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**A STUDY OF SELECTED HEBREW HIGH SCHOOLS IN
CHERRY HILL, NEW JERSEY TO DETERMINE
HOW THEY CONFRONT THE PROBLEM OF
ASSIMILATION IN THE AMERICAN
JEWISH COMMUNITY**

by
Linda Friedman

A THESIS

**Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the
Master of Arts Degree in the Graduate Division
of Rowan University
1997**

Approved by _____

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ABSTRACT

Linda Friedman. *A Study of Selected Hebrew High Schools in Cherry Hill, New Jersey to Determine How They Confront the Problem of Assimilation in the American Jewish Community*, 1997, Thesis Advisor: Dr. Steven Shapiro, Graduate Program in Public Relations, Rowan University.

This study examines the goals and curricula of two supplementary Hebrew high schools and questions whether they changed their focus after the release of the 1990 Council of Jewish Federations' National Jewish Population Survey, which cited a 52% rate of intermarriage since 1985. The study investigates the synagogues' response to the reported 52% rate of intermarriage, as well as the response of the south Jersey Jewish community as a whole. It probes successful strategies for synagogues and their staff to increase the retention rate of their post bar/bat mitzvah students, through their confirmation.

By means of interviews with rabbis, principals, teachers, students, parents of students, and the head of the Department of Jewish Education of the Jewish Federation of Southern New Jersey, the study explores the relationship between additional post bar/bat mitzvah Jewish education and resulting student attitudes towards interdating and

intermarriage. Results of the interviews were analyzed, using information gleaned from national studies and surveys.

Education is an effective tool for producing young adults with positive attitudes toward their Jewish identity but not necessarily young adults who reject interdating. Youths' attitudes toward interdating correlate strongly with those of their parents; many parents skirt the issue because they lack the skills and knowledge to deal with it. Therefore, communities and synagogues need to take more initiative and direct more resources toward educating the multi-generational family in order to adequately confront the problem of assimilation.

MINI ABSTRACT

Linda Friedman. A Study of Selected Hebrew High Schools in Cherry Hill, New Jersey to Determine How They Confront the Problem of Assimilation in the American Jewish Community, 1997, Thesis Advisor: Dr. Steven Shapiro, Graduate Program in Public Relations, Rowan University.

This study examines whether two Hebrew high schools changed their focus since the release of the 1990 Council of Jewish Federations' National Jewish Population Survey, which cited a 52% rate of intermarriage since 1985. From interviews with synagogue professionals, students, and parents of students, the study concludes that extensive education produces students with strong Jewish identities but not necessarily teens who reject interdating. More family education is indicated.

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CHAPTER 1

BACKGROUND

In 1990, the Council of Jewish Federations conducted a national Jewish population survey. It found significant changes in the social, demographic, and religious structure of the American Jewish community since 1970, when the last Jewish population survey was conducted. One of the most threatening findings was that the rate of intermarriage between 1985 and 1990 increased to an alarming 52% (up from nine per cent in 1965).¹ Since then, the organized Jewish community focused on assimilation and education as core, survival issues.

Assimilation is the process by which one cultural or national group loses its identity and becomes part of another group.² For Jews, assimilation means losing their Jewish identity and becoming absorbed in gentile society. Although long a part of Jewish history, until close to the middle of the 20th century, assimilation affected only a small part of the Jewish population.

Jews are a people rooted in a religion. There were many periods in their history when they were persecuted for practicing their religion. Depending on the country they inhabited and its ruler, anti-Semitism resulted in restricted employment opportunities. Brutal persecution often caused Jews to convert on the surface, while secretly remaining Jews. The lure of a better social or economic position during the Middle Ages enticed many Jews to convert.

In the mid 19th century, a strong attachment to Germany's soil, language, and culture was the compelling cause of assimilation, but during the Holocaust, the descendants of those who surrendered their Jewish identity found that even the most assimilated Jews were singled out and sent to death camps.

For thousands of years, Jews lived in restricted areas because of social discrimination and economic pressures. Being restricted forced them into close proximity to parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins, with little distraction from the outside world. Since Judaism is primarily practiced in the home, it lent itself to a ghetto environment, though often teaching and observing had to be done secretly. In the United States, social anti-Semitism caused much assimilation during the 19th and 20th centuries.

After World War II, American society grew more tolerant of Jews. The Holocaust (which annihilated one third of world Jewry) and the creation of the state of Israel in 1948 caused many Jews to reaffirm their Jewish identity. As they improved their economic status, they became part of the American establishment. Today, Jews live in an open society and the educated middle class has drawn them out of a ghettoized Jewish community and into the mainstream of American life, where forces of assimilation are quiet, but powerful. One of these forces is the change in the core family - birthrates are low, grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins often reside far away, many more women work outside the home, and divorce increasingly occurs. Changes in the Jewish family echo changes in the American family in general but the impact of these changes is greater because of the small size of the Jewish community. The close family ties, high educational values and strong ethics and morals that are the soul of Judaism have begun

to unravel. *Without strong family support systems, more and more Jews are being drawn away from Jewish education and Jewish culture to a world that is vastly more secular.*

Assimilation reflects not just a physical loss in numbers, but a spiritual loss as well. For Jews who practice their religion, Judaism is daily the most important thing in their lives and they want to marry people who share the same sacred beliefs. Practicing Jews experience a sense of community as well as a spiritual connection to their heritage which is magnified each Friday evening when they sit down to a Shabbat (Sabbath) meal after a busy week. The dinner hour is magically transformed into a prolonged period of intimacy between family members (and often, friends). Beginning with the recitation of required blessings, the family sits around the dinner table in the glow of candles, sharing a sense of being surrounded by holiness. The rituals provide a sanctified family framework through which children are taught that even their parents acknowledge something greater than themselves. Sharing this heritage with children shapes within them the spirits of a deep tradition - one whose goals include nourishing their souls, creating communities, and improving the world. Putting aside one night a week for family and self, for reflection and hope, is a tradition that instills Jewish family values and promotes Jewish survival.

Also fading away with assimilation is the observance of the Jewish dietary laws, or kashrut. The laws of kashrut promote Jewish survival for practicing Jews because they teach self-discipline. When youngsters are conditioned to think twice about what they eat, they tend to consider all choices more carefully, including their choice of a mate.

Any religious group that cares about sustaining itself cares about how the next generation is raised. Since Judaism is almost entirely home-based, and homes are (most

often) made by married couples, a Jew cannot lead a fully Jewish life if the people in his or her home are not Jewish.

Jewish continuity is an issue of concern for communities and the Jewish constituencies within them. It is imperative to find ways of attracting present and future generations to Judaism without making a past history of persecution the motivation for being Jewish. Like secular law, Jewish law establishes criteria for unacceptable behavior. However, in addition, Jewish law legislates good behavior. Jews are commanded to take positive action to right a wrong - to better the world and mankind. Jewish institutions must affirm all that is positive about Judaism. Education is the key to that affirmation.

Before the Holocaust, Hitler set the stage for the final solution by using propaganda to turn the world against the Jews. In the United States today, discrimination still exists. Most Jews are ill-equipped to counter the bullying of children, random acts of vandalism, anti-Semitic speakers on college campuses, and the news media's frequent denunciation of Israel.³ Education is imperative for understanding these biases and combating them effectively.

Growing up as a child of Holocaust survivors, the author always considered her existence both an accident and a miracle. Many more could have survived this dark period in the history of mankind if the Jewish communities of the free world were more knowledgeable and better organized. In the 52 years since the end of World War II, Jews did not reproduce sufficiently to replace the six million murdered during the Holocaust. They represent under 2% of the country's population (under 6 million) and .0025% of the

population world-wide (approx. 12 million).⁴ But, what Hitler did not accomplish by murder, Jews are willingly doing to themselves today through assimilation.

Jews in America, no longer persecuted and forced to practice their religion secretly, do not feel threatened. They have opted to become more secular in order to conform to the norms of American society; they are more accepted into that society today than ever before.

Because there are almost two billion Christians in the world⁵ and because America is largely Christian, Christians do not perceive intermarriage as a threat to the survival of their faith. But Judaism teaches that every life makes a difference. Therefore, every loss is of concern to its people. To committed Jews, intermarriage is usually a death knell. The children of these marriages are overwhelmingly likely not to identify themselves as Jews (only 25% are raised Jewish).⁶

The losses through intermarriage are staggering, according to the 1990 National Jewish Population Survey. But the survey and other studies undertaken since 1990 also found that intermarriage decreased as the number of years of Jewish education increased.⁷

Jewish people have a visceral desire not to be the last generation of Jews. They are waking up to the realization that their traditions and laws cannot be transmitted by osmosis. Through community federations and synagogue religious education programs, they are renewing efforts to pass their heritage to the next generation.

The bar/bat mitzvah ceremony at the age of 13 signifies the young adult's acceptance of Jewish responsibilities. Of the 41% of American Jews who belong to synagogues,⁸ many join primarily so that their children will become b'nai mitzvah.⁹ To most

youngsters, becoming a bar/bat mitzvah means a four year commitment to studying about Judaism. The bar/bat mitzvah ceremony used to signify an end to formal Jewish education, but a new community and national effort exists toward continuity in the form of Hebrew high school, an additional three year commitment through tenth grade. During these years, children start to question everything, including their identity, and need added educational support to help them make informed decisions. Hebrew high school expands the learning opportunities of young adults so they will turn into committed Jewish people.

This study determined whether post bar/bat mitzvah Jewish education affects the attitudes and behaviors of young adults and their parents toward Jewish continuity.

¹ Kosmin, B. (1990). *Highlights of the 1990 CJF national Jewish population survey*, 28. New York: Council of Jewish Federations.

² Posner, R. (Ed.). (1982). *Junior Judaica encyclopedia Judaica for youth, I*. Jerusalem: Keter Publishing.

³ CAMERA on Campus. (1997, Spring). 8 (2), 1-16. Boston: Committee for Accuracy in Middle East Reporting in America.

⁴ Strength in numbers. (1997, February 28). *Jerusalem Post*, page unknown.

⁵ Strength in numbers. (1997, February 28). *Jerusalem Post*, page unknown.

⁶ Beiser, V. (1996, September 5). Intermarried with children. *Jerusalem Report*, VII(5), 29.

