education” is apparent. But by working within those distinctive cultures, much good can be done if educational leaders are nurtured to think systemically and encouraged to work toward connecting schools, programs, families, and the community. All the players stand to benefit, and the anarchy of Jewish education can be reduced. Most important, learners would have the opportunity to receive an integrated Jewish education, drawing on the formal and informal programs available. The whole of local Jewish education in each community can be far more than the sum of its parts.

acknowledgments

Based on the following diverse sources, I have pieced together my own account of the varied “cultures of Jewish education” in these seven communities. I alone am responsible for the community portraits, and I take responsibility for errors or distortions that may appear in
this account of a highly complex, usually diffuse, and rapidly changing set of educational arrangements. The research for this study was completed in the spring of 2005.

I deeply appreciate the information and perspectives provided by more than eighty knowledgeable informants who took the time to speak with me. I am delighted to acknowledge their graciously offered and unstinting help.

On national and comparative matters, I benefited from conversations with Dr. Steven Brown, Jewish Theological Seminary; Prof. Adam Gamoran, University of Wisconsin; Prof. Ellen Goldring, Vanderbilt School of Education; Prof. Barry Holtz, Jewish Theological Seminary; Dr. Leora Isaacs, Jewish Education Service of North America; Dr. Steven Kraus, Jewish Education Service of North America; Dr. Alisa Rubin Kurshan, UJA–Federation of New York; Prof. Sara Lee, Rhea Hirsch School of Jewish Education, Hebrew Union College; Prof. Joseph Reimer, Brandeis University; Prof. Susan Shevitz, Brandeis University; Dr. Jack Ukeles, Ukeles Associates, New York; Prof. Harold Wechsler, New York University.

In Atlanta: Rabbi Steven Balaban, Davis Day School; Prof. Michael Berger, Emory University and former acting director of a day school; Deborah Goldstein Cirulnick, JCC of Atlanta; Rabbi Stanley Davids; Cheryl Finkel, former director of Epstein Day School; Dr. Paul Flexner, Jewish Educational Services of Atlanta; George Fox, lay leader; Shira Ledman, Jewish Federation of Atlanta; Noah Levine, Jewish Federation of Atlanta; Miriam Rosenbaum, Epstein Day School.

In Boston: Cheryl Aronson, Combined Jewish Philanthropies; Marjory Tarmy Berkowitz, Prozdor Program, Hebrew College; Rabbi Mark Gottlieb, Maimonides School; Marion Gribetz, Bureau of Jewish Education; Carolyn Keller, MetroWest Jewish Day School; Adina Kling, Combined Jewish Philanthropies; George Krupp, lay leader; Rabbi Daniel Lehman, Gann Academy; Dr. Daniel Margolis, Bureau of Jewish Education; Rabbi J. J. Schachter, Soloveitchik Institute; Prof. David Starr, Meah Program, Hebrew College.

In Chicago: Rabbi Michael Balinsky, Florence Melton Adult Mini-Schools; Marci Dickman, Solomon Schechter School; Dr. Peter Friedman, Jewish United Fund/Jewish Federation of Metropolitan Chicago; Tzivia Garfinkle, Bernard Zell–Anshei Emet Day School; Rabbi Nina J. Mizrahi, Director, Pritzker Center for Jewish Education; Wendy Platt Newberger, day school lay leader; Rabbi Yechiel Poupko, JUF/Jewish Federation of Metropolitan Chicago; William Rubin, Community Foundation for Jewish Education; Max Skip Schrayer, education and federation lay leader; Rabbi Michael Siegel, Anshei-Emet congregation; Rabbi Harvey Well, Associated Talmud Torahs.

In Los Angeles: Dr. David Ackerman, Los Angeles Bureau of Jewish Education; Metuka Benjamin, Stephen S. Wise Day School; Prof. Michael Berenbaum, University of Judaism; Rabbi Richard Cameras; Rabbi Edward Feinstein; Dr. Jerry Friedman, director of Shalhevet High School; Rabbi Laura Geller; Dr. Gil Graff, Los Angeles Bureau of Jewish Education; Mark Lainer, philanthropist and lay leader; Rabbi Mitch Malkus, Pressman Academy; Rabbi Harold Schulweis; Prof. Ron Wolfson, University of Judaism and Synagogue 2000.

In Philadelphia: Dr. Sol Daiches, Jewish Federation of Greater Philadelphia; Rabbi David Glanzburg-Krainin; Rabbi Andrea Merow; Brian Mono, Jewish Federation of Greater Philadelphia; Rochelle Rabeeeye, Auerbach Central Agency for Jewish Education; Rabbi Seymour Rosenbloom; Dan Segal, lay leader; Rabbi Lance Sussman; Dr. Helene Tigay, Auerbach Central Agency for Jewish Education; Dr. Saul Wachs, Gratz College.

In Saint Louis: Ed Becker, lay leader; Fran Cantor, lay leader; Dr. Stephen Cohen, Jew-
ish Federation of Saint Louis; Rabbi Joshua Einzig, Epstein Day School; Marsha Grazman, Mirowitz Day School–Reform Jewish Academy; Maurice Guller, lay leader; Jeffrey Lasday, Central Agency for Jewish Education; Rabbi Mordechai Miller; Susan Witte, Jewish Federation of Saint Louis; Joan Wolchansky, Jewish Family Education, Central Agency for Jewish Education.

In San Francisco: Sheila Baumgarten, Koret Foundation; Sandra Edwards, Koret Foundation; Prof. Arnold Eisen, Stanford University; Dr. Vicky Kelman, Bureau of Jewish Education; Laura Heller Lauder, lay leader; Janis Sherman Popp, lay leader; Mark Reisbaum, Jewish Community Endowment Fund; Dr. Robert Sherman, Bureau of Jewish Education; Estee Solomon-Gray, lay leader; Gail Zucker, Jewish Community Federation of San Francisco.

NOTES

1. This is how Jonathan Woocher, the head of the Jewish Education Services of North America, memorably characterized the national field of Jewish education in a private conversation.

2. Some supplementary programs are based not in synagogues but in communal or independent settings.

3. This report serves as a snapshot taken at a particular time, between 2003 and 2005. As will become abundantly evident, communal priorities and funding do not remain static, and emphases change. Some communities invest heavily in a particular educational vehicle, only to switch focus because an interested donor has come along or a particular educational leader has departed the scene.

4. Fran Nachman Putney, “New Federation Study Confirms Young, Middle-Class Migration to Alpharetta and Beyond,” Atlanta Jewish Times, June 20, 2004. At the end of 2005, the Atlanta federation announced that it had leased space in a far suburb on behalf of a range of Jewish service institutions. See Beob Menaker, “North Side Story: Federation to Open Multi-agency Alpharetta Campus,” Atlanta Jewish Times, December 30, 2005. Accessed on JTA Online.


6. I am grateful to Dr. Adam Ferziger of Bar Ilan University for sharing an advanced draft of his manuscript titled “The Community Kollel in America: An Emerging Model for Confronting Assimilation.” He addresses the Atlanta Kollel on pp. 35–36.


8. The “Boston system” of Jewish education in the first half of the twentieth century was encapsulated as follows: It was a model that strove to “serve, improve, and coordinate Jewish education in Greater Boston.” The system encompassed “a central figure, sufficient funding from a credible, broadly-based community agency, and working schools, reasonably sound politically, professionally, and pedagogically.” Next came the creation of a Bureau of Jewish Education, and finally, the effort to “raise standards” through training programs for teachers. Daniel J. Margolis, “The Evolution and Uniqueness of the Jewish Educational Structure of Greater Boston,” in Alexander M. Schapiro and Burton I. Cohen, eds., Studies in Jewish Education and Judaica in Honor of Louis Newman (New York: Ktav Publishing House, 1984), 86–88.
11. For more on this theme, see Reimer, “Passionate Visions,” 299–300.
14. The CJP’s teaming with Haifa has permeated quite a few educational programs, including the teen experiences.
16. Brandeis University, with its large assortment of Jewish studies faculty, has taken a less visible role in communal education, perhaps because it regards itself as a national institution. Brandeis is primarily engaged in local Jewish education through its Delet Program to train educators as potential school directors; its faculty of education perform evaluation work for communal programs, and some Brandeis professors partake in communal deliberations or teach in the Meah program.
18. It should be noted that 75 percent of Prozdor teens are drawn from Conservative synagogues. Reform temples for the most part refuse to do business with Prozdor and insist on educating their own teens.
20. The current head of the North American federation system, Howard Rieger, reflected on the “culture of direction from central organizations” on which Chicago is built. He noted that in the Jewish community, “outcomes are determined by the fact that not much is left to chance.” “Howard’s View,” April 22, 2005, disseminated by the United Jewish Communities in New York.
21. The JUF Web site counts the federation’s allocations somewhat differently, claiming to have channeled $15.7 million to causes that build Jewish identity and community in 2003–4. Not all of this can be construed as designated for Jewish education.
22. One of the noteworthy exceptions to this rule is George Hanus, an attorney and ardent day school activist, who has single-handedly launched a “Superfund for Jewish Education and Continuity,” along with a newspaper (the World Jewish Digest) and a master’s degree program with a local Catholic university to train Jewish educators. At first, his efforts may have served as a useful goad to pressure the JUF to support day school education, but well after the federation created two new endowment funds, Hanus continues to promote his
own alternative “superfund.” All of these efforts are indicative of duplication and competition, rather than coordination and cooperation in Chicago.


24. Ibid.

25. The pattern in such communities was analyzed in a report prepared by the Council of Jewish Federations in 1994. See *Reinventing Our Jewish Community: Can the West Be Won? A Report to the Jewish Communities of the Western United States and the Council of Jewish Federations*, December 1994.


27. See “The BJE at 65: No Time to Retire. 2002,” 9, where the pupil-to-BJE staff ratios in eight communities are compared.

28. As an example, the bureau is seeking foundation support for funded vouchers to enable children in poor families to attend day schools.


30. As an expression of this partnership, the federation lent its vice president of planning and allocations to the BJE for two years to serve as a consultant on “operational issues” through the Bureau of Jewish Education. Her job will be to “streamline operations, improve marketing and development,” and help the schools use their collective purchasing powers to cut costs on “everything from supplies to insurance.” Fax, “The $45 Million Question.”


