How Day School Teachers Perceive Their Working Conditions: A National Study

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How Day School Teachers Perceive Their Working Conditions: A National Study

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ABSTRACT

Induction and mentoring are widely considered in the United States and in the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries as a basic universal and critical intervention for a successful launch of new teachers. Based on an expanded set of survey data, this article focuses on how Jewish day schools offer professional support and learning opportunities from the head of school, the administration, colleagues, parents, and the school community and how useful teachers perceive these resources to be. This study reveals that less than half of all teachers in the schools surveyed report participating in formal induction programs and believe their schools take the learning needs of new teachers seriously. Schools would do well to attend to this aspect of teacher support and consider the systems and structures that do (or do not) exist to help orient, support, and develop new teachers.

KEYWORDS

Administration/principal/head of school support; beginning teachers; Jewish day school; professional development; professional learning community; school environment; teacher survey

Introduction

Schools play a critical part in shaping teachers’ roles and effectiveness. As many educational researchers have observed, schools often provide isolating and stressful environments that do not encourage teachers’ personal and professional growth (Fullan, 2007; Lortie, 1975). Yet, we know from decades of research on school leadership and professional learning communities that schools can also help teachers gain new understandings of teaching and children and consolidate and grow their practice when they work in a supportive, collaborative learning environment (Feiman-Nemser, Tamir, & Hammerness, 2014; Little, 1987, 2002; McLaughlin, 1993; McLaughlin & Talbert, 2001; Tamir, 2013a).

For several decades, liberal and community Jewish day schools have experienced rapid growth and expansion before they too were affected by a downturn in the economy (Tamir, 2011). While these schools have attracted growing investments from Jewish communities, federations, philanthropists,
educators, and parents, research on Jewish day schools has remained a relatively undeveloped area.

Based on an expanded set of data, this article focuses on Jewish day schools as sites for teacher development. It examines in some detail the kinds of professional support and learning opportunities currently available to day school teachers from the head of school, the administration, colleagues, parents, and the school community. It also considers how useful teachers perceive these resources to be.

Clarifying these questions is critical to the ongoing development and retention of effective teachers. Heads and administrators cannot count on the commitment and good will of teachers to persist in the face of the many challenges that confront them without access to supportive working conditions and ongoing learning opportunities. Knowing how teachers regard the support and guidance they receive from administrators, colleagues and professional developers can help school leaders identify possible areas for school improvement; areas that are directly linked in the research literature to teacher retention, teacher satisfaction, and student learning outcomes (e.g., Branch, Hanushek, & Rivkin, 2013; Tamir, 2013a, 2013b).

The impact of administrative support and professional communities

Arguing that teachers are the most important school factor that affects student learning outcomes has almost become a cliche. Studies have also shown that school principals are key to teachers’ professional growth, well-being, career commitments, satisfaction, and retention (Bryk, Camburn, & Louis, 1999; Boyd et al., 2011; Johnson, 2004; Kardos & Johnson, 2007; Newmann, King, & Youngs, 2000; Smith & Ingersoll, 2004). Principals can offer meaningful and critical instructional support, as well as distribute leadership responsibilities to teachers. Principals can also influence and shape the professional culture in schools by designing, building, and sustaining organizational infrastructures that provide beginning, midcareer, and veteran teachers with ongoing opportunities for professional growth.

Following a long line of research on professional culture and professional learning communities (e.g., Little, 1987; Rosenholtz, 1989; McLaughlin & Talbert, 2001), we argue that a school’s professional culture is defined by how committed the administration and senior teachers are to investing in thoughtful mentoring and professional development that leads to consistent improvements in teachers’ practice. The dramatic attrition of beginning teachers in their first 3 years of teaching has focused much of the research in this area on how schools can successfully retain teachers and foster their professional development. Previous work has shown that administrative support, particularly around instruction and the existence of a strong collaborative culture among teachers can sustain teachers in what policy makers
call “hard to staff” schools, where teacher attrition is rampant (Tamir, 2013a; Feiman-Nemser et al., 2014).