⁷ Fishman, S.B. & Goldstein, A. (1993, March). *When they are grown they will not depart: Jewish education and the Jewish behavior of American adults* (Research report 8), 12. Waltham, MA: Brandeis University.

⁸ Kosmin, B. (1990). *Highlights of the 1990 CJF national Jewish population survey*, 53. New York: Council of Jewish Federations.

⁹ Wertheimer, J. (Ed.). (1996). *Conservative synagogues and their members - Highlights of the North American survey of 1995-96*. 33. New York: Jewish Theological Seminary of America.

CHAPTER 2

TOPIC STATEMENT

A Study of Selected Hebrew High Schools in Cherry Hill, New Jersey to Determine How They Confront the Problem of Assimilation in the American Jewish Community.

METHODOLOGY

Two Cherry Hill, New Jersey Conservative Hebrew high schools (grades 7-10) were the focus of this study, which analyzed the attitudes of rabbis, principals, teachers, students, and parents of students toward Jewish continuity. The author sought to determine the relationship between additional Jewish education and resulting observance levels, as well as attitudes towards interdating/intermarriage. The study examined the schools' goals and curricula, and questioned whether the schools changed their focus since the Council of Jewish Federations (CJF) announced its findings in 1990. The study examined the synagogues' response to the reported 52% rate of intermarriage, as well as the response of the south Jersey Jewish community as a whole. The author explored ways in which the Hebrew high school message could be more effective - how a synagogue and its staff could increase the retention rate of its post bar/bat mitzvah students, through their confirmation, which should, in turn, lead to higher levels of observance and lower incidences of inter-faith dating and marriage.

After extensive reading of relevant literature, five sets of questionnaires were developed as the basis for interviews with two rabbis, two principals, eight teachers, eight

students, and eight parents of students, as well as one interview with the head of the Department of Jewish Education of the Jewish Federation of Southern New Jersey (interview questions can be found in Appendix 1-Appendix 6). In most cases, face-to-face interviews were conducted. However, for convenience, two interviews (both with teachers) were conducted by telephone. The interview process required 29 interview sessions. Interviews with students and their parents required 30-60 minutes each, while the duration of all others was 60-75 minutes. Because not all tentative respondents had flexible schedules, an accidental sample was used. Twenty three students were on the roster for Congregation Beth-El's confirmation class, with 12 Hebrew high school teachers. Temple Beth Sholom had 38 registered, and 16 teachers in its high school. The results of the interviews were analyzed, using information gleaned from national studies and surveys reviewed below for comparison.

At Savitz Library, Rowan University, Glassboro, NJ, a search of Dissertation Abstracts On-line, January 1993 - December 1996, generated no related research papers. However, one of the author's other sources, *High School Resource Guide for Jewish Educators*,¹ listed a 1995 doctoral dissertation dealing with policies and programs related to retention in Hebrew high school. Several attempts were made to obtain a copy of the dissertation. The author sent an empty disc, along with a self-addressed, stamped envelope, to the dissertation writer's home, after an encouraging conversation with her. Several follow-up phone attempts failed to produce the doctoral dissertation.

The Savitz Library ERIC Index (1982 to current) yielded no related articles. Key words and phrases used were: retention, religious education, Jewish; Jewish schools;

Jews, education; religious education, Jewish weekday schools; teachers, Jewish schools; and Jewish studies.

A similar search of the Education Index (same key words), June, 1993 through December, 1996, produced lists totaling 109 articles. Of these, 20 were applicable to the thesis topic. The author obtained copies of the relevant articles at Gratz College's library, Philadelphia, PA.

From Yaffa Fuchs, the religious school principal at Cherry Hill's Congregation Beth El, the author acquired a 1996-97 high school handbook and a resource guide for Jewish educators.

A phone conversation with Dr. Leora Isaacs, Director of Research and Evaluation at the Jewish Education Service of North America, Inc., New York City, led the author to Brandeis University. In response to her request (and \$13.00), the Cohen Center for Modern Jewish Studies of Brandeis University supplied two related research reports.

Judy Kahn, Director of the Jewish Federation of Southern New Jersey's Department of Jewish Education, provided a related article, a book, several studies/surveys, and a handbook of Jewish continuity.

The author obtained a book and several applicable newspaper and magazine articles from Rabbi Albert Lewis of Temple Beth Shalom, Cherry Hill, NJ.

Nancy Messenger, of the Auerbach Central Agency for Jewish Education, Philadelphia, PA, suggested resources such as Gratz Library and the American Jewish Committee for additional appropriate literature.

From Francine Richter, educational director of Kerem Torah Community Hebrew

High School in Vineland, NJ, came a list of on-line sites relevant to Jewish teens.

Rabbi Steven Wernick of Temple Beth Shalom, Cherry Hill, NJ, provided two Jewish population studies and a 1996-97 Hebrew high school handbook.

The author searched daily and weekly newspapers, current magazines and book reviews, for information related to the topic. One book review and six articles were pertinent.

Finally, an inspection of the author's personal library yielded a set of encyclopedias, two books, and two articles for this research project. The following pages summarize these relevant findings.

REPORTS, STUDIES and SURVEYS

■ *Conservative Synagogues and Their Members - Highlights of the North American Survey of 1995-96* presented findings from five distinct, yet inter-related, research projects: The CJF National Jewish Population Survey of 1990, a congregational survey, a membership survey, a survey of recent bar/bat mitzvah celebrants, and two ethnographic studies. The research focused on self-identified Conservative Jews affiliated with synagogues.²

■ *The Draft Report for Jewish Continuity Commission Meeting on December 13, 1993* discussed how the committee came into being after the publication of the 1990 National Jewish Population Survey and the Federation of Southern New Jersey's Demographic Study of 1992. It emphasized the need for a joint effort between federation and synagogues, discussed the purpose of the steering committee and subcommittees, and reported on their findings.³

- *Highlights of the 1990 CJF National Jewish Population Survey* interpreted what being Jewish meant to the respondents, and how, in practice, they manifested their Jewish connections. Self-definition was the criteria for Jewish identity in the national survey. The study examined this identity, along with age and sex, origins of the population, education, employment, household type, geography and marriage.⁴
- *Jewish Involvement of the Baby Boom Generation* characterized two groups of young adults from among the six age groups identified in the 1990 CJF National Jewish Population Survey. Mordechai Rimer and Elihu Katz defined the group's involvement as a function of demographic and socio-economic factors, variations in Jewish affiliation, and types of Jewish education.⁵
- *Portraits of Schooling: A Survey and an Analysis of Supplementary Schooling in UAHC Congregations* was conducted by the Reform movement to determine curriculum, course content, and teachers' knowledge in its 600 schools. A recommendation was made for the religious school to be embedded as part of a lifelong learning process, from cradle to grave.⁶
- *Teach Your Children When They Are Young: Contemporary Jewish Education in the United States*, Sylvia Barack Fishman and Alice Goldstein focused on current levels of formal and informal Jewish education among American Jewish children, related to the denomination of the homes in which they are raised, religious composition of the household, level of ritual practice in the home, and the Jewish education of their parents. They used data from the 1990 National Jewish Population Survey.⁷

■ *When They Are Grown They Will Not Depart: Jewish Education and the Jewish Behavior of American Adults* reported on the relationship between Jewish education and Jewish attitudes and lifestyles among adults and explored the levels of formal and informal Jewish education among American Jewish children in diverse types of households. Sylvia Barack Fishman and Alice Goldstein, backed by data from the 1990 National Jewish Population Survey, presented evidence that assimilation and intermarriage do not occur on a random basis. The extent and type of formal Jewish education are clearly related to levels of Jewish affiliation and activism.⁸

■ *The 1991 Jewish Population Survey of Southern New Jersey* collected data about Jewish households and Jewish individuals in Burlington, Camden, and Gloucester counties in order to help community leadership serve the needs of the southern New Jersey community. It estimated the Jewish population of these three counties in 1991-92. It identified critical needs of people and gathered demographic data of persons unknown to the organized community, as well as compared data on those individuals already associated with the Jewish Federation of Southern New Jersey.⁹

FEDERATION

■ "The Central Agency for Jewish Education Looks in the Mirror," *Jewish Education*, reflected upon the first nine decades of the century. Alvin Schiff reviewed the agency's first effort, the Bureau of Jewish Education of New York, the 20th century's first community effort on behalf of Jewish education. Schiff also discussed the principles that guided the bureau's activity. Its primary function was to make Jewish education a community responsibility.¹⁰

■ In “The Federation Role in Jewish Education,” *Jewish Education*, Stephen Solender expressed the need for a partnership between Jewish federations and synagogues, with more intensified planning in congregational schools and bureaus of Jewish education. Synagogues have limited funds, a cooperative effort would attract more qualified educators and offer better salaries.¹¹

SUPPLEMENTARY SCHOOL

■ In *Jewish Education*, Barbara Elish answered negatively to “Should Jewish Supplementary Religious Schools be Like the Public Schools?” She emphasized creating “feeling Jews” first – ones who developed positive Jewish attitudes and a sense of belonging, and then, producing “educated, thinking Jews.” Miss Elish wants more informal methods of evaluation, with standards of achievement to be defined in the confines of the feeling Jew. Students should feel that religious school is a safe place to be. They should be encouraged to work in groups, since socializing is one of the goals of Jewish schools. In addition, unlike public schools, the voluntary nature of supplementary schools makes it difficult to enforce rules of attendance.¹²

■ In “Needed: Bold and Creative Planning,” *Jewish Education*, Sylvia Ettenberg strongly urged supplementary schools to reorganize and plan for the education of parents and families, to allocate sufficient funds to retrain teachers and pay them better, and to provide programs for the gifted and disabled.¹³

■ “Any Change Will be for the Better: On the Future of Supplementary Schooling,” *Jewish Education*, highlighted the results of a three year study of Jewish supplementary schooling in Greater New York. Shimon Frost recommended a pilot program of

community-based, learning-oriented supplementary school, as opposed to a synagogue-run school, because little learning is taking place at synagogue affiliated schools.¹⁴

■ Ben Zion Kogen, principal of Los Angeles Hebrew High School, wrote about a program at his school structured for the students and their parents in “lahhs - the place for teens to be...,” *The Messenger*. It urges all to explore the texts and language of their tradition. Students actually earn high school credit for their work. The program is successful in attracting and retaining students.¹⁵