34. The Perelman School is noteworthy for landing the single largest gift in the history of the Philadelphia Jewish community, a bequest of $20 million from the Kimmel family. That and the Perelman gift appear to be the only significant investment in Jewish education generated within the community.


36. Ibid., 379.


40. Joe Eskenazi, "And the Survey Says: Population Spike Makes Bay Area the 3rd Most


43. It appears that synagogue-based Jewish education is not well integrated into other communal efforts. The federation invests a pittance in supplementary schooling, and rabbis are not perceived as important participants in local educational efforts.


45. See chapter 9 in this volume by Shaul Kelner and Steven M. Cohen, which examines how those investments affect the participation of children in the range of programs.


47. The Whizin Institute drew some favorable comments in the area of family education, as did some video-conference classes offered by the Siegel College of Jewish Education in Cleveland.


49. A related planning issue for federations is why so much energy should be invested in coordinating local Jewish education, when a similar level of cooperation should be forged regarding social services or Israel-related activities. Why should a community do more, in other words, for Jewish education than it does for other aspects of its work? The answer, of course, is that this need not be a zero-sum game. The success of educational coordination may translate into other areas of heightened cooperation.

Why Communities (May) Differ: People, Policies, and More

“The Jewish community,” although admittedly a nebulous concept, is central to thinking about American Jewry and their identities. With about two hundred Jewish population centers sufficiently large and institutionally complex enough to be recognized as distinct communities by the United Jewish Communities, the umbrella organization for Jewish federation campaigns, each such locality is a unique constellation of institutions, populations, and histories. Surely these unique constellations, with all their variety, must have some impact on the lives of the Jews who live within their precincts, if not under their sway.

Yet, despite the centrality and obvious importance of local communities, few works in the social scientific study of American Jews have engaged in the comparative study of how Jewish communities differ. That such differences exist is evidenced in a compendium of raw statistics from local population studies (Sheskin 2001). Some research has helped specify the effect of community size on Jewish engagement, finding that as Jewish community size increases, Jews are more likely to form friendships with one another but less likely to join Jewish organizations (Kelner 2002; Rabinowitz 1989; Rabinowitz, Kim, and Lazerwitz 1992). Still, although size undoubtedly matters, it is not all that matters, and these studies have had little to
say about the role of historical, cultural, demographic, and institutional factors in creating the specific character of individual communities. Horowitz has argued that the impact of community size is mediated through these factors. The generalizability of her conclusions is limited, however, by her focus on the Jewish community of New York, which, as American Jewry’s major population center, she acknowledges as sui generis (Horowitz 1999; Horowitz and Solomon 1992). Much of the life’s work of the late Daniel Elazar emphasized a comparative perspective on global and national levels, and paid particular attention to institutional and demographic characteristics of Jewish communities (see Elazar 1976, 1989). Yet Elazar’s concern was more with collective action and organizational dynamics than with the effects of these on individual identity and behavior. As a result, although many insider practitioners and Jewish communal leaders have a working, albeit impressionistic sense of the character of many American Jewish local communities, we know very little of a systematic nature about how Jews, their identities, and their collective processes differ by locale. And we know, or can surmise, even less about how the locale influences the individuals and institutions it embraces.

One reason that Jewish communities differ is that they have succeeded in attracting Jews with differing characteristics, varying most notably by age, length of residence, and affluence, to say nothing of important Jewish background characteristics that can be indexed by denominational self-identification. In short, the presence of different individual Jews makes for different collective communities. Thus, in the conclusion to their monograph on Jewish geographic mobility, Sidney and Alice Goldstein write: “The very migration process that has helped produce the national Jewish community has, through its selective character, helped to ensure the maintenance of sharp differences among localities” (1996: 313). In part because Jews of a certain character live in one place and not another, the nature of being Jewish in one place differs from that in another, although we suspect that factors other than aggregate differences in the Jewish population influence local variations in Jews’ behavior and attitudes.

The area of Jewish education is one in which we might expect Jewish community differences to emerge, illustrating the power and potential of communities to influence Jewish behavior and outlook. Patterns of educational usage (for example, rates at which parents enroll their children in Jewish camps or day schools), as with any other significant Jewish behavior, will reflect two sorts of underlying differences by community: differences in population characteristics and all other differences. The latter can refer to the larger sociocultural context (the level of religiosity, for example, or civic-mindedness in a certain city), or to the way in which the organized Jewish community functions. And therein lie critical questions of interest to analysts and, presumably, to communal practitioners as well. We ask: what accounts for differences between and among Jewish communities? To what extent, and for what purposes, is it the character of the local Jewish population? And, beyond the character of the indigenous Jewish population, do the actions of local
educational and other institutions account for intercommunity variations in one or another dimension? Concretely, do different rates of Jewish schooling in places like San Francisco, Boston, or Baltimore merely reflect the different Jewish populations that live in each of these cities? Alternatively, do institutional and contextual factors make independent contributions to the different enrollment patterns, over and above that which is the result of the population composition?

To illustrate, if we find (as we know we would) that yeshiva enrollment in Boro Park, Brooklyn, substantially exceeds the per capita rate of yeshiva attendance on the Upper West Side of Manhattan, we would logically attribute this difference primarily to population characteristics—the presence of a large Orthodox population in Boro Park. But if enrollment rates in non-Orthodox all-day high schools are higher on the Upper West Side than in, say, Riverdale (whose Jews are almost as affluent and somewhat more traditional than their West Side counterparts), then one would have to attribute the difference to a genuine community effect. In this case, we would point to the founding of a very popular non-Orthodox high school (Heschel) in the neighborhood.

To take this thinking to a higher analytic level, this paper seeks to offer a contribution to the study of community effects. The particular focus of our analysis centers on rates of Jewish educational usage. Thus, while we seek to enrich our understanding of how (and whether) communities influence Jewish educational decisions, we also hope to advance, through the use of a specific case, our understanding of how communities influence Jewish behaviors and other indicators of any kind, be they in the domain of Jewish education or otherwise.

Methodological Issues

Determining whether communities collectively operate above and beyond their local demography to influence the local levels of Jewish educational enrollment is no easy task. We need, first, to determine the extent to which Jewish educational usage varies by community. Next, we need to estimate the extent to which these differences may be attributed to differences in population characteristics (Jewish background, affluence, and so forth). Thus, we need to determine the extent to which levels of Jewish education depart from those that would be expected on the basis of the Jewish engagement, affluence, and other characteristics of the local Jewish population. Insofar as some communities do “better” or “worse” with respect to Jewish educational usage relative to what might be expected for/from their respective populations, we would want to know the reasons for these departures from expected levels.

However, to be clear, given our current state of knowledge, in particular, the lack of an understanding of the histories, cultures, and policies of the communities under study, we will be unable to determine the exact cause of these variations. For
example, if day school enrollment rates are particularly low in a certain community, even after we take into account that, say, a large number of the Jewish families are intermarried, are the low rates attributable, say, to the extraordinary reputation of the local public schools or to the dismal performance of the headmasters or to the miserly philanthropic support of the local federation? The analysis below addresses the earlier questions. That is, it can determine whether there is a question to be addressed in the first place, or more precisely, whether community variations in Jewish educational enrollments remain even after we take their respective population profiles into account. But, if we do arrive at such a conclusion (and we do), we cannot address the more complex questions of precisely why communities differ.

To conduct this analysis, we rely on data from a five-community survey of Jewish Community Center members with Jewish children ages birth to eighteen years in the household (N = 2,538). Details on the survey method, response rates, and the constraints on interpretation imposed by the nature of the data set are provided in the appendix at the end of chapter 3.

The small number of communities in the study limits our ability to draw definitive conclusions. Accordingly, we consider this analysis to be exploratory—offering a first word on a topic, not a last word. We also had initially been concerned that a switch in question wording during the administration of the survey might have affected the results of the cross-community comparisons. The tests we ran to assess whether this was the case assured us that the change had little impact on the analysis’s substantive results. (A discussion of the issues involved is provided in the appendix to this chapter.)

To explore the effects of Jewish community on Jewish educational decisions, we focus on two outcome measures: day school enrollment and participation in overnight Jewish camping. The advantage is that, as we shall demonstrate, they draw on somewhat different populations and arise from different considerations. Choosing day schools for one’s children certainly reflects a commitment to their Jewish upbringing, as does sending them to Jewish overnight summer camps. However, beyond this commonality, other considerations are distinctive to each decision.

The analysis proceeds as follows: first, we identify characteristics of the Jewish population associated with enrollment in these two forms of Jewish education. To learn whether population characteristics explain intercommunity variation, we need first to know which characteristics are critical determinants of Jewish day school and Jewish camping utilization. Then we look at how these factors that we identified are differentially distributed across the populations of the five communities. That is, if we find out (and we do) that more ritually observant families are more likely to send their children to Jewish educational contexts, we need to establish that Jewish ritual observance in fact varies by community. Next, we assess whether the community-based differences in day school and camp enrollment rates are attributable solely to the different demographic compositions of the communities. Last, finding that differences in enrollment rates sometimes persist even
after controlling for communal demographics, we discuss steps that future research would need to take to determine the causes of the different rates of Jewish educational enrollment from community to community.

Findings

Large Influence of Orthodoxy, Current Observance,
and Jewish Upbringing

Parents’ propensities to enroll their children in Jewish day schools and overnight camps vary in clear and predictable ways, as seen in tables 9.1 and 9.2.

By a variety of measures, those who are or were more Jewishly engaged (in their youth or at present) are more predisposed to provide Jewish educational experiences for their children. This nonstartling finding emerges in a number of comparisons. For example, parents who had themselves received Jewish education and/or grew up in ritually observant households make more use of Jewish day schools and Jewish overnight camps for their children. Higher enrollment rates are also found among families who currently observe Jewish home rituals. Inasmuch as these behaviors map onto denominational preference, enrollment rates for the two forms of Jewish education show clear variation as one compares the Orthodox, Conservative, Reform, and secular—the more traditional the denominational affiliation, the greater the use of day schools and Jewish camps.

Although parental Jewish practice is certainly related to the enrollment of children in Jewish education, the strength of this relationship is not constant. Camp enrollment is much less dependent on home Jewish practice than is Jewish day school enrollment. Relative to day schools, camps enjoy greater success in reaching less observant Jews.