This echoes the seminal work of Richard Ingersoll (2003) who attributes teachers’ dissatisfaction and ineffectiveness to the following factors: low compensation (54%), insufficient or inappropriate mentoring and support from school leadership (43%), challenging student behaviors (23%), lack of control and influence over their school lives (17%), low student motivation (15%), large class sizes (7%), inadequate time for preparation (6%), and insufficient opportunities for professional advancement (6%). As these findings suggest, apart of salary and class size, principals can significantly affect all other factors.

Kardos and Johnson (2008) show that schools which foster teacher growth and development have strong professional cultures. In such schools, principals and teachers work together to build clear expectations and communicate effectively, and teachers enjoy ongoing support from the administration. Finally, Smith and Ingersoll (2004) highlight an important distinction between emotional support and instructional guidance. They show that emotional support from administrators had no statistically significant effect on teacher retention, while support that “strengthens teachers’ practice,” had a strong and statistically significant impact on teachers’ decisions to stay in teaching or leave the profession. Such support includes “common planning time with other teachers in their subject area or participating in regularly scheduled collaboration with other teachers on issues of instruction” (p. 703).

These studies in general education developed measures to evaluate the impact of administrative support and professional culture on teachers’ professional growth, satisfaction, and commitment to teaching; however, such measures have rarely been applied in a systematic manner to the study of Jewish day schools. Previous research on Jewish day schools and their teachers has shown that day schools cope with some similar challenges as public schools. In a study of teachers in three major Jewish communities, Holtz, Gamoran, Dorph, Goldring, and Robinson (2000) found that Jewish day schools offered their teachers insufficient professional support and they recommended investing in large-scale professional development for day school teachers (Dorph & Holtz, 2000). In 2008, the Jewish Education Service of North America (JESNA) commissioned the Educators in Jewish Schools Study (EJSS), which reported similar findings (Ben-Avie & Kress, 2008). Two decades later, based on analysis of a large sample of day school teachers from the Day School Leadership Through Teaching (DeLeT) Longitudinal Survey and the EJSS Survey, Tamir and Lesik (2013) reported that the current day school system is divided between schools which offer strong administrative guidance and professional development and schools where teachers face challenging, often unsupportive working conditions.
In the research reported here, we seek answers to two general questions. Using a robust set of insights and measures drawn from general education and adapted to Jewish education, we ask: What types and levels of induction, professional development, mentoring, and opportunities for professional advancement and leadership are reported by a diverse sample of current Jewish day school teachers? Based on these teacher reports, what can we learn about areas of strength and weakness in Jewish day schools, particularly regarding to the professional growth of their teachers?

Sample and data

The research builds on data collected through a biannual survey of alumni from the DeLeT programs at Brandeis University and Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion (HUC-JIR) and annual surveys of incoming students. Since 2007, the DeLeT Longitudinal Study has provided important information to leaders, funders, and interested stakeholders about Jewish day school leadership and day school teacher preparation, induction, retention, and quality.

In previous studies, we analyzed the career choices that DeLeT fellows make and the factors that shape their decision to stay in teaching, become teacher leaders or administrators, or leave the classroom to pursue alternative careers (Tamir & Lesik, 2013; Tamir & Magidin de Kramer, 2011). We have also described the backgrounds of DeLeT teachers and their views of day school teaching (Tamir, Feiman-Nemser, Silvera-Sasson, & Cytryn, 2010), and the challenges and opportunities they face in their schools (Birkeland & Tamir, 2013; Tamir, 2011; Tamir, 2013b).

Recently, we focused on how DeLeT graduates perceive their preparedness for day school teaching, as well as how they perceive the faculty and the programs’ strengths and weaknesses (Tamir & Pearlmutter, 2014). In another study, we explored the impact of the DeLeT program on prospective teachers’ entering beliefs about good teaching and their ideas about the kinds of teaching practices they anticipate enacting in their classroom (Pearlmutter, Tamir & Feiman-Nemser, 2015).¹

Description of the survey

Survey questions cover a range of topics—including graduates’ educational and religious background, motivations for and perceptions of teaching, their professional preparation, teaching experience and school conditions, their satisfaction with various aspects of school culture, and their future career plans.