■ In “Overcoming the Shortcomings of Limited Time,” *Jewish Education*, Lali Ray recommended an intensive summer school, alternating formal and informal minimesters. She advocated developing teachers whose goal is to share their love of Judaism, serving as role models, and placing more emphasis on teaching Hebrew as the language which links all Jews and all generations.¹⁶

■ A crisis of faith in the educational effectiveness of supplementary schools exists, according to Dr. Samuel Schafler in “Needed: A New Vision for Supplementary Schools,” *Jewish Education*. At least two more years of supplementary school should be required after bar/bat mitzvah. Teachers must be obliged to further their own education, educators and principals need to be better evaluated, and much more funding must be provided from federations.¹⁷

■ In “The Jewish Supplementary School - A System in Need of Change,” *Jewish Education*, Alvin Schiff reviewed a three year study by the Board of Jewish Education of Greater New York to determine what aspects of Jewish supplementary education must be improved. The study recommended changing the thrust of synagogue schools from

supplementary schooling for pupils to Jewish family education, maximizing formal and informal learning time, training all Jewish educational professionals to become more effective educators, and providing full-time career opportunities for educators.¹⁸

■ Elliot Schwartz noted that, historically, Jewish education was religiously oriented, was home-based, and was fostered by the Jewish community in "Needed: Regional Community Congregational Schools," *Jewish Education*. Because some of these imperatives were abandoned, Jewish education today is devoid of serious content. But, the community could use modern technology to produce TV and video programs of religious and cultural interest, stimulating discussions and enriching Jewish knowledge. He suggested that federations take responsibility for the survival of a healthy American Jewish community.¹⁹

■ Miriam Shapiro explained why "The Jewish Supplementary School Needs a Community," *Jewish Education*. A supportive community would help students interpret and experience the Jewish knowledge they acquire. A community created for everyone, not just the students, should not replace a course of studies but should give it the framework to succeed.²⁰

TEACHERS AND PRINCIPALS

■ In "Teachers and Principals - the Crucial Link to the Bureaus," *Jewish Education*, Alvin Schiff stated the eight criteria which characterize a profession. They include rigorous preparation, entry requirements, and evaluation, certification procedures, peer defined standards of practice, and increased responsibility assigned to increased

competence. Central agencies or bureaus could serve as advocates for improving the image and working conditions of educators, and increasing their earning capacity.

Community lay leaders should form think tanks and seek help from public relations firms in developing specific communication techniques.²¹

■ In "Jewish Educators vs. Mixed Marriages," *Jewish Education*, Allen Maller described mixed marriages as a "hemorrhage in the body of American Jewry" because they result in a doubling of the divorce rate and produce children of whom only one quarter will be raised as Jews. He recommended that Jewish educators plan four lessons a year for five years on continuity and interdating, starting when students are ten.²²

■ Shoshana Silberman cited results of a 1981 survey in "Jewish Teachers' Expectations of Their Principals," *Jewish Education*. She found teachers' first priority to be creating a viable curriculum. Other priorities were: providing special needs, promoting the sharing of ideas among the faculty, and developing a system of accessibility for books, supplies and equipment. Teachers appreciated principals' support when faced with student confrontation and also admired principals' ability to be open professionally.²³

JEWISH EDUCATION AND CURRICULUM

■ "The 1961 Mission Statement," *Ramah: The Magazine*, prepared at Camp Ramah in the Poconos, reflected the educational vision of some of the pioneering leadership of the Ramah Movement. Teaching ethical values, studying Torah, connecting to the people of Israel, and strengthening Jewish life in America are among the educational goals included in the statement.²⁴

- *Beth-El Hebrew High School Student Handbook, 1996-1997* reviewed the course selection for the fall and spring semesters and listed the teachers for each course.²⁵
- *Temple Beth Shalom Religious School BeST Handbook, 1996-1997* reviewed the course selection for the fall and spring semesters and listed the teachers for each course.²⁶
- Robert Leiter reviewed a newly introduced curriculum designed by Dr. Saul Wachs of Gratz College in Philadelphia, PA. He reported in "Never Too Young," *Jewish Exponent*, that Wachs does not believe prayer and spirituality have played a large role in children's Jewish education. Many Jews have sought spirituality in groups such as Hare Krishna and Jews for Jesus. Dr. Wachs contends that all humans are naturally spiritual beings but need guidance in dealing with this trait.²⁷
- "The Ideal Conservative Jew: Eight Behavioral Expectations," *United Synagogue Review*, stated that the Conservative synagogue's challenge is for its educators to create Jews who will live as Jews. According to Rabbi Jerome Epstein, living Jewishly includes participating in synagogue activities, studying text at least one hour per week, incorporating Jewish values into daily living, and adding a minimum of three new mitzvot each year. Other behavioral expectations are: doing something to relieve human suffering, considering how individual decisions affect others in the Jewish community, increasing connections to Israel, and increasing knowledge of Hebrew.²⁸
- Children need between 3,000-4000 hours of Jewish schooling before education significantly impacts their Jewish identity, according to Norman Friedman in "On the 'Non-Effects' of Jewish Education on Most Students: A Critique," *Jewish Education*. Jewish day schools and some supplementary Hebrew high schools reach this threshold.²⁹

■ The *High School Resource Guide for Jewish Educators and Rabbis, Youth Directors, Federations, Lay Leaders and Parents Working with Jewish Adolescents* featured programs, research, task force reports, reports of Jewish youth and directions in Jewish education. Diana Yacobi compiled the data. She provided a summary of educators' findings regarding high school-aged Jewish youth and described successful high school and youth programs from coast to coast.³⁰

■ Although the 1990 National Jewish Population Study indicated education is the only serious antidote to stemming the 52% rate of intermarriage, Bernard Reisman noted that the lifestyles of fourth and fifth generation American Jews need to be evaluated differently than those of first and second generation American Jews in "Needed: A Paradigm Shift in Jewish Education," *Jewish Education*.³¹

■ Alvin Schiff lamented that American Jewry probably will not disappear, but its numbers, strength, and vitality may be greatly diminished, in "Toward the Year 2000 - Condition of Jewish Life: Implications for Jewish Education," *Jewish Education*. He suggested that the Jewish community shape its destiny by being more proactive in dealing with intermarriage and Jewish identity; if it reinforces Jewish life, then the heart of the community may remain strong.³²

■ In "Impact of Varieties of Jewish Education Upon Jewish Identity - An Intergenerational Perspective," *Contemporary Jewry*, Steven Cohen cited a direct correlation between amount of Jewish education and Jewish behaviors. He found that, with the exception of Sunday school, all forms of Jewish education contribute to higher

levels of Jewish involvement. Also, increased years of education appear to diminish the likelihood of intermarriage.³³

ASSIMILATION, INTERMARRIAGE, AND CONTINUITY

■ *Planning for Jewish Continuity: Synagogue-Federation Collaboration* highlighted data about successful models of joint efforts between synagogues and federations across the country. In handbook form, its programs will help local communities address the challenges of continuity more effectively by enhancing synagogue-federation endeavors.³⁴

■ “Strength in Numbers,” *Jerusalem Post*, posed the threats facing Judaism because of its dwindling size.³⁵

■ Steven Bayme reviewed a new book in the *Jewish Exponent*. Rabbi Samuel Dresner discusses the decline of the nuclear family and how that has bred poverty, illiteracy and delinquent behavior in “*Can Jewish Families Survive Pagan America?*” The book notes that, unlike Hollywood which has glorified single-parent families, Judaism possesses a powerful message of building family and serves as a corrective to the excessive individualism that characterizes so much of contemporary America.³⁶

■ In “Intermarried with Children,” *Jerusalem Report*, Vine Eisner discussed how gentile spouses and the children of their marriages are radically changing the anatomy of the Jewish community. With mixed marriages commonplace, the American Jewish community differs on whether and how it should deal with the intermarried. Due to lack of funds, a minimal amount of money is spent on outreach programs.³⁷

■ Alan Dershowitz defended secular Judaism in *The Vanishing American Jew*. He asserted that Judaism is a civilization and a culture, as well as a religion, so Jews who do

not practice their Judaism are as authentic as religious Jews.³⁸

■ In "The Last Word," *Jerusalem Report*, Hirsch Goodman analyzed the findings of the 1990 National Jewish Population Survey and said that by assimilating, Jews are accomplishing what Hitler did not quite manage to do.³⁹

■ In *Forward*, Yaffa Klugerman pondered, "Where Have All the Children Gone?" The average American Jewish family is comprised of 2.2 people. Families with four or more children make up less than 3% of the Jewish population.⁴⁰

■ "Assimilation and Jewish Identity," *Ha'Am*, reviewed the findings of the 1990 National Jewish Population Survey in relation to college dating. Julie Gruenbaum noted that at UCLA, approximately 90 percent of the Jewish students are not involved in the campus Jewish community.⁴¹

■ *Ultimate Issues* featured Dennis Prager's response to a non-Jewish college student in "Are Jews' Objections to Inter-marriage Racist?" He explained that Judaism is not a race and anyone can become Jewish. Jews who object to intermarriage do so because they want Judaism to survive. Prager does not think Judaism will die out; he fears it will become irrelevant.⁴²

■ In *A Certain People - American Jews and their Lives Today*, Charles Silberman gave positive projections for the Jewish community.⁴³ (He has since re-evaluated his position.)

■ Jack Wertheimer, Charles Liebman and Steven Cohen discussed "How to Save American Jews," *Commentary*. The Jewish community might need to redefine what it means by Jewish continuity. Rather than targeting the uncommitted, communities should direct their focus and dollars to their most dependable members.⁴⁴

■ In "Why You Should Bother Being Jewish," *Forward*, David Wolpe described Judaism as worth the effort because it teaches humanity how to grow its souls. But, if Jews do not raise their children with this tradition, their children's goodness will have no roots.⁴⁵

JEWISH INTERNET CONNECTIONS FOR STUDENTS

The author visited four web sites and one site on America Online.