This is evident throughout the data presented in table 9.1. To take one instance as an example, 50 percent of the surveyed JCC parents who were raised in households that regularly light Sabbath candles have at one point enrolled their children in Jewish day schools. Among respondents whose childhood homes did not regularly light Sabbath candles, the proportion drops sharply to about half that: 26 percent. The comparable drop with respect to camping is not nearly as steep, falling from 53 percent to just 40 percent. These patterns generally characterize all of the other Jewish upbringing and affiliation measures.

The impact of standard demographic characteristics on enrollment is less straightforward. Secular education has no statistically significant bearing on either day school or camp enrollment rates. Income is a significant predictor only of day school enrollment where, due to a disproportionate concentration of Orthodox respondents in the lower income brackets, higher earning households are less likely to enroll their children in Jewish day school. Single parents are no more or less likely
| **TABLE 9.1** | Enrollment Rates by Jewish and Demographic Characteristics |  
| **Ever enrolled child in Jewish day school (percentage)** | **Ever enrolled child in overnight camp (percentage)** |
| Respondent attended Jewish day school (4+ years)** | | |
| No | 33 | 47 |
| Yes | 79 | 57 |
| Respondent attended Jewish overnight camp** | | |
| No | 35 | 41 |
| Yes | 46 | 57 |
| Childhood household usually lit Sabbath candles** | | |
| No | 26 | 40 |
| Yes | 50 | 53 |
| Service attendance past year** | | |
| Never | 10 | 24 |
| Just for high holidays | 27 | 36 |
| A few times during the year | 26 | 41 |
| About once a month | 33 | 50 |
| 2–3 times a month | 51 | 55 |
| About once a week or more | 76 | 61 |
| Current household usually lights Sabbath candles** | | |
| No | 11 | 38 |
| Yes | 47 | 50 |
| Respondent’s current denomination** | | |
| Orthodox | 91 | 56 |
| Conservative | 41 | 52 |
| Reform | 16 | 39 |
| Reconstructionist | 24 | 44 |
| Traditional | 62 | 52 |
| Secular | 16 | 39 |
| Other Jewish | 43 | 41 |
| Non-Jewish member of interfaith household | 11 | 28 |
| Household structure** | | |
| Single | 33 | 47 |
| Intermarried | 10 | 28 |
| Conversionary | 37 | 42 |
| In-married | 44 | 50 |
to enroll their children in day school and camp than in-married couples, consistent with the impression that schools and camps offer scholarships to needy families (of whom single parents are unusually numerous) to effectively facilitate their enrollment. On the other hand, consistent with the low rates of involvement among the less Jewishly engaged, out-married households are significantly less likely to enroll their children in these Jewish educational settings.

In short, certain population characteristics in a community predict Jewish day school and overnight camp enrollment. The most prominent include Orthodoxy, in-marriage, and ritual observance, as well as observant upbringings and parents who themselves attended Jewish day schools and summer camps when they were children.

**Different Populations: From Baltimore to San Francisco**

As Table 9.1 demonstrates, the enrollment of children in Jewish education is related to the Jewish upbringings, involvements, and connections of the parent population. Accordingly, we would expect that community-wide rates of enrollment would vary in line with the different Jewish backgrounds and lifestyles of the parents in each locale. Other things being equal, Jewish communities with higher proportions of synagogue-going adults or alumni of Jewish camps should have higher rates of day school and camp enrollment than those with lower proportions of such individuals.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Selected Jewish Characteristics of the Surveyed Communities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Respondent attended Jewish day school (4+ years) (percentage)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baltimore</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Detroit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West Orange, N.J.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boston</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>San Francisco</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall total</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
To investigate this possibility, we first need to examine and establish that the populations in our five communities do in fact differ in terms of the characteristics that predict Jewish educational utilization, for which we turn to table 9.2. The differences among the communities are, indeed, readily apparent.

The locales can be divided into three groups. Baltimore and Detroit are characterized by larger proportions of Orthodox Jews than are any of the other three areas studied. San Francisco's JCC parent body, by contrast, is predominantly Reform and includes the highest proportion of interfaith households. Boston and West Orange, New Jersey, tend to fall between these two extremes with regard to all the measures of Jewish observance, involvements, and connections.

Based on the attributes of the five communities’ distinct populations alone, we can make predictions about Jewish educational utilization in each one. These predictions would be based on the assumption that the only reason for intercommunity variations is the character of the Jews who live there, rather than any impact of the surrounding culture or Jewish institutional effectiveness.

On the basis of the population characteristics alone, we would predict that the communities' enrollment rates in the two forms of Jewish education would be highest in Baltimore, followed closely by Detroit, then drop in Boston and West Orange (whose rates would be roughly equal), and fall even further in San Francisco. Furthermore, we would predict that the drop in rate from Baltimore to San Francisco would be steeper for Jewish day school enrollment than for camp enrollment, if only because we previously learned that day school attendance is more closely tied with Jewish identity characteristics than is Jewish summer camp utilization. Furthermore, based on the finding that camp enrollment exceeds day school enrollment, we would also expect rates of camp enrollment to be higher than rates of day school enrollment in all communities with the possible exception of Baltimore, where the Orthodox proportion is so large as to give a significant boost to day school enrollment.

These hypotheses are borne out partially, but not entirely. First, with regard to day school enrollment and JCC parents, we found that Baltimore has the highest rate of enrollment (estimated at about 60 percent). This rate is significantly higher than the next closest, Detroit's, which falls to about 49 percent, which is nevertheless higher than the rates in the other three communities. The rates for Boston (about 33 percent), West Orange (about 28 percent), and San Francisco (approximately 26 percent) did not differ significantly among themselves. These results largely follow the predictions we could make based on the Jewish engagement levels and other characteristics of the local populations. Figure 9.1 displays the point estimates and 95 percent confidence intervals for the five communities’ JCC-family day school enrollment rates.

The hypotheses we advanced met with less success with respect to Jewish overnight camp enrollment. Here, rather than varying considerably as we might expect, four of the five communities (Baltimore, Boston, West Orange, and San Francisco) reported roughly equal levels of Jewish camp utilization, showing no statistically
significant differences among them. Detroit, by contrast, had a significantly higher enrollment rate than all of the other communities. As predicted, in all communities save Baltimore, the rate of camp enrollment was higher than the rate of day school enrollment. Community-based rates of camp enrollment for these JCC-member families are presented in figure 9.1.

Controlling for Population Characteristics: Differences Emerge

To what extent is the cross-community variation in enrollment rates solely a function of their populations’ different Jewish characteristics? Is Baltimore’s high day school enrollment, for example, entirely explained by the fact that 41 percent of its JCC-affiliated population is Orthodox? If we remove the “Orthodox effect” in Baltimore, does it still maintain its position as the community with the highest rate of day school use? At the other extreme, does San Francisco’s large intermarried population explain why it enrolls a smaller proportion of its population in Jewish day schools than the other four communities? Perhaps when we account for the presence of the intermarried, San Francisco will not look very different from the other communities in terms of its day school utilization.

To explore these and related possibilities, we examine the intercommunity differences after controlling for all of the Jewish population characteristics identified earlier (that is, Jewish day school and camp attendance as a child, regular
Community Effects on Jewish Engagement

Sabbath candle lighting in the household of origin and in the current household, denominational affiliation, worship service attendance, and out-marriage.) In other words, we are trying to “level the playing field” between communities with respect to their Jewish populations. If Baltimore had as many intermarried families as San Francisco, and San Francisco had as many Orthodox families as Baltimore, would Baltimore still outpace San Francisco with respect to day school enrollment? Would the gap between the two narrow, and by how much? (Conceivably, the relationship could be reversed. Perhaps, given its population composition, Baltimore is “underperforming” and San Francisco is “overperforming” with respect to sending children to day school.)

To assess community differences after controlling for all available and relevant characteristics, we use a statistical technique known as multiple classification analysis (MCA). If the rate differentials in day school and camp utilization are only the result of the different Jewish populations who live in each community, these differentials should disappear. If rate differentials persist, we would conclude that additional factors beyond population composition account for the different Jewish educational enrollment rates in the communities. (The small sample size in each of the communities limits our ability to achieve the statistical precision we desire. The adjusted enrollment rates by community—adjusted for all the population characteristics—should therefore be taken as rough approximations rather than precise figures.)
Adding the statistical controls eliminates most of the rate differentials for day schools; but for camps, the rate differentials remain, even after we control for population characteristics. Figure 9.3 shows the raw and adjusted Jewish day school enrollment rates in each of the five communities. Controlling for population characteristics leads the enrollment rates to converge between 40 and 46 percent in four of the five communities, with only West Orange displaying a lower enrollment rate (33 percent). In other words, the high raw day school enrollment rates in Baltimore and Detroit are essentially a function of the high proportion of observant Jews in those communities.

In contrast, San Francisco’s low raw rate results from the relative absence of a similar population of Orthodox, observant, and in-married families whom we would expect to send their children to day schools. Even though San Francisco reports the lowest day school attendance rate of any of the five communities, its Jewish population is so constructed as to be the least predisposed to day schools. The very high intermarriage rate is probably the most telling single indicator of this predisposition to eschew day schools. In spite of this, when we hold population characteristics constant, San Francisco’s day school enrollment rate actually rises to the highest among the five communities. Whether this relatively high rate is the result of any intentional action on the part of San Francisco’s organized Jewish community is another question, and one that we stated at the outset is beyond the scope of this paper.

The situation with camping is quite different. Figure 9.4 shows that in all the communities save San Francisco, the introduction of statistical controls has no discernable effect on Jewish overnight camp enrollment. Again, San Francisco’s en-
The enrollment rate appears to be lowered by virtue of the population it draws from. Once we take its population character into account, San Francisco’s adjusted rate of camp use actually rises to tie with Detroit for the highest level among the communities.