¹For more details about the DeLeT Longitudinal Study of Day School Teachers, go to http://www.brandeis.edu/mandel/research/delettracking.html.
This article focuses on questions about how day school teachers experience their school’s organizational setting, working conditions, and resources as well as the professional culture in which they work. We analyzed responses related to three broad questions: What kinds of support did teachers receive during their first year of teaching? For those who continue to teach, what opportunities are available for ongoing professional growth? How satisfied are teachers with the administration and culture of the school?

We aspired to achieve two aims in the sample: to have a relatively comprehensive and diverse sample of day school teachers, and to include both current and former teachers, in order to analyze factors associated with teacher retention and attrition.

To broaden the sample beyond DeLeT graduates, we worked with program directors at Stern College/Yeshiva University, the Jewish Theological Seminary (JTS), and the Jewish New Teacher Project (JNTP) who provided us with complete lists of their alumni. Program directors also helped recruit their alumni by reviewing and cosigning letters inviting alumni to answer the survey. The process of data collection included sending several letters, encouraging both current and former teachers to participate. The response rates among alumni of the three teacher preparation programs, were above 80%; DeLeT (n = 128), Stern (n = 44) and JTS (n = 49). The response rate among JNTP (n = 110) alumni was below 50%, perhaps because they felt less connected to JNTP which is not their alma matter, but rather a program that provides mentoring to beginning teachers.

**Description of the respondents**

Overall, a total of 329 teachers completed the survey of which 257 (78.2%) were female and 72 (21.8%) were male. Two hundred and sixteen (65.6%) respondents were currently teaching in Jewish day schools at the time of the survey, while 113 (34.4%) respondents were former teachers, not teaching at that time. Respondents had an average of 4.25 years of teaching experience. They were located in dozens of day schools across the United States, in 24 states, as well as in Israel, Ontario, and Great Britain.

Almost 40% of the respondents were certified to teach in public schools. The average age of the respondents was 33 and almost half were married or in a committed relationship (42.5%). The sample of teachers was diverse in terms of religious denomination, with 42 (13%) respondents identifying as Orthodox; 90 (27%) identifying as Modern Orthodox; 11 (0.03) identifying as Conservadox; 80 (24%) identifying as Conservative; 42 (13%) identifying as Reform; and 30 (9%) identifying as Reconstructionist, renewal, or cultural. Fourteen percent did not indicate their religious orientation.
In this first analysis of the expanded data set, we analyze how this broad, comprehensive, and diverse sample of day school teachers experiences and perceives the collaborative structures and administrative support at their schools.²

Findings

Guidance and support during the first year of teaching

The first year of teaching is widely understood as a critical and formative time in a teacher’s career, where the challenges are great and the learning curve steep (Feiman-Nemser, 2001). The New Teacher Project (TNTP, 2013) calls the first year a “leap year” and describes it as the most important in a teacher’s career. During this often turbulent time, some teachers leap forward while others fall behind and leave the profession (Ingersoll, 2001). One effective strategy to help teachers deal with the challenges of the first year of teaching is to provide comprehensive induction support including individualized mentoring.

One set of survey questions asked about teachers’ experiences during their first year of teaching. Teachers were asked, “In your first year of teaching, did you participate in a teacher induction program?” We wanted to know whether and how day schools address the learning needs of beginning teachers (see Table 1). Forty-four percent of teachers responded that they had participated in some kind of formal induction. In addition, teachers were asked “Did you receive the following kinds of support during your first year of teaching?” followed by a list of six possibilities. All of these questions could be answered “yes” or “no.” The options represent common strategies for reducing the stress associated with the first year of teaching and providing new teachers with necessary support and guidance.