■ *Jewish Community* offers information on Israel, holidays and spirituality, family, arts and culture, food, and youth. It also includes "Ask a Rabbi," for more information.⁴⁶

■ *Virtual Jerusalem* features a pen pal list and information on arts, entertainment, and Jewish life on college campuses.⁴⁷

■ *Judaism and Jewish Resources* is geared for school projects. It contains chat rooms.⁴⁸

■ *Shamash* is useful for researching topics related to Judaism and Israel. It has links to Hillel houses on college campuses.⁴⁹

■ *A Network for Jewish Youth* is fun-filled, and especially designed for teens.⁵⁰

GLOSSARY

■ **anti-Semitism** - any form of hostility or prejudice shown towards Jews throughout history (believed to have stemmed from Jews' refusal to worship idols; also, Jewish dietary laws forbade them from eating non kosher foods, which prevented social contact between Jews and non-Jews; non-Jews considered Jews anti-social)

■ **assimilation** - losing Jewish identity and becoming absorbed into gentile society

■ **bar/bat mitzvah** - son/daughter of the commandments; upon reaching the age of

13/12, a Jew must keep all the commandments and is considered an adult; usually follows four years of study; today, ceremony is often followed by a party

■ **b'nai mitzvah** - plural form of bar/bat mitzvah

■ **Central Agency for Jewish Education** - sometimes called Bureau/Dept. of Jewish Education, a community effort on behalf of Jewish education

■ **chazzan** - cantor

■ **Council of Jewish Federations** - continental association of 189 Jewish federations, the central community organizations which serve nearly 800 localities in the United States and Canada; helps strengthen the work and impact of Jewish federations by developing programs to meet their needs (est. 1932)

■ **Conservative Judaism; Conservative movement** - rooted in traditional Jewish law, but responds to the life situation of contemporary Jews by allowing some innovations (mid-19th century)

■ **continuity** - the process through which successive generations of Jews develop and express a connectedness to their fellow Jews, Jewish culture, and a tradition that informs their lifestyles, life choices, and life decisions

■ **day school** - school which teaches both secular and religious subjects; children who attend day school do not need to attend supplementary religious school

■ **federation** - the central Jewish community organization, in communities with several thousand Jews, which helps to enhance the social welfare of the Jewish community in areas such as aging, youth services, education, and refugee resettlement

■ **gentile** - any person not a Jew

- **ghetto** - section of a city to which Jews were formally restricted
- **Hare Krishna** - cult that stresses devotion to the Hindu god, Krishna
- **Hillel** - social, communal, and educational organization for Jewish university students
- **Holocaust** - systematic genocide of more than six million European Jews by the Nazis before and during World War II
- **intermarriage** - marriage of a Jew to a non-Jew
- **Jews for Jesus (Messianic Jews)** - religious group based on Christian doctrine; uncommitted and uneducated Jews are often the targets of this Christian messianic group; not recognized as having anything to do with Jews or Judaism by anyone in the organized Jewish community
- **Judaism** - the Jewish religion; a monotheistic religion based on laws and moral teachings of the Torah (five books of Moses) and Talmud
- **kashrut** - Jewish dietary laws which limit the amount and kind of meat permitted as a compromise to a strictly vegetarian diet, regulate that an animal must be killed as quickly and painlessly as possible, prohibit hunting, prohibit mixing meat and dairy products, and elevate the act of eating from an animal-like level
- **kepah** - skullcap worn in reverence to G-d and to remind the Jew of his Jewishness
- **Midrashah** - Hebrew junior college for 11th & 12th graders
- **mitzvah/mitzvot** - commandment/commandments; there are 613 commandments Jews are taught to obey, which represent G-d's will (a mitzvah is also the performance of a good deed)
- **Orthodox movement** - insists upon faithful observance of traditional Jewish law;

before the 19th century, almost all Jews adhered to traditional forms of religious life

■ **rabbi** - religious leader of a synagogue; literally, teacher

■ **Reform Judaism, Reform movement** - has dropped certain traditional laws and practices in response to the conditions and values of modern life

■ **secular** - not sacred or religious

■ **Shabbat** - Jewish Sabbath, from sundown Friday evening to one hour past sundown Saturday evening; purpose of observance is to make each seventh day holy and produce a state of inner peace by refraining from any work that does not make the Shabbat holy

■ **supplementary school** - religious school separate from secular school education; held late afternoon, evening, and weekend

■ **tefillah** - prayer

■ **tikkun olam** - repairing the world

■ **tzitzit** - fringes that hang from the corners of a lightweight undergarment which is draped over the neck and worn as a reminder of G-d's commandments

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CHAPTER 3

DATA

FEDERATION

The Council of Jewish Federations' 1990 National Jewish Population Survey was the impetus for the Jewish Federation of Southern New Jersey's Demographic Study, which was completed December, 1992. The New Jersey study encompassed Camden, Burlington, and Gloucester counties. Relevant to the author's research were the population and intermarriage statistics. In 1991, the tri-county Jewish population was 49,200. In Cherry Hill, the core area of the study, there were 22,100 Jews (9,420 households). The 1991 survey of the Jewish community of southern New Jersey estimated that 31% of all married couples were intermarried. Intermarried couples constituted 51% of non-core, non-federation affiliated households, but only 12% of Cherry Hill core/affiliated households.¹

Both studies highlighted the demographic trends of the Jewish community; both studies indicated a need for federation and the synagogue community to join together to provide services and programs for Jewish families, college students, post-college students, and adolescents. In the spring of 1993, the Jewish Federation of Southern New Jersey established a Commission on Jewish Continuity to deal with the escalating rates of assimilation, intermarriage, and Jewish illiteracy.² Although Jewish institutions alone

cannot stem the tide of assimilation, commission members agreed that the commission represented the best means of reaching Jewish individuals.

When Jews intermarry, under 30% of their offspring are raised as Jews.³ The commission had to decide whether money should be spent on this segment of the community, when the likelihood of increasing the number of Jewish children is small. It chose instead, to concentrate funds on those who have made a commitment to Judaism.

First, money was allocated to the community's day school. Then funds were designated to a professional dating service (which got minimal results), followed by the hiring of a program specialist for singles and young adults.

The Committee on Adolescents (one of the commission's subcommittees) identified five areas of high priority: curriculum development, parental education programs, interschool teenage programs, social action projects, and youth trips to Israel. The Israel trip was developed with a shared investment concept between family, synagogue and federation. When a child began Hebrew school, a bank account would be set up for him. Each year the three components would put money into the account. By confirmation year, there would be enough money to send the child to Israel. By the end of 1993, Temple Beth Shalom became the first area synagogue to take its confirmation class to Israel. Two years later, many area synagogues were doing the same.

According to the commission's chairman, the Israel component was a superb public relations tactic but in reality, federation gives very little, and the other two partners foot most of the bill. In addition, although the commission's accomplishments looked good

on paper, the federation did not state whether its goals for continuity should focus on religious or cultural identity.

Other efforts by the Department of Jewish Education of the Jewish Federation of Southern New Jersey are worth mentioning. The department gives \$20,000 in yearly scholarships. Teachers who take courses at Gratz College are given a \$300/semester stipend as part of an incentives grant. During inter-school workshops for teachers and principals, speakers are often featured whom synagogues could never afford to sponsor individually. A principals' council, established several years ago, has become invaluable. Administrators discuss new curricula, discipline problems, troublesome parents, etc.

Federations serve as long term planners for the overall interests of Jewish polity. Along with synagogues, schools, youth groups, camps, Hillels, Jewish community centers, and other Jewish organizations, they promote Jewish continuity.

SYNAGOGUES

Synagogues meet the more immediate needs of their congregants. Temple Beth Sholom and Congregation Beth El are two Conservative synagogues in Cherry Hill, NJ. Listed are some pertinent figures for this study.

		Beth El	Beth Sholom
Membership	(1997)	1150 families	1025 families
Confirmation class	(96-97)	23 students	38 students
Hebrew High III	(96-97)	26	30
Hebrew High II	(96-97)	26	66
Hebrew High I	(96-97)	30	70
Hebrew High I	(97-98)	31	63
Hebr. High Teachers	(96-97)	12	16

Rabbi B = any rabbi from Beth El

Principal B = Beth El's principal

Rabbi T = any rabbi from Temple Beth Sholom

Principal T = Temple Beth Sholom's principal

RABBIS

There are three rabbis at Beth El and at Beth Sholom. The ones interviewed for this study have served their congregations over 35 years. Both offered similar comments. There is great concern over the findings of the 1990 National Jewish Population Survey. More sermons have focused on the implications for the future of the Jewish community.

At Temple Beth Sholom (TBS), education for students and adults has always been important for creating a Jewish environment in the synagogue. The school has won nation-wide awards because of its emphasis, and classes have always been large, with a retention rate of 80-90% over time. At Beth El, education is also emphasized from cradle to grave.

Both rabbis have taught Hebrew high courses. There is give and take between them and their principals. The Israel trip has become the highlight of Hebrew high school and does encourage some students to continue their education. A rabbi from each synagogue travels to Israel with the confirmation class.

Within the community, a tri-county board of rabbis meets monthly. It serves as a think tank and support group, with Jewish continuity receiving much attention. As previously mentioned, the federation's efforts have also focused on continuity. However, Rabbi T suggested that federation allocate much more funding for Jewish camps (camps are actually models for Jewish communal life, with strong bonds tying campers and staff together).

Spirituality is an important aspect of religion but unlike prayer, which can be taught, spirituality must be "caught."

The rabbis agree that schools must instill a sense of Jewish pride in their young people. They believe principals and teachers must constantly work to create an environment in which students can learn. Finally, students should take advantage of opportunities to learn and to serve others. They must practice tikkun olam, constantly striving to make the world a better place.

PRINCIPALS

The principal at Beth El has served there since 1989; at TBS, an associate rabbi hired in 1995 became the full-time principal of the synagogue's Hebrew high school. Principal T explained that the entire school was revamped a few years before his arrival. The bar mitzvah year used to be the last grade of the elementary school. It is now the first grade of Hebrew high school. The change was made to promote continuity within the program; students would already be in the high school when they became b'nai mitzvah, with the opportunity to interact with older students. This structure already existed at Beth El.

In addition, because Midrashah, the community junior college for juniors and seniors, meets at TBS the same time as HHIII and HHIV, there is the perception that education does not end after Hebrew high school.