Discussion

Several points emerge from the analysis above. First, as is well known, communities differ, sometimes widely, in the extent to which families make use of different types of Jewish education. Second, certain characteristics of individual Jews, particularly those related to Jewish upbringing and engagement today, influence the propensity to provide one’s children with Jewish education; but, the link between these individual characteristics and type of education is stronger in some instances (such as day schools) and weaker in others (such as overnight camps). Third, communities differ widely in the average Jewish engagement of their population; of the five communities in this study, Baltimore and Detroit reported the highest levels in engagement measures, and San Francisco the lowest. Fourth, owing to the confluence of all these patterns, variations in Jewish population characteristics may explain why some communities report unusually high or unusually low levels of enrollment in one or another form of Jewish education.

These findings lead us to ask, does participation in Jewish education vary from community to community for reasons beyond simple fact that different places are homes to different types of Jewish populations? This exploratory analysis suggests that the answer depends on the type of Jewish education one looks at. Jewish day
schools remain the choice of a distinct segment of the American Jewish population. Cross-community variation in enrollment rates appears largely to be the result of the relative presence or absence of Sabbath-observant (in some sense) and synagogue-attending, in-married Jewish households (both endogamous and conversionary). After controlling for these population characteristics, there is little variation between communities that is left to explain. Given the populations in their catchment areas, none of the communities (or the collection of day schools within these areas) can be said to be doing extraordinarily well or poorly in recruiting day school students. By contrast, community variation in Jewish overnight camp enrollment exists, and it cannot be explained away as a mere function of population.

How might we explain the seeming community-effects on camp enrollment? Several possibilities suggest themselves. They might be the product of intentional action on the part of local Jewish communities or particularly enterprising camp directors. Alternatively, they might be the result of external factors, such as the prevalence of camping as an option in the Northeast and its relative unpopularity in the South; or they might be some combination of the two. If we seek to attribute the effect to actions taken by local Jewish communities, the question remains as to whether the effects should be attributed to actions taken by individual camps or by organizations working on behalf of the community more broadly.

At present, we have no data-grounded way of claiming preference for any of these possible explanations. As with the verification of the findings, the explanation of them will also require additional research. With a sufficient number of communities, more advanced methods can provide statistically based answers (see the appendix). To do so would require the collection of data not just about individuals but also about local community contexts. The presence or absence of coordinated transinstitutional recruitment efforts, the number of Jewish camps within a certain distance from the community, and any number of other issues can be coded as community-level variables and entered into a statistical model. The endeavor would be worthwhile, in light of the findings of this exploratory research. American Jewry may be a national community, but at least with regard to camp enrollment, the power of local context to shape behavior appears strong.

Beyond the specific findings about camp and day school enrollment, the value of the current exercise lies in the general theoretical and empirical model we have advanced for thinking about and exploring community-based effects. We have advanced the view that simple variations in observable behavior are not adequate to establish the presence of community-based effects. Rather, we also need to take into account the characteristics of the local population, understand how they may affect the outcomes under study, understand how these characteristics vary from community to community, and then statistically remove the impact of population characteristics to isolate the possible net effects of communities. Those effects may be attributed to a combination of local cultures, the effectiveness of particular Jewish institutions, the policies of the organized Jewish community, or other factors. In short, the analysis of Jewish community effects is compelling, complex,
and challenging. The challenges include not only developing appropriate analytic tools, but also collecting adequate data from a sufficient number of communities, as well as developing sufficient understanding of the distinctive features of those communities.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This chapter benefited from the ongoing conversation among the research team gathered by Jack Wertheimer as part of the Next Generation project. It also owes much to Leonard Saxe, who played a central role in the development of this research project. We also thank Fern Chertok, David Tobey, Jack Ukeles, Alisa Rubin Kurshan, Jacqueline Buda, David Livert, and Judith Veinstein for their contributions and assistance.

METHODOLOGICAL APPENDIX

This chapter reports on findings from a survey of parental attitudes and experiences surrounding Jewish education. Details on the survey’s methodology are found in an appendix to chapter 3. As noted there, early in the survey’s fielding we determined that interviewers working in the Bezeq Online call center had diverged from the interview protocol and had asked questions in a non-uniform manner. We temporarily suspended the fielding of the survey to address the matter, launching it again in December 2004 with a set of respondents who previously had not been called.

Assessment of Data Validity

We conducted a series of statistical tests to determine whether, within each community, the data gathered during the first month (wave 1) differed significantly from the data gathered after the interviewing team was reconstituted and the additional quality-control measures were put in place (wave 2). These results are presented in table 9.3. In most instances, we found that the data gathered by interviewers who used free-wording displayed the same patterns as the data gathered by those who adhered strictly to the written script. However, on one question that we had hoped to use in the analysis—“How important is being Jewish in your life?”—we found that wave 2 respondents were consistently more likely than wave 1 respondents to have answered “extremely important.” This variable was accordingly removed from all analyses of cross-community differences.

Jewish day school enrollment rates in Boston and West Orange were lower in the second wave of the survey. This difference was statistically significant. It is an open question as to whether this is the result of the discrepancy in wording. Perhaps the free-wording of the questions introduced a bias that led people in these communities to be more likely to say that they had enrolled their children in day school. As the report of enrollment or nonenrollment is a statement of fact rather than of opinion, we speculate that such a bias (if it existed) was caused by questioners defining Jewish day schools in broader terms than specified in the script. A more plausible explanation is that the people who first responded to the survey were those who were more interested in its topic, Jewish education. If this is so, then the discrepancy in day school enrollment rates testifies not to a weakness of the survey, but to one
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Community</th>
<th>Enrolled child in Jewish day school (percentage)</th>
<th>Enrolled child in Jewish overnight camp (percentage)</th>
<th>Respondent attended Jewish day school (4+ years) (percentage)</th>
<th>Respondent attended Jewish overnight camp (percentage)</th>
<th>Childhood household usually lit Sabbath candles (percentage)</th>
<th>Current household usually lights Sabbath candles (percentage)</th>
<th>Orthodox (percentage)</th>
<th>Conservative (percentage)</th>
<th>Reform (percentage)</th>
<th>Being Jewish is extremely important (percentage)</th>
<th>Service attendance monthly or more (percentage)</th>
<th>Exogamous household (percentage)</th>
<th>P values</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Boston</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oct–Nov</td>
<td>38**</td>
<td>49*</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>80*</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>42***</td>
<td>46*</td>
<td>9</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dec–Apr</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>12</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Detroit</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oct–Nov</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>68*</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>70*</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>62**</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dec–Apr</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>San Francisco</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oct–Nov</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>31**</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>33</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dec–Apr</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>38</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West Orange, N.J.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oct–Nov</td>
<td>25**</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>36***</td>
<td>57*</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>45***</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>11</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dec–Apr</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>9</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p < .10; **p < .05; ***p < .01.
of its strengths. Efforts to follow-up with nonrespondents succeeded, thereby making the final data set representative of a more diverse Jewish population than that which responded enthusiastically to the first call.

The overall consistency between the two waves of data helped to alleviate our initial concern at the fact that the two polar extremes among the five communities—Baltimore and San Francisco—were also the two communities with the least overlap in the field period. San Francisco and Baltimore are vastly different communities, standing at opposite ends of the Jewish identity and Jewish education spectrum. Their presence in the analysis of community variation is vital. Excluding the first month’s data would have meant dropping San Francisco from the analysis, as the vast majority of the calls to San Francisco were conducted during the first month. So, in contrast with the decision taken with respect to the analysis of ECE effects, we opted to retain the first month (and San Francisco) in the analysis of community variation. We recognize that this comes at the price of preventing us from asserting unequivocal findings and therefore have made explicit that we consider this to be an exploratory analysis that can serve as a basis for future research that assesses the topic more thoroughly.

Methodological Advances in the Estimation of Community Effects

Another reason we consider this study of community effects to be an exploratory analysis is that the small number of communities in the JCC parent survey prevented us from using hierarchical linear modeling (HLM), the preferred method for statistically modeling community effects (Bryk and Raudenbush 1992). Whereas an HLM analysis would require data from at least twelve to fifteen communities, the JCC parent survey was fielded in only five. The results of this analysis therefore should be taken as indicative rather than definitive and should be revisited when a larger study with more communities makes possible an HLM-based analysis of this question.

NOTES

1. The relationship between day school enrollment and current observance may be strengthened if day school enrollment leads nonobservant families to become observant. We persist in speaking of the relationship as causal rather than merely correlative because the variables relating to Jewish upbringing also show the same relationships with day school enrollment.

2. We ran additional analyses to assess whether these relationships were primarily the result of the predominance of Orthodox Jews within the day school population. Even when we removed the Orthodox from the analysis, the relationships in almost all instances remained statistically significant.

3. For each respondent, enrollment in a given form of Jewish education was indicated by a dichotomous variable coded 0/1. This enabled community enrollment rates to be compared using one-way ANOVA (where the mean score is equivalent to the proportion enrolled). Specific community-by-community comparisons were made using post-hoc analyses with a Bonferroni correction. (Making multiple comparisons increases the likelihood of erroneously declaring findings to be statistically significant. The Bonferroni correction corrects for this by raising the standard of proof needed to declare a mean difference statistically significant.)
REFERENCES


Conclusion

The foregoing chapters demonstrate that the hard work and investments of the past few decades have built a momentum in Jewish education. It is not necessary to create something from nothing, but rather to sustain and further build the momentum. The good news about Jewish education is that it has cumulative effects. Substantial evidence attests to the value of more intensive Jewish education—more years, more exposures, more time devoted to such enterprises. All of these factors engage young Jews and draw them into social networks that reinforce Jewish participation.

As members of the research team listened to parents and educators speak, we also learned about the new way in which families think about Jewish education. The field of Jewish education must address the new climate of thinking in several key areas.

Parental Choice and the Marketing of Day Schools

Parents are speaking a new language today when they talk about Jewish education. As several of the essays have noted, parents certainly focus on the needs of each child and will avoid enrolling their children in schools that do not meet their unique needs. Even as parents make educational decisions for what is best for their children, they simultaneously consider the efficacy of the educational environment.
for their own purposes. Jewish education, in short, is an investment for their children and also for themselves.