Mentoring, or ongoing support and guidance from a master or experienced teacher, is the most widely used strategy for supporting new teachers. Mentoring takes many forms and serves diverse purposes. Mentors may orient new teachers to school expectations and resources, provide emotional support, model effective teaching strategies, and coach new teachers as they develop their own teaching practice. New teachers also value opportunities to plan lessons with colleagues and participate in seminars designed for novice teachers. Some schools recognize the novice status of beginning teachers by reducing their teaching load. While all teachers appreciate administrative support, new teachers are especially sensitive to the positive regard of school leaders and administration.

The first four items on the list above involve ongoing, job-embedded support and development which is widely recommended for all teachers. A moderately

²Given the lack of comprehensive research in this field, our aim is to provide a broad and general description of the field. In the future a more detailed examinations of particular data groupings is planned.
high percentage of teachers (60%) reported engaging in regular supportive communication with an administrator and receiving ongoing guidance or feedback from a master or mentor teacher. A considerable body of research confirms the impact of these forms of induction on new teacher retention (e.g., Smith & Ingersoll, 2004). In addition, half of the respondents had common planning time with other teachers in their subject area. Collaboration with other teachers who teach the same content, particularly if those other teachers have expertise, can be an important source of professional guidance and development for new teachers who are often unsure about what content to teach and/or how best to teach it to their particular students. Seminars or classes for beginning teachers can be another source of guidance, but are typically not embedded in the school and can be less directly related to the daily work of teaching. Slightly less than a third (29%) of the respondents participated in this type of support during their first year.

Two strategies that are relatively more costly although known to ease the challenges of first-year teaching involve reducing the teaching schedule or number of preparations or providing extra classroom assistance. Less than a third of respondents (28%) experienced a reduction in their teaching load and exactly one quarter (25%) had extra assistance in the classroom. These two strategies may provide support for teachers but do not have the added benefit of promoting professional development.

### Table 1. Types of support available to beginning teachers.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Kind of support</th>
<th>Teachers receiving this support in first year (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Regular supportive communication with your principal, other administrators, or</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>department chair</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ongoing guidance or feedback from a master or mentor teacher</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Common planning time with teachers in your subject</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seminars or classes for beginning teachers</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reduced teaching schedule or number of preparations</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extra classroom assistance (e.g., teacher aides)</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Teachers’ reports on the usefulness of guidance and support

Another set of questions asked about the usefulness of the guidance and support teachers reported receiving from their schools later on in their career (see Table 2). Specifically, current teachers were asked, “In the past 12 months, in which of the following activities have you participated and how useful were these activities to you?” Respondents were asked to rate the usefulness of the activities on a 4-point Likert scale (1 = not useful, 2 = somewhat useful, 3 = useful, and 4 = very useful).

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3 Program graduates who left teaching responded to a similarly worded question, but were asked to refer to their last year in teaching.
Not surprisingly, the four types of professional development which teachers tended to rate as useful or very useful were often led by teacher leaders at school and were directly connected to the ongoing work of teaching. The two most highly rated forms of development both involved ongoing collaboration with colleagues. Fifty percent of teachers participated in regularly scheduled collaboration with other teachers on issues of instruction and 36% of teachers participated in mentoring and/or peer observation and/or coaching as part of a formal arrangement. Two other types of professional development that were rated highly by teachers include observational visits to other schools, in which less than a quarter of teachers (23%) engaged and individual or collaborative research on a topic of interest to you professionally, in which slightly less than a third of teachers (31%) engaged. Both of those types of professional development may be more appropriate for midcareer teachers who value opportunities to extend and deepen their practice in ways that meet their particular needs and interests.

Other forms of professional development are generally provided by outside organizations or experts and often take place on specially designated “professional development days.” Researchers have shown that this form of professional development has not been very useful in facilitating teachers’ learning and professional growth because it is disconnected from their ongoing work and may not reflect their particular needs and interests (e.g., Smith & Ingersoll, 2004). It is worth noting that the most common type of professional development was attending workshops, conferences or trainings of teachers. More than half of all the teachers surveyed (56%) indicated that they participated in such activities. On average, teachers rated this professional development as useful, but it was less useful than the long-term professional development activities that take place in schools. Presenting at workshops, conferences or trainings was also rated, on average, as useful, but far fewer respondents, only one in five (19%) participated in this type of professional development.