Hebrew high school is divided into two semesters. At TBS, each student takes two 50 minute classes every Sunday morning. Then, HHIII and HHIV meet Tuesday evening for two 50-55 minute classes; HHII and HHIII attend two 45 minute classes Wednesday evenings. At Beth El, students meet every Monday and Wednesday evening for two 50

minute classes. Both schools require 75% class attendance. Students are responsible for missed class work.

At TBS, the principal personally calls every student who has not signed up to continue after bar/bat mitzvah. He is a full-time employee. Principal B also makes phone calls to encourage continuation through confirmation, but she works fewer hours and is principal for the entire school, not just Hebrew high. Presently, Beth El's retention rate after bar/bat mitzvah is 65-70%; at Temple Beth Sholom it is 88%. The national retention rate for *all* schools (not just those in the Conservative movement) is 40%.⁴ If students attend Midrashah, they are informally tracked. Both principals would like to formally track students once they graduate from high school but currently do not have the time. Rabbi T sends E-mail to all college students.

Curriculum

The principals are responsible for courses and curriculum, with no directives from the Conservative movement. Principal T noted that the United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism has, on occasion, sought out programs from TBS because its school has a reputation for excellence in education. At both schools, there are core courses which every student takes. Hebrew is required only during the bar/bat mitzvah year, but at TBS, it is an elective each successive year. Beth El confirmation students must take a course entitled *Crises Affecting American Jewish Youth*. Eighty percent of the course deals with interdating and intermarriage. Temple Beth Sholom does not tackle interdating/intermarriage specifically. Principal T's approach is to get students to feel, believe in, and identify with Judaism. As the Conservative movement's study indicates,

the more education, the greater the commitment will be to Judaism.⁵

During the bar/bat mitzvah year, Rabbi B holds a class for families. He also teaches HHIV. Both Principal T and Rabbi T teach HHI and HHII. The cantor works with bar/bat mitzvah students at both synagogues but does not teach a class.

At TBS, there is a mandatory program called Activities in Jewish Living. Its goal is to apply Jewish principles to daily living through a series of activities/projects in the area of Torah (study), Avodah (prayer), and Gemilut Hasadim (acts of loving kindness). HHI is exempt from AJL because of bar/bat mitzvah preparation. HHIV students participate just during the first semester because of confirmation preparation. All other semesters, students must select an activity from one of the three areas. Before confirmation, students are required to complete at least one activity from all three areas. Students at Beth El may volunteer for community service any time during Hebrew high school. If they complete 13 tasks (at least four involving prayer, four involving study, and four acts of loving kindness) before they become b'nai mitzvah, they are awarded a certificate of commendation during the bar/bat mitzvah ceremony.

At Beth El, students are supposed to attend five Shabbat services during the year. Once a year, there is a special service for each grade, followed by lunch. In addition, tefillah (prayer) is required during the break between classes each Monday and Wednesday evening. TBS does not require students to attend Shabbat services, but rather, the school creates meaningful service opportunities - seventh and eighth graders attend a prayer service during their break on Wednesday evenings and participation in services is part of the prayer area of AJL.

Suggested reading lists are offered at both schools through the librarian and the synagogues' book fair. Jewish magazines and newspapers are not pushed. Jewish causes/charities, youth groups and camping are encouraged. Each year, a representative from Camp Ramah, the Conservative movement's camp, makes a presentation to the elementary students. There is a higher retention rate for students involved in camping and youth groups; families who are involved with ongoing Jewish spiritual and educational life are more likely to send their children to camps and USY (United Synagogue Youth group). For students who do not continue their education after bar/bat mitzvah, USY is a means for them to socialize with other Jewish children. In addition, they can take courses in adult education through their synagogues. Hebrew high students are taken on trips, usually each year. The Israel trip is the culmination of four years in Hebrew high school. Both principals agree that the trip has a profound effect on the students, and increased the retention rate in both schools.

Teachers

Temple Beth Sholom's teacher/student ratio is too high but will be adjusted next year. Beth El's classes have no more than 15 students each. TBS and Beth El both require teachers to be Jewish, but not necessarily synagogue members or part of the Conservative movement. They must, however, promote the goals of the movement. Both principals attempt to hire teachers who lead Jewish lives. Teachers attend monthly staff meetings and are encouraged to attend programs sponsored by the federation and the Coalition for the Advancement of Jewish Education (CAJE). At Beth El, a teacher representative from the elementary school sits on the school board; Monday night meetings make it

impossible for any high school teacher to attend. Teachers from TBS are not represented on the school board.

Principals' Suggestions

Principal B suggests that rabbis stop pontificating and involve themselves more in the school. They should keep stressing the importance of Jewish education to congregants. Rabbis, principals and teachers should be models of good behavior for congregants. To understand the importance of Jewish education, parents must make it a priority for themselves. They also should become more involved in their children's lives, and support all school programs. Principal T believes teachers themselves must keep learning. As a Hanukkah gift in 1996, Temple Beth Shalom took them to New York City for an educational tour of several Jewish sites and for a kosher restaurant experience. As for parents, the school must give them the tools and support (with family education programs) to live their lives more Jewishly.

TEACHERS

Responses to questions revealed no variations from one school to the other unless noted. All teachers were frightened by the results of the 1990 National Jewish Population Survey but most were not surprised.

Curriculum

Teachers all follow a curriculum. In general, the focus has remained the same since the CJF Survey was released, however, some teachers feel that courses are more contemporary and dynamic rather than historical. Their goals and significant messages

for the students include developing a strong positive Jewish identity with self-respect, remaining committed to Judaism and having Jewish children, learning to take responsibility for themselves and being responsible for passing on their heritage, finding roots of ethics in Judaism, becoming knowledgeable Jews, and learning why Judaism is valuable to them and to the world. Some teachers expressed a desire to touch the students' emotions and souls, to transmit their own passion, and in turn, create a younger generation of passionate Jews.

A few teachers use books in class but usually as guides and reference material. Sometimes articles are handed out for review. Usually, teachers lecture, with some discussion after. Very few assignments are given - parents often complain if students get homework. At Temple Beth Shalom, the school board limits homework to 15 minutes per class. Some teachers give long-term group assignments. Very few give tests. Report cards are sent home after each semester. Students are evaluated more on effort than ability. One teacher always gives A's as long as there is complete cooperation during class. For each student, she writes a favorable comment. Another teacher calls parents to praise their children if they make an extra effort during class. Students are not asked to evaluate courses - most would not take the task seriously. However, at the beginning of each semester, one teacher asks students if there is anything in particular they would like to learn.

Three teachers have been to CAJE (Coalition for the Advancement of Jewish Education) Conferences and found them to be interesting and helpful. However, conferences are often held in distant cities. Minimal subsidies are available, but not

enough to cover air transportation and hotel expenses. Many teachers can not afford to attend. Teachers would attend more conferences held in closer proximity to home if they could do so on a daily basis. Presently, a requirement stipulates attending the entire weeks' events or none at all. Some teachers expressed a desire for better communication from the Department of Jewish Education - they knew nothing about the \$300/semester available to them for taking courses at Gratz college.

Teachers agree that spirituality should be discussed at an earlier age so that children have more time to understand the concept of G-d, the unknown, the intangible and prayer. Students at Beth El have more opportunity for prayer. At both schools, the rabbis conduct classes on spirituality during the confirmation year; students are much more spiritually awakened after they return from Israel.

Students' Informal Activities

Instruction, class trips, programs, community service and social activities are a package deal. Teachers believe informal education, as well as the formal classroom work, is necessary. During the year, the Jewish community is invited to attend programs and hear speakers, but principals do not utilize enough of them. Students could be involved in additional social action if it were coordinated with USY (youth group). Parents are invited to participate in programs at school but few attend. They are also welcome to go on class trips. Some teachers mention Jewish publications; some bring in articles to read in class. One teacher encourages students to create and continually update a scrapbook of important articles.

Teachers sometimes discuss giving to causes, both monetarily and time-wise. They believe the concept of doing something to fix the world is an important one that can be taught better informally, through actual doing. One Beth El teacher takes her class to Washington, DC to meet with politicians. She discusses the value and importance of political action in light of Jewish history, when Jews were not activists. If students learn to empower themselves, they can change the course of events.

Teachers encourage attending Jewish camps but some are not happy with the Jewish Community Center's day camps. With 1350 children attending, there is an opportunity to teach them a love of Judaism in an informal setting. However, teachers agree that not enough effort is made. There is little to distinguish these camps from any others. Because the federation accepts money from the United Fund, its camps must hire anyone who applies. There are often non-Jews working at the camps who are not equipped to deal with any aspect of Judaism. In addition, many Jewish staffers assume they do not have to worry about interdating the other counselors. The teachers say it is not in the best interest of the Jewish community to accept United Fund's money because the price children may pay is too steep.

Most teachers have been to Israel several times, only two have not made the trip yet. All agreed that teachers should not only have a certain level of commitment in order to teach, but need to be passionate role models. Some believe teachers who are not married to Jews or are not raising their children Jewish should not be hired. Students pick up on their teachers' commitment. Teachers expressed the desire to be given guidelines of what is expected of them when they are hired. They should strive to increase their level of

commitment. Only two teachers had no other Jewish-related involvement outside of the classroom; their other jobs left them with no free time.

Communication

Teachers generally communicate with students as a class. Some give their home phone numbers to students, urging them to call with any questions or problems. Parents are called if there is a problem, although a few teachers actually call them to praise a child's efforts. There is ongoing give and take with the principals, but very little with the rabbis. Some teachers find the time to talk to others about their successful strategies, however, some who are anxious to share do not always find other teachers receptive. Some teachers follow up on confirmands; all believe tracking is important and suggest a volunteer could begin the process.

Teachers' Suggestions

Rabbis should re-prioritize and let someone else attend to the bureaucratic details. They should be more hands on with the students, should better educate their congregants, and should not lessen their standards because of pressure from members. They should stress the importance of family life and transmitting values. One teacher suggested using the life cycles as an opportunity for education. Parents could attend a course on parenting when a baby is named. During the child's pre-nursery and nursery school years, parents are generally very receptive to programs connected with their children. Before a bar/bat mitzvah, rabbis should address parents on how to say "no" to interdating. Another opportunity to address parents and children is before confirmation.