Mothers particularly see their school choices and their involvement with schools as defining characteristics of their own identities. (Our research confirms the central, though certainly not exclusive, role women play in Jewish educational decisions and in bringing their children to school.) The educational decisions of parents are therefore not based solely on what is best for the child but on the setting that also meets the needs of the parents. Day school parents, for example, decide on a school based on what is acceptable within their own community and among their peers. They seek a school where they, the parents, will feel comfortable with other parents. True, there are boundary-crossers: some modern Orthodox parents send their children to a Schechter or community day school; some Conservative and even Reform parents send their children to Orthodox schools. That usually happens only if a peer group of parents in the school makes it comfortable or if the child’s needs are so clear that the decision comes down to “what is best for my child.” The same holds true to some extent for supplementary school parents, who regard the enrollment of their children in a synagogue school as part of a larger family investment in a congregation. They too seek a peer group among the congregation’s members.

One potential implication of these tendencies is that the merging of smaller day schools into one larger one will not necessarily appeal more to parents who are looking for very particular types of schooling for each child. More parents may opt out of Jewish schooling, especially day schools, if niche schools are unavailable. Moreover, as long as day schools cannot offer serious programs for the most gifted and those with learning difficulties, day schools will be at a disadvantage. Clearly, there are important cost considerations, and communities must weigh the costs and benefits of larger communal day schools. In some locales, such schools have proved a beneficial replacement for failing smaller ones; in communities we have studied, parents have expressed a strong preference for placing their children in schools whose ideological or pedagogic language suits their family’s needs.

Local communities have understandably placed a premium on minimizing duplication and maximizing efficiency. To achieve these goals, they have pressed day schools to merge, and they have favored the creation of community day schools at the expense of denominationally oriented schooling. These inclinations toward streamlining are understandable, but they may be short-sighted in an age of boutique shopping by consumers of Jewish education. Parents seek niche schools for their children, and unless larger schools can provide tracks for children with different interests and abilities, they may in the aggregate attract fewer children than an array of smaller schools with more clearly defined missions.

As they engage in recruitment, day schools will have to pay more attention to the language employed by parents and to their aspirations for their children. Many day schools and the Partnership for Excellence in Jewish Education (a supporting agency for day schools) speak of excellence as an end in itself. This seems to be the
focus of much day school advocacy work: how to achieve excellence and market it so as to increase student numbers. Our research confirms that day schools will struggle to recruit among non-Orthodox families if they are not at least as good as local public schools (good, note, rather than excellent). But it also shows that because school selection depends not only on rational choice (the search for a good-enough school), the schools must focus also on other issues: how to access parents’ social networks and how to engage with the personal and ideological dimensions in school choice. Excellence, or whichever term we use to indicate good-enough educational quality, makes day schools a plausible option; other factors make them desirable. Schools need to listen to parents to hear what they are seeking beyond a quality education for their children; many different values are at work as parents make their decisions.

Marketers of day schools, particularly outside of the Orthodox community, must also address concerns parents have about the lack of “diversity” in Jewish schools. They will have to dispel fears that day school graduates are unable to function as good Americans or somehow receive an inferior preparation for living in a pluralistic society. Those who promote day school education will not only have to appeal to the high aspirations parents have to raise children who are committed to Jewish life, but also to overcome what some parents regard as the negative aspects of day schools—for example, their inability to expose children to “diversity.”

Finally, day schools and supplementary schools must develop programs to acknowledge the parents as learners and focus not only on the education of children. Everything we have learned about the bidirectional interplay between parents and children suggests that as parents get more engaged, they will serve as important role models to their children; and as children get more involved, they may be able to draw their parents into greater engagement. Schools are already stretched to serve the needs of youthful learners, but to succeed, they will have to develop the resources to address their adult learner population too. Ideally, this task could be accomplished were institutions to work cooperatively so that schools for children can rely on sustained adult education programs to address the needs of parents. Here is a patently obvious case where linking isolated institutions could do much good.

Investing in Supplementary Schooling

As the educators of the majority of Jewish children, supplementary schools are significant players in the field of Jewish education. But for a variety of reasons, they receive only limited support. For one thing, they are generally tied to congregations, and therefore it is (incorrectly) assumed that the religious denominations offer them curricular support and direction. In fact, supplementary schools operate in isolation and derive only limited benefits from the educational arms of the religious movements. For another, the sheer numbers of supplementary schools are daunting. Housed in many hundreds of synagogues and other semiprivate settings, they
seem impervious to supervision. And for another, the track-record of such schools in teaching basic skills and Jewish literacy relegates them to second-class status. If supplementary school graduates exhibit such low levels of Hebraic and Judaic literacy, and their long-term engagement with Jewish life tends to be weaker than day school products, why bother with them? The answer is that with the exception of the Orthodox population, only Conservative families send a significant minority of their children to day schools. Unless we are prepared to write off the majority of young Jews, we must find ways to strengthen the field of supplementary Jewish education.

Supplementary high schools are particularly worthy of new support. They already tend to attract teens whose personal commitments and family background have disposed them positively to Jewish engagement. In our JCC survey, 62 percent of day school dropouts in Boston continue their Jewish education in a supplementary program. Some go on to high school. (Close to one-fifth of students enrolled in Prozdor, the transdenominational school of the Boston Hebrew College, which enrolls one thousand high school students, are former day school students.) Others who drop out of day schools after the fifth or sixth grades continue their Jewish studies in the years leading up to their bar or bat mitzvah in a supplementary program.) Moreover, those who continue into high school tend to come from families that encourage Jewish involvement. Significant percentages of such teens also participate in youth movement activities, trips to Israel, and summer camping. Students in supplementary high schools are resisting the post-bar/bat mitzvah dropout syndrome. They deserve a strong education. Unfortunately, few communities know how to address this population. There is a critical need to develop a supplementary high school initiative to offer curricular and programmatic guidance to help communities around the country bolster their programming for Jewish teens. With some creativity, supplementary high schools can also expand their base by appealing to the preoccupations of teens: one community, for example, is experimenting with opportunities in informal education to help young people flesh out their résumés with community service work that then enhances their college applications.

At the other end of the spectrum are children who are enrolled in the least demanding form of Jewish schooling—one-day-a-week Sunday schools. These schools have the poorest track record of producing literate and committed Jews. Graduates of such schools tend to be the least engaged; and so too are their parents. Where possible, families should be encouraged to move their children from such schools into religious schools offering a program meeting at least twice a week, because Sunday schooling has little positive impact over the long term. But when that is not possible, children in Sunday schools must be offered opportunities for enrichment through specially designed programs that will complement their Sunday school experiences. Perhaps, we need a separate track of programs for these kids. The danger of isolating them is that they will not be exposed to children who take Jewish education more seriously, and their parents will not meet peers who
will reinforce engagement. But currently, as the engaged are getting better and more meaningful programs, the disengaged are exposed to inferior programs. We must move the minimally engaged onto a track designed to expand their Jewish horizons.

Families with children in two- or three-day-a-week supplementary schooling also deserve more support. By talking with parents who enroll their children in congregational schools, we learned that while some are minimalists and mainly want their children to endure as they did in religious school or to learn just enough to celebrate a bar/bat mitzvah, a significant population of supplementary school parents has far more serious Jewish aspirations for their children. Quite a few talk about passing Judaism and Jewish connection on to their children; others talk about Jewish literacy; some even talk about Hebrew competency. And still others aspire to create Jewish memories for their children, often through music, the smells of cooking, and so on.

It will not do to dismiss the entire lot as people who are not serious Jews. Certainly, intensive Jewish education is a low priority for some supplementary school parents. But others opt for supplementary schools because they regard such an education as the best they can afford; and still others believe the combination of public or nonsectarian private school education coupled with supplementary school programs offers the best all-around education for their children. Day school tuition remains an impediment to some Jewish families who do not want to apply for help or go through what they regard as the humiliation of asking for assistance. Moreover, some supplementary school parents are participating in serious adult education programs both to improve their Jewish parenting abilities and also for their own growth. The interaction of such positively inclined parents with one another both in the supplementary schools and in adult education settings is fostering heightened participation. Finally, some parents of supplementary school children also enroll them at Jewish summer camps, in youth movements, and in Israel trips. They clearly are exposing their children to more than a bare minimum. If nothing else, our study highlights the need for fresh research on supplementary Jewish education and the families who utilize this form of schooling.

By listening to parents, we have discerned an interest among a sector of the supplementary school parent body in giving a Jewish education to their children. Are they as serious as day school parents? Perhaps only a minority are. But even if most parents of supplementary schools children are not as serious, they ought not to be written off as hopelessly indifferent. On the contrary, communities must develop ways to inform parents about educational options, about ways to deepen their children’s participation, about ways for the parents to engage in adult education, about ways that Jewish education makes them, the family, and their children better. After all, Jewish parents want “better” for their children. It behooves communal leaders, therefore, to invest in supplementary education to make it better and to provide enrichment for children in supplementary school in the form of summer camping, youth movement programs, and the like.
Thinking Systemically

Most medium-size and large Jewish communities offer a range of programs in formal and informal Jewish education. These include early childhood programs, day schools, supplementary schools, youth movement programs, summer camps, teen programs, and Israel trips. (They also sponsor a variety of adult education opportunities.) Over the past ten to fifteen years, donors have launched a number of new initiatives to strengthen one or another of these educational settings: PEJE works with day schools; the Foundation for Jewish Camping helps Jewish summer camps; the Jewish Early Childhood Education Initiative is beginning to look into early childhood programs. On the funding side, one or another of these programs has won national champions. And on the local level, individuals and foundations have helped raise more funds for day schools or for local teen programs or for Israel trips. But given the diversification of the field, a larger question remains: who links the various programs to each other? True, quite a few central agencies for Jewish education are now bringing all local day school educators together or all supplementary school principals. But who is cutting across the types of institutions?

This question is not academic. Much research suggests that the mix of Jewish educational experiences, the combination of formal and informal programs, has a differential effect on people as they grow older. Children who attend supplementary school but also go on to post-bar/bat mitzvah schooling and youth programs or who attend Jewish summer camps along with their supplementary schooling tend to be more actively engaged as Jews when they get older. The mix of experiences affects the types of involvement in adulthood—for example, whether the adult will be strongly committed to Israel or Jewish ritual observance or attendance of religious services.

Who, then, in Jewish communities invests effort in channeling children into a range of programs? Who is informing parents of the options? Communities offer numerous stand-alone institutions. They offer little guidance to help parents negotiate between them and little open encouragement of children to move naturally from one to the next. Informally this happens, so that day school families who can afford the costs send their children to the Jewish summer camps that the peers of their children prefer. But families without strong connections are often unaware of such opportunities, and are not naturally steered to them by peers.