The three types of professional development that were ranked lowest for usefulness by the surveyed teachers still had means close to 3.0, which indicates that most respondents continued to find them relatively useful. The participation level in these lowest three varied. Only 15% of respondents participated in university courses and 30% participated in a network of teachers. Both types of professional development tend to be external to schools. In addition, 45% of surveyed teachers worked informally to bring about change in [his/her] school. The survey does not reveal whether teachers believed this change was useful to their work as a teacher or useful because it successfully led to positive changes in the school.
School climate and culture

A third set of questions used 17 prompts to assess the climate and professional culture of the respondents’ schools. Respondents were asked “Please use the following scale to indicate to what extent you agree with each of the following statements about your current school.” Respondents used a 5-point Likert scale with the following ratings: 1 = I do not agree at all, 2 = I slightly agree, 3 = I somewhat agree, 4 = I very much agree, 5 = I completely agree. Sixteen of the statements were grouped into three categories. Then, within each category, we ordered the items from highest to lowest agreement and provide percentages by rating level (see Table 3).

School-wide beliefs and actions

This category includes three statements about the school’s mission and vision of good teaching (see Table 4 for the statements and teacher responses). Recent studies have shown that when teachers buy into a school’s mission, it promotes a sense of community among them and helps motivate student learning (Darling Hammond & Bransford, 2005; Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004). Studies in teacher education have also shown that developing a shared vision of good teaching fosters professional growth among beginning teachers (Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005).

The first two statements concern the extent to which teachers are clear about the school’s unique mission and have a shared sense of the kind of teaching valued in their setting. For both of these statements, agreement tended to be mixed, with about half of the respondents agreeing that teachers in their schools very much or completely share a vision of good teaching and a language for talking about it (50.4%) and an understanding of the school’s Jewish mission (48.8%). The third statement, there is a gap between what the school stands for

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Table 2. Usefulness of and participation in types of professional development.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Usefulness rating (means)</th>
<th>Teachers participating in this activity (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Regularly scheduled collaboration with other teachers on issues of instruction</td>
<td>3.33</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mentoring and/or peer observation and/or coaching as part of a formal arrangement</td>
<td>3.20</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observational visits to other schools</td>
<td>3.19</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individual or collaborative research on a topic of interest to you professionally</td>
<td>3.16</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attending workshops, conferences, or trainings</td>
<td>3.02</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presenting at workshops, conferences, or trainings</td>
<td>3.02</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University courses</td>
<td>2.96</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participating in a network of teachers (e.g., one organized by an outside agency/program or over the Internet)</td>
<td>2.94</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working informally to bring about change in your school</td>
<td>2.92</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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4One statement that involves teachers’ perspectives on administrators is grouped with the following section.
and what it does, captures teachers’ perceptions about how well their schools enacts its mission and vision. Distinct from the other statements, the lower the mean, the more positively teachers perceive the schools’ actions to be aligned with their philosophy. A clear majority of teachers (64%) either did not agree or only slightly agreed that a gap exists between espoused and enacted beliefs. This suggests that a majority of the teachers had positive perceptions of how well their schools aligned beliefs and actions.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Mean rating</th>
<th>Percent by rating level</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teachers share a vision of good teaching and a language for talking about it.</td>
<td>3.41</td>
<td>18.2 31.4 50.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers share an understanding of the school’s Jewish mission.</td>
<td>3.31</td>
<td>20.2 30.1 48.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There is a gap between what the school stands for and what it does.</td>
<td>2.24</td>
<td>64.8 19.3 16</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Professional culture**

While alignment of school-wide beliefs and associated actions are a foundational aspect of school climate and culture, another important facet is the opportunity for teachers to participate in a growth-oriented, collaborative professional culture. The next four statements, listed in Table 4, provide information about teachers’ perspectives of various dimensions related to the professional culture in their schools.