One teacher at Temple Beth Shalom would like the principal to offer a course on comparative religion. Administrators should consider making Hebrew high six hours, as it used to be. Students do not spend enough time learning; many teachers said it is scary how little students know. One teacher thought a timeline of Jewish history, placed in the hallway, would be helpful for students.

Some teachers feel that more teachers should demand respect from their students. The key to learning is concentration. Teachers sabotage themselves if they do not discipline their students. One teacher gives all students A's, as long as they sit up straight with their feet on the floor, keep only a notebook on their desks, and refrain from chewing gum.

Teachers believe parents should be taking more responsibility for their children, talking more to their children, and prioritizing their children's Jewish education. One instructor recommended that parents become as passionate about Judaism as they are about what college their children will attend. Parents should also make an effort to invite other children to their homes who do not live in Jewish areas.

Students should throw themselves into Jewish life - continue their Jewish education, join all the Jewish organizations they can, go to Jewish camps, and attend colleges with higher percentages of Jewish students.

CONFIRMATION STUDENTS

Two boys and two girls from each school were interviewed. The students were generally not surprised by the 52% rate of intermarriage; some had aunts and uncles who were not Jewish.

School Attendance and Curriculum

Four students attended Hebrew high school because their parents gave them no other option, three made their own decision to go, and one was influenced to attend by the principal. All had some friends who did not continue, mostly because parents did not push the issue, and they did not really want to be there.

Three students had a teacher they really liked during the four years of school, and several had a favorite course. Many students chose the course on the Holocaust as the one which influenced them the most. Other favorites were a program on spirituality and the class with the rabbis (at both schools). Most students said that courses during the confirmation year were the most interesting. One girl hated almost every teacher and course; one boy claimed a teacher had a negative influence on him.

The students agreed that discussions on spirituality, G-d, and prayer were lacking until the confirmation year, when they experienced a spiritual connection in Israel. The rabbis from both schools involved the classes in discussions about spirituality since their return from Israel. At Beth El, many students who used to pray begrudgingly, now demand prayer. Some of the boys started wearing a kippah (skull cap) and tzitzit (fringes) inside and outside of the synagogue. One boy from Temple Beth Shalom prays every morning at home.

The students from both schools became much closer to their classmates as a result of the Israel trip. Although they felt profoundly more connected to their heritage, their level of religious commitment waned after being home three weeks, with a few exceptions.

Almost all students will attend Midrashah next year by their own choice.

Informal Religious Activities

Six students are members of United Synagogue Youth (USY) but are minimally involved.

Four belong to B'nai Brith Youth Organization (BBYO), but only two are actively

involved. One member of BBYO believed his involvement increased his level of Jewish

awareness. One student attended an overnight Jewish camp, which did increase her

awareness; four attended the Jewish Community Center Day Camp but with little effect

on them. A TBS student, with support from friends, started a Jewish Culture Club at his

high school, something he only thought about doing before going to Israel, but was

moved to do upon his return. As for Jewish newspapers and magazines, one student did

his reading on the internet; a few students occasionally browsed through the local *Jewish*

Community Voice.

Two students participated in community service through BBYO, working on a

walkathon for handicapped children. Students from TBS performed community service

through the school's AJL program.

Religious Commitment

Although all students fast on Yom Kippur, three out of eight light candles each Friday

night and keep kosher. One student attends services once in a while, three occasionally,

and the rest hardly go.

Two students were against interdating; the remainder did not think it mattered now. Intermarriage was a different story - six were strongly against it; the other two believed it would not be so terrible as long as the children of that union were raised in one religion.

Three students discussed interdating and intermarriage with their parents. Most parents told their children they would not be happy with an intermarriage. The students at Beth El have a few teachers who discuss continuity frequently. Temple Beth Shalom teens held discussions in their class with the rabbis.

Two boys were particularly impressed with their community service at an animal shelter and with teaching younger children. Trips with a lasting impression were to the Holocaust Museum in Washington, DC and to the local mikveh (ritual bath).

Students' Suggestions

Students would like rabbis to come down to their level. The principal should bring in speakers who are intermarried and can give first-hand advice. S/he should get rid of some teachers and hire more interesting ones. Teachers should have more open discussions as opposed to lecture. They should stop talking at the students and start listening to them. Teachers should not state their opinion as fact. Students would like more parents to start talking to their children at a very young age about continuity. Perhaps they should not give the children a choice about going to Hebrew high school. For themselves, students agree they should attend as many Jewish social functions as possible and let their friends know how they feel about interdating.

PARENTS OF CONFIRMATION STUDENTS

Of the parents interviewed, all were 40-50 years old. Two were fathers. All parents were distressed by the 52% rate of intermarriage, but few were surprised.

Religious Background

Three parents of Beth El students had some Jewish education, but only one was confirmed. Two attended a Jewish camp and all were members of a youth group, but not necessarily actively involved. None participated in a college campus Jewish group or had any courses with Jewish content while at college. All Temple Beth Sholom parents had some Jewish education; two were confirmed. One attended a Jewish camp and two were members of a youth group. Three were slightly involved with Hillel while at college. Two parents took college courses in Jewish studies.

Religious Involvement

Three Beth El parents participated in Jewish causes, two subscribed to a Jewish newspaper or magazine, and all thought that attending religious services was nice but not too important. Three Beth El parents had not been to Israel; two were not sure it was important to go. All TBS parents contributed to Jewish charities. Three subscribed to a Jewish publication. Two parents thought attending services was important. One parent had not been to Israel but was planning to go in a few months.

Role in Child's Education

Three of the Beth El parents allowed their children to decide whether or not to go to Hebrew high school; one gave no choice. One TBS parent encouraged his child to go while two gave no choice. One student publicly declared when he became a bar mitzvah

that he would continue his education. For one child, knowing about the trip to Israel was a motivating factor to continue his education. Parents wanted their children to continue with their Jewish education so they would learn more about their heritage and be in social situations with other Jewish teens. One mother believed it was her responsibility as a parent to give her child every opportunity for learning.

Jewish Identity/Attitudes/Activities

No parents were aware of the eight behavioral expectations for the Conservative Jew.⁶

All parents wanted their children to feel comfortable with/proud of their Jewish identity and marry within the faith. Three did not want to tell their children they could not date a non-Jew, even though they were not comfortable with interdating. Attending a day school was not a priority for anyone but attending a Jewish camp was important to all.

While some parents suggested talking to children about continuity as soon as they could understand the concept, one mentioned the early diaper stage, and others suggested bar/bat mitzvah age. Additional opportunities for parents to instill a Jewish identity would be taking children to any Jewish community celebrations, speakers, film festivals, or programs. Reading Jewish books, celebrating holidays with family, meeting Holocaust survivors, and visiting relatives' graves are other suggestions for instilling Jewish identity.

All parents spoke favorably about their children's trip to Israel and almost all would like the children to continue their Jewish education with Midrashah, and possibly, college courses.

Parents' Suggestions

Rabbis should make themselves more a part of students' lives and should talk to them, not at them. Principals should offer more speakers for the parents, like the public schools do, especially dealing with intermarriage. They should not berate students for leaving school early when involved in sporting events. Teaching methods are important in Hebrew high school; this is a social age and students need a substantial amount of interaction. Teachers should dwell more on the positive aspects of Judaism and spend less time on ritual. Rabbis, principals, and teachers should better explain to their students why they should not interdate. Parents should make it clear how they feel about interdating and intermarriage and how acceptable it will be, and they should live in Jewish neighborhoods. Students should maintain their Jewish friends and stick together.

¹ *The 1991 Jewish Population Survey of Southern New Jersey*. (1992, December). Cherry Hill, NJ: Ukeles Assoc., Inc.

² *Draft report for Jewish continuity commission meeting on December 13, 1993*. (1993, December). Cherry Hill, NJ: Jewish Federation of Southern New Jersey.

³ Kosmin, B. (1990). *Highlights of the 1990 C.J.F. national Jewish population survey*, 24. New York: Council of Jewish Federations.

⁴ Lewis, S. (1997, May 21). Children are ill-served if bar/bat mitzvah is the end. *The Jewish Community Voice*, p.28.

⁵ Wertheimer, J. (Ed.). (1996). *Conservative synagogues and their members - Highlights of the North American survey of 1995-96*, 36. New York: Jewish Theological Seminary of America.

⁶ Epstein, J. (1996, Spring). The ideal Conservative Jew: Eight behavioral expectations. *United Synagogue Review*, 48(2).

CHAPTER 4

CONCLUSIONS

The alarm that sounded after the 1990 CJF National Jewish Population Survey was released triggered positive action in the south Jersey Jewish community. The two Conservative synagogues that were the basis of this study are both attempting to stem the tide of assimilation but they could do much more.

To their credit, both have schools with dedicated administrators and committed teachers. The course selections are varied and interesting, but Hebrew is not mandatory for the duration of high school and should be, according to one of the behavioral expectations of the Conservative Jew.¹ Knowledge of the Hebrew language is often required for teachers. Students are encouraged to take the teacher certification course offered at Midrashah, which enables them to begin teaching Hebrew school while at college, an excellent source of additional money.

The Conservative Movement is remiss in several areas. Camp Ramah and USY (United Synagogue Youth) are under its auspices. Their programs should be better integrated with those of the Hebrew school. Not only should rabbis, principals, and teachers encourage students to participate in USY and attend Camp Ramah, but credit should be given for doing so. Camp Ramah incorporates daily classes into its recreational activities,² and credit could easily be transferred to the Hebrew high school. USY sponsors many social action/community service projects for which Hebrew school

students could receive credit. The Conservative movement is in a position to exert authority over its member synagogues. There are behavioral expectations for the Conservative Jew² with which none of the parents interviewed were familiar. The synagogues must begin to articulate behavioral expectations if they are to meet the challenges they face. Conservative Jews of all ages, students as well as parents, are entitled to know what Conservative Judaism expects of them. Rabbis should incorporate these behavioral expectations into sermons and coordinate their efforts to disseminate this information with the board of directors, board of education, principals, and teachers.

If parents made their children's religious education as much a priority as their children's high school and future college education, the synagogues would have to enlarge their facilities. One way to make that priority a reality is for Hebrew high schools to create accredited programs accepted by the public schools (and Midrashah credits could be accepted on the college level). If a few more hours of classes were added each week, students would have more consistent and intensive courses, but there would be less opposition to the additional time if credits were transferred to the students' public schools.