To put this into less abstract language: Imagine a bus is driving from the preschool to the day school or supplementary school and then to the summer camp, teen programs, and Israel trips. Who is working to get parents and children to board the bus, rather than remain fixed in only one institution? The advantage of such a bus route is that parents will be shepherded from one place to the next—and in the process will talk to other parents on the same bus who may draw them into Jewish educational programs. Our research indicates that this happens haphazardly. Few communities offer such a bus service, and few education professionals think it is
their responsibility to play the role of guide, announcing the stops and encouraging riders to get on and off the bus at as many stops as possible.

The field of Jewish education has reached a level of maturity where serious resources should be directed at creating the linkages between educational programs. We should recruit the bus drivers who will usher people from one place to the next. We should teach and motivate educators to serve as guides who channel people and think about the entire network of education from preschool through high school. Undoubtedly the personnel or agency providing such services will differ from one community to the next, but in each community some educators must be trained to think systemically. Jewish education should be an organic system, not merely a network of loosely connected institutions. The creation of such a system will require attention not only to the parts, but also to the connections.
Index

Ability grouping, 114
Academic excellence. See Quality of education
Administration, school. See Professionals, education
Adolescents: American cultural influence on, 199; bar/bat mitvah experience, 193; and community context, 191; developmental issues, 182; and Jewish identity, 196–97; religious school experience for, 156, 164, 167. See also Teen programs
Adult education: children as inspiration for parents, 130–31, 134–35, 144, 158, 200–201, 276, 277; and day school choice, 118–19, 125–26; ECE’s contribution to, 59–73, 91; expansion of, x; JCC’s promotion of, 218, 228, 249; and local educational organization, 227–28; and supplementary schools, 157–58, 170–71, 279
Affective educational formats, x, 131, 166–67
Affiliation: and Baeck Academy population, 112; and day school education, 107, 109; ECE’s impact on, 61; and education, 40, 43, 44–45, 51, 53, 224, 261, 262, 264, 270; and friendship groups, 189; and geographical dispersal of Jews, 217; variations in local rates of, 229. See also Synagogues
Akiba, 234
American culture: and Jewish educational organization, 214, 220, 226, 232, 250–51; and Jewish identity, 19–20, 83, 170, 182, 183, 205; public schools as transition to, 195; and religious institutions, ix; teens’ attitudes, 199
Antisemitism, 83, 146
Arendt, Hannah, 140
Aronson, Cheryl, 187, 188, 189
Aspirations for children, parental; and day school enrollment, 82, 88, 89, 92, 95, 98, 276–77; and supplementary school investment, 279
Assimilation, 170, 182, 205
Associated Talmud Torahs (ATT), 227
Atlanta, Jewish education in, 216–19
Auerbach Central Agency for Jewish Education, 233–34
Authority issues with local institutions, 249
Avi Chai Foundation, 249
Baeck Academy: emotional safety of, 114; and fellowship among parents, 133–34; influence on parents, 119, 130, 131; need for volunteer participation, 122; politics of, 127; profile of, 111–13
Baltimore, Jewish education in, 264, 265–69
Bar/bat mitvah: conflicts with home life, 153, 166; as culmination of Jewish education, x, 26; parents on value of, 149, 150, 166; teens’ view of experience, 193; voluntary aspects of, 176n8
Barry, F., 174
BBYO (B’nai B’rith Youth Organization), 184, 193, 210n11
Beck, Pearl, 60, 61
Belonging, sense of, education’s effects on, 44–45, 51, 53, 60
Berkowitz, Margie, 188
Berla, N., 165
BJEP (Brandeis Jewish Educational Program), 188–89
BJEs (Bureaus of Jewish Education). See Bureaus of Jewish Education (BJEs)
B’nai B’rith Youth Organization (BBYO), 184, 193, 210
Bolman, L. G., 122, 129, 132
Boston, Jewish education in, 219–25, 253–18, 264, 265–69
Boston Hebrew College, 219, 221, 222–23
Brandeis Jewish Educational Program (BJEP), 188–89
Brandeis University, 219, 254

Bureaus of Jewish Education (BJEs): in
Atlanta, 217; in Boston, 219, 222; in Chicago, 227, 228; in Los Angeles, 230–31; in San Francisco, 241

CAJE (Coalition for the Advancement of Jewish Education), 59–60
Camping experiences: and adult Jewish identity, 37; in-marriage rate effects of, 41, 46; local community effects on enrollment, 260–63, 262–64, 265–66, 267, 268–69; and local educational organization, 228; teens’ view of, 192, 194
Career focus and gender roles, 9, 10–11
Catholic schools, 35, 106
Centerville research context, 103, 104–15
Central agencies for Jewish education: in
Centralized vs. decentralized educational organization, 187–88, 214, 220–22, 228, 231, 236–37, 249
Chicago, Jewish education in, 225–28
Child-centered choices for education, x, 18–20, 24, 26, 84, 124, 275, 276
Children: aspirations for, 82, 88, 89, 92, 95, 98, 276–77, 279; developmental perceptions, 155–57, 159–60; effect on parental view of religious schools, 144, 149–50, 154–57; individual growth expectations for, 149; information sources outside parents, 174; as inspiration for parents, 130–31, 134–35, 144, 158, 200–201, 276, 277; and parental involvement in school, 124; refusal to continue Jewish education, 25; and school choice, 18–20, 24, 26, 84, 275, 276; work/family balance effects on, 8, 13, 14. See also Adolescents
Choice, educational: day schools vs. supplementary schools, 165, 278; decision making process, 17, 18–23, 80–99, 113–20, 201–3; and denomination, 14–17; expansion of Jewish identity, 62–63; and family formation, 3, 17–28; and gender roles, 6–14; parental sharing of, 6; preoccupation with, ix; and private schools, 102; recommendations for, 275–77; and religion as choice, 163; and teen programs, 181, 190–91; theoretical perspectives, 113–20
Christian parents and religious school, 27
CIJE (Council for Initiatives in Jewish Education), 250
CJP (Combined Jewish Philanthropies), 182, 219, 220–22, 223, 225
Class, socioeconomic, 16, 19–20
Coalition for the Advancement of Jewish Education (CAJE), 59–60
Cognitive vs. skill-building educational formats, x
Cohen, S. M., 143–44
Coleman, J., 115, 119–20
College education and Jewish identity, 184, 204–5, 206
Combined Jewish Philanthropies (CJP), 182, 219, 220–22, 223, 225
Comer, James, 174
Commission on Jewish Continuity and Education, 221–22
Commitment to Jewish identity: children as inspiration for parents, 130–31, 134–35, 158, 200–201, 276, 277; and day school choice, 20, 81–85, 87, 88, 91–93, 94, 95, 98; and local educational organization, 243–44; and supplementary schools, 145, 146–50, 160, 163; and teen programs, 187, 189
Communication, parent-school, 109, 112, 126–27, 171, 172
Community-building, 250
Community centers. See Jewish Community Centers (JCCs)
Community context: and day schools, 123, 133–34, 139–40; diversity of, x, 21, 146; and ECE, 63, 65–68; and education’s effects
on adult identity, 42–45, 46–48; and enrollment in Jewish education, 357–71, 27371; family formation, 5–6; and formal/informal schooling experiences, 166, 214; importance for teens, 191; and school choice, 23–24, 105–7, 114, 119–20, 121, 138–39; social service mission, 237, 247; and supplementary school attendance, 147–48, 157; teen programs, 184–85. See also Institutions
Community Foundation for Jewish Education, 227–28

Competition among education providers, 188, 214, 222, 234, 250–51
Congregational schools. See Supplementary schools; Synagogues
Conservative denomination: day schools, 6, 80, 82, 83, 84, 90–91, 108–10, 112, 117, 234; educational professional’s role in, 186; local educational organization, 229, 235, 236, 239, 244; and needs of individual child, 19; supplementary schools, 25, 143, 148, 149, 222; synagogue experience, 161; teen programs, 188; and women’s work/family balance, 15
Consumers, Jews as education, ix–x, 18, 19, 83–84, 98, 121
Convenience and school choice, 114, 173, 191, 202
Conversionary parents, 26–27, 158
Coordination vs. competition among educational institutions, 214, 250–51
Costs of private schooling. See Financial issues in school choice
Council for Initiatives in Jewish Education (CIJE), 250
Cremin, Lawrence, 249
Cultural capital, 69, 71, 129
Cultural context: and day schools, 129, 135–37, 139–40; family formation, 4–5; and practice vs. spirituality, 27–28; and social class, 29; and value of teen programs, 206–7. See also American culture; Community context
Cultural identity, 26
Curricula, 191–93, 203–4, 219–20, 249
Daniels, H., 152
Day-care centers and ECE, 62
Day School Advocacy Forum (DAF), 222

Day schools: and adult identity factors, 37, 41–43, 44, 49, 50–51, 52–53, 54, 101–13, 133–40; challenges for family life, 10, 137; decision making process, 17, 20–23, 80–99, 113–20, 201–3, 204; ECE’s impact on enrollment, 61, 65, 66, 67, 72, 81, 224; enculturation effects, 135–37, 139–40; enrollment levels, 6, 14, 011; integration effects of, 133–34; local community effects on enrollment, 260–61, 262–64, 265, 268, 270, 273–31–2; and local educational organization, 218, 222, 229–30, 234, 236, 237, 240–41, 244, 245; marketing of, 81, 98, 110, 111, 129, 138, 276–77; parents’ direct benefit from, 124–25; parents’ strong commitment to, 321–27; personal-historical perspective, 120–33; as primary beneficiaries of funding, 246–47; quality perceptions, 83–84, 88, 89, 90, 95, 98; vs. supplementary school choice, 163, 278
Deal, T. E., 122, 129, 132
Decentralized vs. centralized educational organization, 187–88, 214, 220–22, 228, 231, 236–37, 249
Decision making process. See Choice, educational
Demographics and local community differences, 258, 261, 263, 266–69, 270
Denominations: and competition for resources, 188; and day schools, 81–82, 107–13, 118, 202; and engagement in Jewish education, 261, 262, 264, 270; and local educational organization, 227, 238, 243–44; and parenting, 14–17; and supplementary schools, 222–23; and teens, 185, 196; transdenominational programs, 188, 196, 234, 240. See also Conservative denomination; Orthodox denomination; Reform denomination
Denton, M. L., 164
Desegregation and day school choice, 218, 230, 245
Detroit, Jewish education in, 264, 265–69
Direct vs. mediated learning experiences, 165
Diversity: and community context, x, 21, 146; and day schools, 107, 201–2, 277; in educational formats, x–xi; and freedom to be Jewish, 83; importance in school choice, 17, 21–22; and public schools, 163; and
transdenominational programs, 188, 196, 234, 240
Dual-earner households, family management roles, 6, 11–12, 13–14
Duration of education, effects on identity, 36
Early childhood education (ECE): impact on Jewish commitment, 59–73, 91; and local educational organization, 228; methods and data, 63–65, 70–71, 73–76, 77n17–17; and recruitment into day schools, 81, 22.4
Educational attainment and Jewish education, 265
Educational openness and ECE’s impact on parents, 67–72.