The first three statements garnered moderate to low levels of agreement. All involved specific ways that schools support the professional development needs of teachers. Less than half of the surveyed teachers very much or completely agreed that *teachers have regular opportunities for professional development* (44.2%), *teachers have regular times to meet with colleagues to work on issues regarding teaching/learning* (39%), and *my school takes the needs of beginning teachers seriously* (40.5%). The latter statement also fits well with the previous findings about the type and usefulness of professional development activities available to beginning teachers during their first year. Although researchers have pointed out that motivation and professionalization of the teaching workforce are dependent on creating opportunities for teacher promotion, advancement, and leadership in their field (e.g., Johnson et al., 2004), the survey reveals that just about one fifth of the day school teachers very much or completely agreed that their schools offered sufficient *opportunities for professional advancement (promotion)* (21.9%). This statement garnered the lowest level of agreement in this section on school climate and culture of the survey, suggesting that such opportunities for teacher leadership are relatively rare in Jewish day schools.
Satisfaction with school context
Schools strive to retain teachers since high levels of attrition cause disruptions on many levels. One factor that correlates with teachers’ decisions to stay in their school or leave is a sense of satisfaction (Johnson & Birkeland, 2003). Satisfaction with the professional climate and culture is one important factor; however, other school factors also influence teacher satisfaction. The following six statements provide a window into respondents’ sense of satisfaction with a range of aspects of their school contexts. These statements assess the teachers’ feelings about basic aspects of school life such as class size, facilities, and materials as well as aspects that are more abstract, such as feeling appreciated for their approach to teaching (for details, see Table 5 below).

The two highest levels of agreement within the section on school climate and culture are found within this subcategory. Approximately two thirds of the surveyed teachers very much or completely agree that the schools appreciated and supported my approach to teaching (66.1%). From a different angle, teachers also were satisfied with class size(s) (67%). We know, of course, that day schools typically have smaller classes than public schools which may account for the relatively high level of agreement with this statement.

Other dimensions that received significantly lower levels of agreement include teachers’ sense of satisfaction with materials and facilities. Approximately half of the respondents very much or completely agreed that teachers have adequate curricular resources and materials (51.3%) and

Table 4. Teachers’ perspectives on professional culture.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Mean rating</th>
<th>Percent by rating level</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teachers have regular opportunities for professional development.</td>
<td>3.15</td>
<td>29.2 26.7 44.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers have regular times to meet with colleagues to work on issues regarding teaching/learning.</td>
<td>3.05</td>
<td>31.9 29 39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My school takes the needs of beginning teachers seriously.</td>
<td>3.03</td>
<td>36.7 22.8 40.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am pleased with the opportunities for professional advancement (promotion) offered to educators at my school.</td>
<td>2.53</td>
<td>50 28.2 21.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5. Teachers’ satisfaction with school context.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Mean rating</th>
<th>Percent by rating level</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I feel that my school appreciates and supports my approach to teaching.</td>
<td>3.75</td>
<td>14.4 19.5 66.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am satisfied with my class size(s).</td>
<td>3.70</td>
<td>13 20.1 67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers have adequate curricular resources and materials.</td>
<td>3.48</td>
<td>15.9 32.9 51.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The school’s physical facility adequately supports the instructional program.</td>
<td>3.39</td>
<td>23.9 22.6 53.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am satisfied with the policies and practices for assigning students to classes or sections for instruction.</td>
<td>3.19</td>
<td>25.6 31.3 43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers are not unduly burdened with paperwork and noninstructional responsibilities.</td>
<td>3.05</td>
<td>31.3 30.8 38</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
that the school’s physical facility adequately supports the instructional program (53.6%). Despite relatively high levels of satisfaction with class size, considerably fewer teachers were satisfied with the policies and practices for assigning students to classes or sections for instruction (43%). This suggests that while teachers may be satisfied with the size of their class(es), they would like more influence on the ways that students are assigned to those classes. Finally, only a moderate number of teachers very much or completely agreed with the statement, teachers are not unduly burdened with paperwork and noninstructional responsibilities (38%). Like most teachers, day school teachers are asked to serve multiple roles and carry out a variety of tasks, beyond classroom instruction, which may involve time-consuming bureaucratic demands.