Student survey results indicate that education is an effective tool for producing young adults with positive Jewish identities but not necessarily for producing young adults who reject interdating. Most students were opposed to intermarriage but only a few strongly opposed interdating. Attitudes toward interdating correlate strongly with those of their parents. It should be obvious to parents that their children will marry those whom they date⁴ but many parents skirt the issue of interdating because they lack the skills and

knowledge to deal with it. Some parents who themselves received more intensive Jewish education were weak on the issue of interdating. This is contrary to the usual pattern of how additional education affects the attitudes of adults.³

Synagogues need to take more initiative and direct more resources toward educating the entire family in order to adequately confront the problem of assimilation. As suggested by one of the teachers, rabbis should use each life cycle of a child, starting with his/her birth, as an opportunity to meet with parents. Rabbis can communicate to parents how important it is to articulate to children the idea that Judaism is a priority. They can discuss ways that can help insure continuity, teaching parents how to integrate Judaism and Jewish practices into their lives. Parents need to know that Judaism is *not a feeling* religion, but a *doing* religion. Feeling Jewish is not enough; if you (the parents) don't do it, they (the children) will never learn it!

Parents can inspire children to make Jewish choices by being Jewish on a consistent basis. If possible, they should reside in communities where the Jewish population is substantial - areas with federation programs and Jewish community centers. Judaism must be intense so that it touches the heart. Parents should be taught to use Jewish symbols in the home, to light candles on Friday night, and to celebrate all Jewish holidays. Children learn by example and they will cherish what their parents cherish.

More extensive and intensive Jewish education is clearly associated with the *likelihood* of inmarriage because it strengthens Jewish identity.⁶ However, no matter how dynamic the teacher or how inviting the school atmosphere, the beauty of Shabbat and the wisdom of Judaism's high ethical standards cannot be inculcated successfully without

reinforcement in the home. Jewish parents must be positively empowered to serve as Jewish role models for their children. Being Jewish has meaning if it is a part of people's everyday lives. A Judaism that is confined to the four walls of the schoolroom is not worthy of survival.

¹ Epstein, J. (1996, Spring). The Ideal Conservative Jew: Eight behavioral expectations. *United Synagogue Review* 48(2).

² The 1961 Mission Statement. (1996, Spring). *Ramah: The Magazine*, 8, 19.

³ Epstein, J. (1996, Spring). The Ideal Conservative Jew: Eight behavioral expectations. *United Synagogue Review* 48(3).

⁴ Gruenbaum, J. (1991, October/November). Assimilation and Jewish Identity. *Ha'Am - UCLA's Jewish Newsmagazine*, 13, 18, 23.

⁵ Fishman, S.B. & Goldstein, A. (1993, March). *When they are grown they will not depart: Jewish education and the Jewish behavior of American adults* (Research report 8), 12. Waltham, MA: Brandeis University.

⁶ Fishman, S.B. & Goldstein, A. (1993, March). *When they are grown they will not depart: Jewish education and the Jewish behavior of American adults* (Research report 8), 11. Waltham, MA: Brandeis University.

CHAPTER 5

SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER STUDIES

Intermarriage is becoming a greater threat to Jewish continuity each day, with the current 52% rate. All parents interviewed for this study wanted their children to marry within the faith, but many approached interdating with uncertainty and confusion. They can influence their children while still living at home, and they often do by forbidding some behaviors and encouraging others. But many parents are no longer setting parameters for their children (except on issues involving academic decisions). Why parents say “yes” to interdating and “no” to intermarriage should be the focus of future research. This research could be conducted at a few synagogues in Camden county. Parents of pre-bar/bat mitzvah students would be required to attend family education seminars extending over a three-year period. Rabbis would educate parents on the impact of their decision - saying “yes” or “no” to interdating; then, role playing would be the focus of several sessions, to increase parents’ comfort level in dealing with the issue. Parents would be surveyed before their children’s bar/bat mitzvah, and then again, before their children’s confirmation. Results from the surveys would be compared.

Overnight Jewish camps are mini-models of Jewish communities where children, teens, and adults live together for eight weeks. Close relationships are established, and friends learn to pray and play together. All food is kosher, and only Hebrew is spoken during meals. Children have an integrated program of recreation and classes, and certain

age groups perform community service. A study of the role of Jewish camping in reducing the rate of intermarriage might influence the Conservative movement to coordinate its camping program with its supplementary school program. Beginning at 11 or 12 years of age, campers and their counselors would attend seminars on interdating which would alternate lecturing with role playing. Tracking would take place over a five to ten year period, with dating/marriage patterns compared to those of non-campers.

Social trends of young adults are interesting areas for further research. Jews are living more independently, marrying later, and having (fewer) children later. Jews' own values which promote more education and higher achievement often work against them. By the time they complete post-graduate work, they are older, owe money for loans, and often do not find jobs immediately. They need time to get on their feet and establish themselves before they can address the responsibilities of marriage. The older they get, the more difficult it becomes to meet eligible partners. Many have grown up with material privileges and do not want to start out with a tiny apartment and work their way up, as their parents did. Jews are also more transient, no longer living in major population centers on the east coast. Economic factors become more important than religious ones, and they take jobs far away from Jewish cultural centers and away from their families. The breakdown of the family is another social trend which can weaken the links to Jewish support systems and to the Jewish community. Demographic studies should be done through federations in different regions of the country, especially the more remote areas, with a national objective of providing resources for Jews throughout the country. Interviews with Jews who are not affiliated with any synagogues or Jewish

organizations should be conducted to determine whether there is enough outreach being done.

A study of membership and attendance of Hillels at colleges with Jewish populations of over 20% would be helpful in planning programs on campus that deal with increasing students' Jewish identity. Jewish alumni who have become extremely successful could be asked to contribute money for programming on campus. Funds would be available to students with leadership qualities who want to get involved in Jewish causes. They could attend organizational conferences and visit places of Jewish interest, like the Holocaust Museum in Washington, DC. Alumni who are committed Jews, and have not intermarried, could be invited to speak to the students about their area of expertise. The hook would be secular. Alumni would detail their success stories. However, they would also include some discussion of their Jewish activism. Students would be tracked over the next five to ten years, with particular interest in their Jewish involvement and dating/marriage patterns.

Another helpful study would be to determine how many leaders of major Jewish organizations are intermarried, to assess the effectiveness of the leaders who are against those leaders who are not intermarried.

A final suggestion for additional study in the year 2000 is an updated national Jewish population survey to determine whether the focus on the results of the 1990 survey produced any change.

APPENDIX 1

SURVEY FOR HEAD OF DEPT. OF JEWISH EDUCATION

In 1990, the Council of Jewish Federations released a Jewish population study which cited a 52% rate of intermarriage. The purpose of my research is to determine what is being done to reduce the rate of assimilation, specifically with Hebrew high school students.

What are your thoughts on the 52% intermarriage rate?

Tell me about the federation-synagogue relationship in southern New Jersey.

When was the Continuity Commission set up and what did it accomplish?

Has the southern New Jersey community conducted its own population study?

Where in this community do you think funding should go in order to stem the tide of assimilation?

How much support does the federation give for teen trips to Israel?

APPENDIX 2

SURVEY FOR RABBIS

Background

In 1990, the Council of Jewish Federations released a Jewish population study which cited a 52% rate of intermarriage. The purpose of my research is to determine what is being done to reduce the rate of assimilation, specifically with Hebrew high school students.

What are your thoughts on the 52% intermarriage rate?

Why don't all the students continue their post bar/bat mitzvah education? Are the numbers higher than in the past?

Synagogue activities

Has the focus of your sermons changed since the report was issued?

What is being done in the synagogue to encourage students (and their parents) to continue their Jewish education?

Does the synagogue offer any programs or activities for children who don't attend Hebrew high school?

Relationship with school; activities, directives, & teaching

What do you do, specifically, to increase the retention rate in Hebrew high school and encourage continuity?

Do you teach any Hebrew high school courses?

What directives, if any do you pass along to the principal?

What role do you play in the confirmation class' trip to Israel?

Community

The tri-county board of rabbis meets monthly. How much focus has been given to Jewish continuity in our community?

Has the Bureau of Jewish Education been actively dealing with assimilation in our community? If yes, how?

Action to reduce 52% rate

What is being done in the school to encourage students (and their parents) to continue their Jewish education?

How successful do you think the confirmation class' trip has been in shaping the Jewish future of its students?

What role should spirituality play in a student's religious education? Do you think our students receive enough spiritual fulfillment? Are Jewish camps and youth groups better able to meet students' spiritual needs than the religious school is?

Suggestions

What changes if any, would you recommend for the Hebrew high school curriculum to make it more appealing to students? How many go on to Midrasha (Jewish school for 11th & 12th graders)?

What more can rabbis do to help reduce the rate of assimilation?

What more can administrators do to help reduce the rate of assimilation?

What more can teachers do to help reduce the rate of assimilation?

What more can parents do to help reduce the rate of assimilation?

What more can students do to help reduce the rate of assimilation?

APPENDIX 3

SURVEY FOR PRINCIPALS

Background and Planning

In 1990, the Council of Jewish Federations released a Jewish population study which cited a 52% rate of intermarriage. The purpose of my research is to determine what is being done educationally with Hebrew high school students in an effort to reduce the rate of assimilation.

What are your thoughts on the 52% rate of intermarriage? Have the results of the study changed your curriculum focus?

What do you do, specifically, to increase the retention rate in Hebrew high school and encourage continuity?

By each grade, how many students are presently enrolled in Hebrew high school?

What is your retention rate after bar mitzvah? How has that rate changed over the years?

Curriculum

What are your goals for Hebrew high school students? Do you have an overall curriculum plan? If yes, what is it?

What are the most significant messages (implicitly or explicitly) you wish to convey to the students? By what means do you convey these messages?

Do you receive any directives from the Conservative movement regarding Hebrew high school...what should be taught, how many hours students must spend in class?

Do you receive any directives from the Jewish Federation's Bureau of Jewish Education regarding Hebrew high school...what should be taught, ways to involve students in community activities? Should the bureau have more input?

Is there communication between the rabbi, chazzan (cantor), educational director and the school board regarding curriculum? Should there be more input from any of them?