The Education of Catholic Americans (Greeley and Rossi), 35
Elazar, Daniel, 238
Elia, M. J., 160
Emotional basis for school choice, 114, 118–19, 126, 138–19, 166–67
Empowerment approach, 145, 173, 176n3, 200
Enculturation effects of day schools, 135–17, 139–40
Epstein School, 217

Faculty: challenges for supplementary school, 167, 176n11; community disconnect from students, 108, 128; and parents, 125, 129, 139; training of, 218–19
Families: bar/bat mitvah preparation conflicts, 153, 166; community context, 5–6; day schools’ impact on, 134–37; divorce’s effect on Jewish education, 193; ECE’s impact on, 60–73; and educational decision making, 1, 17–28; and engagement in Jewish education, 261, 262, 263; as focus of educational efforts, 221; gender roles and education, 6–14; and Jewish identity, 3–5, 28–29; logistics and school choice, 114, 173, 191, 202; methods and data, 7, 29–30; and religious education in context, 165–66; and school choice, 116–17; supplementary schools’ impact on, 157–60; and teens’ Jewish identity, 196–97; and values/cultural meaning, 4–5; work/family balance issue, 6–11, 13, 14, 15, 31–32n17. See also Children; Parents

Fathers’ roles in education and identity, 9–11, 14, 16


Feinman-Nemser, Sharon, 181, 187

Financial issues in school choice: day school costs, 21, 84, 90–91, 92, 93–94, 96–98, 203, 218, 230, 279; income and enrollment, 261, 263; teen inferiority issue, 192

Florence Melton Adult Mini-School system, 218, 228, 249

Food, religious function of, 15, 196–97

Formal education: and community context, 166, 214; vs. informal format, 1; local organization of, 216; and teen programs, 185, 187–88. See also Day schools; Early childhood education (ECE); Supplementary schools

Foundations, philanthropic, 225, 240–41, 249
Frankel School, 108–10, 131
Friendship networks, 183–84, 189, 204, 257
Friends (Quaker) schools, 24, 32–33n29, 232, 234

Full-time vs. part-time work, 7–11

Funding for Jewish education: and competition among providers, 188; local role of, 218, 221, 224–27, 229, 231–34, 239–41, 246–47; recommendations for, 280

Gann Academy, 223, 225
Garbarino, J., 174
Gardenswartz, Rabbi Wesley, 186

Gender roles: education disparities, 31n13; and family management, 6–14; and Jewish identity, 5, 276; and Orthodox gender separation issue, 110; and work/family balance, 15–14, 15, 31–32n17

Generational issues: and commitment to Judaism, 82; continuation of Jewish identity, 16, 61, 62, 146, 149, 160, 195; and shifting gender roles, 13–14; and success of assimilation, 83
Index | 287

Geographic dispersal of Jews, 214, 216–17, 222, 228, 229, 231, 235, 245–46

Ghettoization fear and day school choice, 83, 89, 92, 95, 99

Goldring, E., 115

Goldstein, Alice, 258

Goldstein, David, 187

Goldstein, Sidney, 258

Gratz, Rebecca, 232

Gratz College, 232, 234–35

Greeley, Andrew M., 35

Hafetz Haim Prep school, 110–11, 132–33

Hanus, George, 254–55

Hartman, Harriet, 13

Hartman, Moshe, 13

Har Zion Congregation, 235

Havura membership, 117

Hebrew language learning: barriers to, 193; and children’s influence on parents, 126, 134–35; importance for parents, 25–26; importance for teens, 186, 195; optionalization of, 223

Hebrew school. See Supplementary schools

Hebrew Theological College, 226

Hebrew Union College, 231

Herberg, Will, ix

Heritage/legacy. See Generational issues

Higher education and Jewish identity, 184, 204–5, 206

High schools, 195, 234–35, 278

Himmelfarb, H. S., 143

Hirsch Academy, 107–8, 114, 127–28, 131

Home environment: ECE’s impact on, 60, 65, 66–67, 68, 70, 71; and education’s effects on identity, 16, 43–44; focus of religion in, 15–16, 21, 32021, 153; supplementary schools’ impact on, 148. See also Families

Homemakers, family management role of, 8–9

Horowitz, Bethamie, 258

Human capital, education’s contribution to, 183–84

Human-resource frame for parental involve-
m ent, 122, 123–27

Identity: and American culture, 19–20, 83, 170, 182, 183, 205; and day schools, 22–23, 37, 41–55, 101–13, 130, 135–40; and duration of education, 36; ECE’s effects on adult, 60–73; and family formation, 3–5, 6, 9, 16, 28–29, 276; generational issues, 16, 61, 62, 146, 149, 160, 195; and higher education, 184, 204–5, 206; and informal education, 37, 41–54, 183; internal conversation as source of, 118; Jewish cultural vs. religious, 26; and local efforts to improve education, 224; methods and data on education effects, 34–41, 47–50; narrative perspective on, 120–21; and supplementary schools, 36–37, 41–54, 144, 146–47, 163; synagogue’s role in, 157, 170, 197; and teen programs, 37, 181–83, 192–93, 194, 195–99, 205–7. See also Commitment to Jewish identity

Induction process for religious schools, 168–69

Informal education: community context, 166, 214; and disconfirming of negative schemata, 164–66; emotional impact of, 131; vs. formal format, x; formal schooling’s effect on participation, 45–46; and identity factors, 37, 41–43, 45, 46–47, 49, 52–53, 54, 183; and local educational organization, 224, 231, 241, 244–45; parental investment in, 279. See also Teen programs

In-marriage: education effects on, 39, 41, 43, 44–45, 50–51, 52, 270; and friendship groups, 183–84

Institutions: Atlanta, 216–19; Boston, 219–25; Chicago, 225–28; common issues among local communities, 245–49; differences among local communities, 213–16, 242–45; identity preservation role of, 182–83; Los Angeles, 229–32; network-building recommendations, 249–51, 280–81; and parental involvement in ECE, 69; Philadelphia, 232–35; range of responses to, 201; Saint Louis, 235–38. See also Central agencies for Jewish education; Federations of Jewish philanthropy; Jewish Community Centers (JCCs); Synagogues

Intensity of education, effects on identity, 16

Interfaith household, American normalization of, 199

Intermarriage: and comfort with Jewish education, 25; and day schools, 80, 112, 136–37; and friendship groups, 183–84;
Institutions (continued)
and geographical dispersal of Jews, 217;
and identity, 16, 196, 198; and Jewish
population density, 183; and Judaism as
choice, 27; and local education commu-
nity, 237, 240, 264; rates of, 182
Israel: focus on funding for, 226, 233, 247;
visits to, 37, 41, 46, 194–95, 231
Israeli population in San Francisco, 240

JECEP (Jewish Early Childhood Education
Partnership), 59–60
Jenkins, R., 118
Jewish Community Centers (JCCs): as data
source, 85, 91; ECE programs, 59, 62, 76;
local role of, 216, 217–18, 223, 228, 231, 238,
244, 249
Jewish Community Fund, 231
Jewish Early Childhood Education Part-
nership (JECEP), 59–60
Jewish Educational Services, 217
Jewish Renewal movement, 232
Jewish Theological Seminary, 232
Jewish United Fund (JUF), 226

Kaplan, D., 170–71
Kaplan, David, 61
Kaplan, H. B., 170–71
Kehilla Jewish High School, 241
Keysar, Ariela, 143, 190
Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, Barbara, 63
Kollel school, 218–19
Kosmin, Barry A., 143, 190
Kostelyn, K., 174
Kress, J., 160
Krug, Cynthia, 60

Lave, J., 165
Lawrence-Lightfoot, S., 107
Leadership Development Institute, 221
Legacy/heritage. See Generational issues
Levisohn, Jon, 186, 193
Liu, X., 170–71
Local community organization. See
Institutions
Logistics, family, and school choice, 114, 173,
191, 202, 203
Long-term impact of education, 35, 37, 48
Los Angeles, Jewish education in, 229–32
Maimonides School, 219, 223
Mandel Foundation, 350
Marcus Jewish Community Center, 216, 218
Marital status. See In-marriage; Intermarriage
Marketing of educational programs: day
schools, 81, 98, 110, 111, 112, 129, 238,
276–77; and denomination, 108; and ECE,
81, 224; recommendations for, 275–77;
supplementary schools, 168–69
MCA (multiple classification analysis), 47–48,
267
Meah program, 221, 222, 223–24, 225, 249
Mediated vs. direct learning experiences, 165
Melton Adult Mini-Schools, 218, 228, 249
Men’s roles in education and identity, 9–11,
14, 16
Milken High School, 229
Minyan, attending prayer to make, 131, 132
Morals, education in, 17, 27, 149, 205–7
Moss, Penni, 187–88
Mothers as teachers of Jewish identity, 5, 9,
11–12, 276
Multiple classification analysis (MCA),
47–48, 267
Narrative perspective on school choice, 120–21
National Jewish Population Survey (NJPS), 13,
38, 60, 62, 81–82
National-level education institutions, 215, 220,
222, 248–49
NESS (Nurturing Excellence in Synagogue
Schools), 233–34
Niche schools concept, 276
NJPS (National Jewish Population Survey), 13,
38, 60, 62, 81–82
NOAR, 187, 221
Non-Jewish parents, 16–17, 26–28, 136–37, 158.
See also Intermarriage
Nurturing Excellence in Synagogue Schools
(NESS), 233–34
Obligation in Judaism, 19, 163
Observance. See Ritual and observance
Orthodox denomination: and day schools, 6,
80, 82, 84, 107–8, 110–11, 127–28, 202, 230,
273n12; and decision making process, 22;
and gender roles, 15, 110; and income fac-
tors in Jewish education participation, 261;
Kollel school, 218–19; local educational or-
organization, 219–20, 226, 227, 236, 244; and needs of individual child, 19; and school choice, 117