**Perspectives on school administration**

Teachers’ professional lives are strongly influenced by school leadership. A fourth question used a set of seven prompts to understand teachers’ perspectives regarding school administration. The question asked “Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements about your school administrator(s).” For this set of prompts, respondents used the same 5-point Likert scale. We include one prompt from the previous section in the Table below because it involves the respondents’ perspectives on administrators (see Table 6 for a list of the eight statements).

Experienced teachers value the latitude to do what they believe is in the best interests of their students. This fits with their sense of professional autonomy and responsibility, although it may work against developing a collaborative culture and a sense of collective responsibility for student learning. A strong majority of respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the statement I can usually count on my school administration to provide me with the freedom to do a

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Mean rating</th>
<th>Percent by rating level</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I can usually count on my school administration to provide me with the</td>
<td>4.04</td>
<td>9 9.4 81.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>freedom to do a good job.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I can usually count on my administration to support me in my relationship</td>
<td>3.99</td>
<td>11.4 9.4 79.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>with parents.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I can usually count on my administration to appreciate my best efforts.</td>
<td>3.95</td>
<td>10.2 13.9 76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administrators support and value teachers’ work.*</td>
<td>3.74</td>
<td>12.1 23.4 64.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My school administration provides a sense of direction for instruction in</td>
<td>3.58</td>
<td>17.3 23 59.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the school.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My school administration seeks teacher input on decisions directly affecting</td>
<td>3.55</td>
<td>18.9 21.8 59.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>curriculum or instruction.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The school administration usually follows through on discipline problems</td>
<td>3.45</td>
<td>17.7 28.9 53.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>that I bring to their attention.</td>
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<tr>
<td>I consider the administration in my school effective.</td>
<td>3.44</td>
<td>19.6 25.3 55.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*This statement was rated using a slightly different Likert scale than the others in this Table: 1 = I do not agree at all, 2 = I slightly agree, 3 = I somewhat agree, 4 = I very much agree, 5 = I completely agree.
good job (81.6%). This suggests that most teachers felt that administrators do not interfere with their instructional decisions and actions.

At the same time, Jewish day schools tend to have a highly educated and involved parent body. So day school teachers frequently need administrators to back them up in their relationships with parents. Teachers rated school administrators highly for this aspect of their work. Indeed a majority of teachers agreed or strongly agreed with the statement *I can usually count on my administration to support me in my relationship with parents* (79.1%).

Two of the statements concerned teachers’ sense of being appreciated or valued by administrators. Approximately three quarters of the teachers agreed or strongly agreed that *I can usually count on my administration to appreciate my best efforts* (76%) and nearly two thirds very much or completely agreed that *administrators support and value teachers’ work* (64.5%). These reveal that a majority of teachers in the survey felt generally appreciated or valued by the administration at their school. Somewhat fewer teachers agreed or strongly agreed that *school administration seeks teacher input on decisions directly affecting curriculum or instruction* (59.2%). This is one tangible way that administrators demonstrate their recognitions of and appreciation for teachers’ expertise, so it is notable that teachers rated this specific survey item less favorably than the more general one indicating *I can usually count on my administration to appreciate my best efforts* (76%).

School administrators are often expected to be instructional leaders, although this may vary across schools and often depends on whether the administrator is the head of school, department chair, or principal. Less than two thirds of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that *my school administration provides a sense of direction for instruction in the school* (59.8). Another key role that administrators play is that of providing support for discipline issues. A slight majority of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that *the school administration usually follows through on discipline problems that I bring to their attention* (53.5%). Perhaps these two more moderate levels of agreement help explain why only a slight majority of teachers surveyed agreed or strongly agreed that *I consider the administration in my school effective* (55.1%). While teachers may appreciate the freedom to do their job well, there are other aspects of administrative leadership that teachers seem to take into account when evaluating an administrator’s overall effectiveness.