What courses are offered? Have they changed over the years? How? Is Hebrew required?

When are classes held? What is the duration of each?

How do you feel about homework?

Do you think the curriculum provides for sufficient spiritual connection? Do students question G-d's existence?

Students' Informal Religious Activities

Is attendance at Shabbat services required (or encouraged)? Do students have any participatory services?

Do you offer pertinent reading suggestions for pleasure?

Do you encourage teachers, students and parents to subscribe to Jewish magazines and newspapers?

Do you encourage students to contribute to any Jewish causes or charities?

Do you schedule class trips (where), speakers (who and how chosen), or other programs(what is their content)? Is discipline an issue when all the classes are together?

Do you feel that students benefit most from class time or from other learning experiences, such as class trips, programs, community service, and other social activities? Is social action or volunteer work required as part of the program?

Tell me about the Confirmation class trip to Israel and the role it plays in the students' Jewish awareness.

Communication/Methodology

How do you influence the students to continue their education after bar/bat mitzvah? Do you encourage them, as well as their parents, during the early stages of their education?

Do you communicate with the students one-on-one or to the group? What about with their parents? Do you communicate with them orally or in writing? Do you get results?

Teachers

How many teachers work in Hebrew high?

What is the teacher/student ratio?

Do you require teachers to demonstrate a certain level of commitment...must they belong to a synagogue? Must they be Orthodox or Conservative? Must they be Jewish?

Do you ever sponsor educational programs or trips for the teachers?

Do you communicate with the teachers? How...one-on-one or as a group? Is your communication oral and/or written?

Does a teacher representative sit on the board of education?

Are teachers required to submit lesson plans?

How do teachers evaluate students? Is good moral character a standard of achievement, and thus, rewarded? Is there a subject called 'menschlichkheit' (exhibiting qualities of high moral character) on the evaluation form (report card)? Do you think achievement should only be measured by mastery of content matter? Do teachers generally evaluate ability over effort?

Do you encourage attendance at Jewish camps and Jewish youth groups? Is there a higher retention rate for students who attend a Jewish camp? A Jewish youth group?

Demographics

Do you share your successful strategies with other Hebrew high school principals (or are you fearful of losing your competitive edge)?

Do you do follow-up on the confirmands? Do you think it is important to track Hebrew high graduates to affirm that they have kept their Jewish heritage and passed it on to the next generation? If yes, who should be doing the follow-up?

Suggestions

What more can rabbis do to help reduce the rate of assimilation?

What more can administrators do to help reduce the rate of assimilation? What about teachers?

What more can parents do to help reduce the rate of assimilation?

What more can students do to help reduce the rate of assimilation?

APPENDIX 4

SURVEY FOR TEACHERS

Background and Planning

In 1990, the Council of Jewish Federations released a Jewish population study which cited a 52% rate of intermarriage. The purpose of my research is to determine what is being done to reduce the rate of assimilation, specifically with Hebrew high school students.

What are your thoughts on the 52% rate? What do you do, specifically, to both increase the retention rate in Hebrew high school and encourage continuity?

Curriculum

How long have you been teaching?

Have the results of the study changed your curriculum focus? Does any part of your curriculum focus on the results of the 1990 population study?

What are your goals for Hebrew high school students? Do you have an overall curriculum plan? If yes, what is it?

How is your course taught? Do you use textbooks?

How do you evaluate students? Is good moral character a standard of achievement, and thus, rewarded? Is there a subject called 'menschlikhkeit' (exhibiting good moral character) on the evaluation form (report card)? Do you think achievement should be measured mainly by mastery of content matter? Do you generally evaluate ability over effort?

Do you assign homework? If so, are the results evaluated?

What are the most significant messages (implicitly or explicitly) you wish to convey to the students? By what means do you convey these messages?

How much of a role does spiritual fulfillment play in the level of a student's commitment to Judaism? Do you think the curriculum provides for spiritual connection?

Does the Coalition for the Advancement of Jewish Education (CAJE) offer directives or material to encourage Jewish continuity?

Are course evaluations filled out by the students at the completion of each course?

Students' Informal Religious Activities

Do you feel that students benefit most from class time or from other learning experiences, such as class trips, programs, community service, and other social activities?

Is social action or volunteer work required as part of the program? If not, do you think it should be?

Do you sponsor any programs and/or trips for both students and their parents?

Do you encourage students and parents to subscribe to Jewish magazines and newspapers?

Do you encourage students to contribute to any Jewish causes or charities?

Teachers' Religious Activities

Have you been to Israel?

Do you think it is important for teachers to have a certain level of personal commitment to Jewish continuity?

Are you aware that there is a \$300/semester stipend available to teachers for courses taken at Gratz College?

What other Jewish-related activities are you involved with outside the classroom?

Communication/Methodology

How do you communicate with your students? Do you speak to them one-on-one or just as a group?

What about their parents...do you communicate with them one-on-one or as a group? Is your communication oral or written? What kind of results do you get?

Do you communicate with the principal? the rabbi? Is your communication oral and/or written? Do you think the rabbi should have more input regarding the curriculum?

Do you share your successful strategies with other Hebrew high school teachers?

Do you do follow-up on the confirmands? Do you think it is important to track Hebrew high graduates? If so, who should be doing the follow-ups?

Suggestions

What more can rabbis do to help reduce the rate of assimilation?

What more can principals do to help reduce the rate of assimilation?

What more can teachers do to help reduce the rate of assimilation?

What more can parents do to help reduce the rate of assimilation?

What more can students do to help reduce the rate of assimilation?

APPENDIX 5

SURVEY FOR CONFIRMATION STUDENTS

Background

In 1990, the Council of Jewish Federations released a Jewish population study which cited a 52% rate of intermarriage. The purpose of my research is to determine what is being done to reduce the rate of assimilation, specifically with Hebrew high school students.

What are your thoughts on the 52% intermarriage rate?

School Attendance and Curriculum

What prompted you to continue your Jewish education after your bar/bat mitzvah? Did your parents, the teachers, and the principal do anything to influence your decision?

Do your friends attend also? If not, why?

What courses and/or teachers had the greatest effect on you while attending Hebrew high school?

Was there enough spiritual fulfillment offered through the Hebrew high school programs and/or classes? What activities in the classroom, or what kind of programs and guest speakers, could enhance the spiritual aspect of Judaism?

Please tell me about your Confirmation class trip to Israel. Was it your first time there? When you returned from the trip, did you feel more connected to your heritage?

Do you plan to attend Midrashah (Jewish school for 11th & 12th graders) next year?

Informal Religious Activities

Do you belong to any Jewish youth group? If yes, which one(s)? Has that involvement increased your Jewish awareness?

Do you attend or have you attended a Jewish camp? If yes, which one(s)? Has that involvement increased your Jewish awareness?

Do you participate in any Jewish causes or charities? If yes, which ones?

Do you subscribe to any Jewish magazines or newspapers? If yes, which ones?

Religious Commitment

What about observance level in the home? Do you light candles on Friday night, keep kosher, fast on Yom Kippur?

How often do you attend Shabbat services? Do you attend with family members or friends?

How do you feel about interdating and intermarriage? Have you had discussions with your parents on interdating and intermarriage? How often?

Since beginning your Jewish education, have any of your Hebrew school teachers discussed Jewish continuity, interdating, and intermarriage with you and your classmates? If yes, how many have discussed these topics? Did the discussions have any impact on your thinking?

Did any of the following have an impact on you: a teacher, a particular course, class trips, social functions, community service, attending a Jewish camp, participating in a Jewish youth group, confirmation class trip to Israel?

Suggestions

What changes if any, would you recommend for the Hebrew high school curriculum?

What more can rabbis do to help reduce the rate of assimilation?

What more can principals and teachers do to help reduce the rate of assimilation?

What more can parents and students do to help reduce the rate of assimilation?

APPENDIX 6

SURVEY FOR PARENTS OF CONFIRMATION STUDENTS

Background

In 1990, the Council of Jewish Federations released a Jewish population study which cited a 52% rate of intermarriage. The purpose of my research is to determine what is being done to reduce the rate of assimilation, specifically with Hebrew high school students.

What are your thoughts on the 52% intermarriage rate?

Religious background

What is your age? 35-40? 40-45? 45-50? 50-55?

Did you have a Jewish education? Did you attend Hebrew high school?

Did you attend a Jewish camp? Were you a member of a Jewish youth group?

While in college, did you participate in a Jewish campus group? Did you take courses in Jewish studies?

Religious involvement

Do you participate in any Jewish causes or charities?

Do you subscribe to any Jewish magazines or newspapers?

How important do you think it is for families to attend Sabbath services regularly?

Have you been to Israel? Do you think it is important for you and your family to go?

Role in child's education

Why do you send your child to Hebrew high school?

What did you do, specifically, to encourage your child to continue his/her Jewish education? How important is it for your child to continue his/her Jewish education?

Did knowing about the trip to Israel during the Confirmation year influence your decision to send your child to Hebrew high school?

Jewish Identity/Attitudes/Activities

What goals do you have for your child's Jewish identity? Do you want him/her to... marry someone Jewish...send your grandchildren to a Jewish day school...send your grandchildren to a Jewish camp? Do you think s/he should place more, less or the same importance on Jewish identity?

Are you aware of the Conservative movement's eight behavioral expectations?¹

Are you and your spouse both Jewish? How do you feel about interdating? At what age do you think it's appropriate to talk to your child about issues such as interdating, intermarriage, and Jewish continuity? Do you talk to your child about Jewish continuity? How often? Besides family discussions, what other opportunities do you feel parents have to instill a strong Jewish identity?

What do you think about the Confirmation class trip to Israel? Did you notice any changes in your child since s/he returned?

Is your child very friendly with the other students in his/her class? Are his/her close friends from Hebrew high school, public school, or other sources?

Would you like your child to go to Midrashah next year? to take courses in Jewish studies at college?

Suggestions

What changes if any, would you recommend for the Hebrew high school curriculum to make it more appealing to students?

What more can rabbis do to help reduce the rate of assimilation? What about administrators?

What more can teachers do to help reduce the rate of assimilation?

What more can parents do to help reduce the rate of assimilation?

What more can students do to help reduce the rate of assimilation?

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