Parents: on bar/bat mitzvah value, 149, 150, 166; on community context, 184–85; conversionary, 26–27, 158; denominational perspectives, 14–17; ECE’s impact on, 60–73; and Hebrew language learning, 25–26, 126, 134–35; involvement processes, 121–32; Judaic knowledge inferiority complex, 21; learning from children’s education, 126, 130–31, 134–35, 144, 158, 200–201, 276, 277; negative Jewish education experiences of, 118, 119, 130, 139–40; as overseers of local Jewish education, 217; personal responsibility for education, x; public school loyalty issue, 83, 111, 163, 191, 236; schema-based approach to expectations, 151–57, 162–67, 168–73; school communication with, 109, 112, 116–17, 171, 172; and school staff, 125, 129, 139, 153–54, 168–70; as socialization agents, 65; and teen programs, 182, 189, 191, 195–98, 199–205. See also Adult education; Day schools; Families; Supplementary schools

Parochial schooling, 106

Partnership for Excellence in Jewish Education (PEJE), 215, 240

Part-time vs. full-time work, 7–11

Peoplehood, 198–99, 200

Perelman Day School, 6, 18, 234, 2553

Personal-historical context for school choice, 117–33

Personal time, complications of discerning, 8, 12

Philadelphia, 4, 5–6, 7, 232–35

Philanthropy, local role of, 239–41, 246–47.

See also Federations of Jewish philanthropy

Philosophy, Jewish, importance of learning, 186

Policies of schools, parental involvement in, 127–28

Political frame for parental involvement, 122, 127–28

Population density/distribution, 23–24, 176n6, 185, 190. See also Geographic dispersal of Jews

Practice vs. spirituality, 15, 25. See also Ritual and observance

Preschool education. See Early childhood education (ECE)

Private schools and day school as free choice, 102, 218, 230. See also Day schools

Professionals, education: connection with religious school parents, 168–70; cultivation of, 222, 234; local role of, 225, 226–27, 230–31; and parental involvement frustrations, 153–54; and teen programs, 183–89. See also Faculty

Prozor program: educational role for teens, 185; funding of, 225; parents on, 203–4; social function of, 190; success of, 222–23; summary of, 209–10; teens on, 192; and transdenominational programs, 188

Public schools: and community context, 105–6; and day school choice, 21, 22, 218, 230, 231, 240, 245; and decision making process, 24; and ideal school size, 138; and rational choice perspective, 113–15; traditional Jewish support for, 83, 111, 163, 191, 236; as transition to multicultural world, 195; and transition to religious schools, 167

Putnam, Robert, 243

Quaker schools, 24, 32–33, 29, 232, 234

Quality of education: and marketing of day schools, 110, 138; and school choice, 83–84, 88, 89, 92, 95, 98, 114–15, 276–77; and supplementary schools, 26

Rabbis, educational role of, 186, 201, 228, 248

Rappaport, J., 173

Rashi schools, 223

Rational choice in school choice analysis, 113–14, 119–20, 277

Reconstructionist Rabbinical College, 232, 235

Recruitment. See Marketing of educational programs

Reductionism in school choice analysis, 113

Reform denomination: day schools, 82, 84, 91, 107, 111–13; local educational organization, 229, 235–36, 239, 243–44; non-Jewish parents, 27; practice focus for Jewish education, 15; supplementary schools, 25,
Public schools (continued)

149, 222; synagogue experience, 161; teen programs, 185, 188. See also Baec Academy

RE-IMAGINE project, 172

Reimer, Joseph, 161, 166, 169–70, 187

Reisman, B., 164

Reisman, J. I., 164

Religion: and American culture, ix; vs. cultural basis for Judaism, 27–28; and family formation, 4, 14; practice focus, 15; and Quaker school choice, 24; spirituality focus, 15, 17, 25, 27–28, 119. See also Ritual and observance

Religious schools. See Supplementary schools

Resource issues. See Funding for Jewish education

Rhea Hirsch School of Education, 231

Rieger, Howard, 254

Rioux, J. W., 163

Ritual and observance: day schools’ impact on, 129, 130–31, 134–35; ECE’s impact on, 60–61, 65; education’s effects on, 40, 43, 44–46, 47–48, 51, 52; and engagement in Jewish education, 261, 262, 264, 270, 273n1; food in, 15, 196–97; and friendship groups, 189; Sabbath/Shabbat, 7, 11, 60, 197–98; supplementary schools’ impact on, 148–49, 157, 165–66; synagogues vs. home-based, 153; and teens’ Jewish identity, 196–98; and time constraints in modern life, 191. See also Bat/bat mitzvah

Rossi, Peter, 35

Shabbat home rituals, 7, 11, 60, 197–98

Sha’arim program, 221, 224

Short-term impact of education, 35

Shrage, Barry, 182, 187, 220

Single-earner households, 6

Situated cognition effect, 137

Smith, C., 164

Smrekar, C., 115

Social and emotional learning (SEL), 166–67

Social capital, 69

Social context. See Community context

Socialization: and education participation, 42–45, 46–48; parents as agents of, 63; and school choice, 19, 119; and supplementary schools, 147–48, 156–57, 165

Social justice mission for Jewish community, 237

Social networks: children’s education effects on parental, 158; and day schools, 23, 115–17, 133–14, 202–3, 204, 277; decline in influence of, x; ECE’s impact on, 66–67; friendship groups, 183–84, 189, 204, 257; importance of, 257; and supplementary schools, 172–73; and teen programs, 183–84, 189–99

Social services mission, focus on, 237, 247

Solomon Schechter schools, 108–9, 223, 234, 216

Soloveitchik, Rabbi Joseph B., 219, 220

Spertus College, 216

Spirituality, 15, 17, 25, 27–28, 119

Stephen Wise Temple, 229

Sternberg, Robert, 165

Structural frame for parental involvement, 122–23

Suburban life, complications for education, 23, 24, 106, 214, 228, 229

Sunday schools: and adult identity factors, 36–37, 41–43, 44, 46, 49, 52–53, 54–55; local attendance at, 236; recommendations for, 278–79

Supplementary schools: and adult identity factors, 36–37, 41–43, 44, 46, 49, 50, 52–53, 54, 142, 146–47, 161; central agency focus on, 248; children’s experiences’ effect on parents, 144, 149–50, 154–57; concerns about quality of, 26; and decision making process, 24–26, 118–19; ECE’s impact on, 61; improving parental involvement,
Index | 291

United Jewish Communities, 257
Universal vs. Jewishness goals for education, 205–7
Urban living and school choice, 23–24, 176n6
USY on Wheels, 194

Values: and families, 4–5, 12; and integration of parents with school, 132–33; methods for passing on, 16, 160, 195; and school choice, 17, 18, 22–23, 28, 114; social network as source of, 116–17
Venture philanthropy, 240–41
Vogelstein, Ilene, 59, 60, 61
Voluntary organizations, Jewish institutions as, 214

Waterman, J. M., 171
Weber School, 217
Wenger, E., 165
West Orange, NJ, Jewish education in, 264, 265–69
Wexner Heritage Program, 240, 249
Whizin Institute, 231
Women: family management role of, 6–9, 11–12; as religious leaders in home, 5, 9, 11–12, 16, 276; work/family balance issue, 13–14, 15, 31–32n17
Work and family balance, 6–11, 13–14, 15, 31–32n17, 123
Workforce participation, men’s vs. women’s patterns of, 11–14
Workplace location and school choice, 23, 24

YESOD, 187–88, 221
Youth groups: and adult Jewish identity, 37; BBYO, 184, 193, 210n11; in-marriage rate effects of, 41, 46; teen preferences for organization of, 193–94

Zellman, G. L., 171

154–73, 176n11; investment in, 277–79; and local educational organization, 214, 222–23, 227–28, 229, 230, 233–34, 236, 238, 244; marketing of, 168–69; methods and data, 174–75; parental expectations, 143–50, 173–74; parents’ negative experiences of own, 143, 150–54; and post-bar/bat mitzvah participation, 243; preference for, 21; synagogue leadership of, 169–70, 173–74, 223–24; and teen programs, 156, 164, 167, 185, 188, 198. See also Bar/bat mitzvah; Sunday schools
Swap, S. M., 171–72
Symbolic frame for parental involvement, 112, 128–32
Synagogues: vs. community-based education, 188; and day schools, 109, 140; and ECE, 61, 62; educational role of, x, 5, 21, 24–25, 201, 214, 222, 223–24, 228, 229, 235, 248–49; and enculturation, 135; and federation of Jewish philanthropy, 217, 225; vs. home-based ritual, 153; and Jewish connectedness, 148; and parenting, 16; and supplementary schools, 157, 160–62, 169–70, 173–74; and teens’ identity, 197
Talmud Torahs. See Supplementary schools
Teachers. See Faculty
Teen programs: community context, 184–85; educational administration role in, 185–89; friendship groups, 183–84; and identity, 37, 181–83, 192–93, 194, 195–99, 205–7; local variations in success of, 231; methods and data, 184–85, 207–8; parents’ viewpoint, 199–205; and social networks, 183–84, 189–99; and training of teen workers, 241; universal vs. Jewishness goals for, 205–7; visits to Israel, 37, 41, 46, 194–95, 231. See also Camping experiences; Informal education; Youth groups
Temple Akiba, 169–70
Tefillah (prayer), 119, 131, 132
Transdenominational programs, 188, 196, 234, 240
Ukeles, Jacob, 205
Uniqueness of children: and parental involvement in school, 124; and school choice, 18–20, 24, 26, 84, 275, 276