**Implications for conditions in Jewish day schools**

The data presented above offers a mixed picture of teachers’ experiences in Jewish day schools. Overall, teachers’ perspectives are positive, yet there is clearly room for improvement. Teachers seem to feel most positive about their relationships with their administrators and express a general sense of being appreciated and supported. Yet, there is a troubling gap between
teachers’ relatively strong sense of satisfaction with school administration overall and the weak assessment of certain critical indicators related to a productive professional culture.

In a previous analysis of a small sample of teachers, we found a similar disconnect. Teachers in that study indicated a general sense of happiness and satisfaction even when their relationships with principals were limited to emotional support (Birkeland & Tamir, 2013). In other words, teachers are often happy to settle for a principal who lacks educational knowledge, but is pleasant and supportive. This raises concerns in light of research which shows that emotional support from administrators had no statistically significant effect on teacher retention, while instructional support was critical to teachers’ long-term commitment to teaching (Smith and Ingersoll, 2003).

Every beginning teacher deserves ongoing support and targeted guidance. Induction and mentoring are not just for beginning teachers who struggle, but are widely considered in the United States and in the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries as a basic intervention critical for retaining and developing new teachers and launching them on a successful teaching career. This study reveals that in the many Jewish day schools sampled here, less than half of all teachers report participating in formal induction programs and a similar percentage of teachers believe that their school takes the learning needs of new teachers seriously. This is particularly striking since one third of the sample are graduates of the Jewish New Teacher Project which specifically focuses on new teacher support and development. Jewish day schools would do well to attend to this aspect of teacher development and consider the systems and structures required to orient, support, and develop new teachers (Johnson, 2004).

Besides attending to the unique learning needs of new teachers, Jewish day schools must attend to the learning needs of all teachers. All teachers need and value regular opportunities to work with colleagues on issues of teaching and learning. This can be a particular challenge in small day schools, where there may be only one teacher for a grade or content area. Since this kind of embedded, ongoing professional learning is highly rated in terms of its usefulness, Jewish day schools may need to think critically and creatively about how to create the structures and professional culture for ongoing teacher learning across career stages both within and across schools.

Finally, a striking finding is the lack of opportunities for professional advancement on the part of Jewish day school teachers. The teachers who responded to the survey represent a particularly committed group of Jewish education professionals. Those who attended the DeLeT programs at Brandeis University and the Hebrew Union College as well as the masters programs in Jewish education at the Jewish Theological Seminar and Stern College’s undergraduate teacher preparation track have specifically chosen to work in the field of Jewish education and are driven by a strong sense of mission and purpose. In
order to capitalize on the commitments and capacities that these teachers bring, Jewish day schools must provide opportunities for professional advancement throughout their careers as day school teachers.

**Recommendations**

Jewish day schools would benefit from providing professional learning opportunities embedded in teachers’ ongoing work. This research provides evidence that day school teachers value such opportunities, which fits with research in general education. Clearly some day schools do offer ongoing professional development. Extending such opportunities for teacher learning may not only increase teachers’ sense of satisfaction, but also improve their teaching.

Developing new forms of teacher leadership can also expand the responsibilities of accomplished day school teachers without requiring them to leave classroom teaching. Schools with a strong collaborative culture offer venues for experienced teachers to share their practical knowledge and contribute to instructional improvement. For instance, effective veteran teachers can mentor new teachers, lead grade-level teams, facilitate professional learning communities, to name a few forms of teacher leadership that are increasingly popular (e.g., Darling-Hammond, Bullmaster, & Cobb, 1995). Developing the structures and culture to promote ongoing teacher learning not only advances professional development, it also stimulates growth and renewal on the part of midcareer and veteran teachers. Transforming accomplished teachers into teacher leaders rather than spending school funds on outside consultants builds capacity, strengthens teacher retention and satisfaction, and has the potential to improve both teaching and learning.

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