

**JEWISH EDUCATIONAL BACKGROUND:
TRENDS AND VARIATIONS AMONG TODAY'S JEWISH ADULTS**

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INTRODUCTION

For several decades, American Jewry has maintained a diverse set of Jewish educational alternatives embracing different kinds of “formal” schooling options as well as several “informal” Jewish educational opportunities. The “formal” schools may be classified as:

- Full-time Jewish **day schools** and yeshivas
- **Supplementary schools** meeting at least twice a week (known as Hebrew schools, religious schools, Talmud Torahs, etc.)
- Supplementary schools meeting once a week (**Sunday schools**)
- Other forms of formal education experiences (such as tutoring or Bar/Bat Mitzvah lessons)

The most widely used informal (or non-school) alternatives include:

- Jewish **youth groups**
- Jewish **camps**
- **Israel travel** and study

For stylistic purposes, this report uses the expressions in bold above to refer to the designated category. For example, “supplementary schools” will refer to schools that met twice or more per week, while “Sunday schools” will refer to those that met once a week, on any day of the week.

This report, one of several focusing upon Jewish educational data in the National Jewish Population Survey 2000-01, examines the extent to which today’s Jewish adults (age 18 and over) engaged in both formal and informal Jewish educational programs and activities in their youth. It also examines trends and variations in educational

participation, seeking to understand how patterns of use have changed over time, and how educational choices vary by such factors as age, gender, region, parents' Jewishness, and religious denomination.

The educational history of Jewish adults today reflects decisions made as recently as the year prior to the survey (when a small number of respondents were 17 years old), and as chronologically distant as 90 or more years ago for the most elderly respondents. In effect, encapsulated within the NJPS findings are nearly a century of Jewish educational choices as reflected in the reports of today's Jewish adults.

The NJPS included both born-Jews as well as a small number of converts to Judaism and other Jews-by-choice who now identify as Jews. Clearly, those who were neither born nor raised as Jews would not be expected to report Jewish educational experiences in their childhood years. Accordingly, this analysis is restricted to 4,349 respondents (out of 4,523 Jewish respondents in all) who reported that at least one of their parents was at least partially Jewish and/or reported some evidence of having been raised Jewish (or Jewish and another religion). Using properly weighted data, as this report does, born and/or raised Jews comprise nearly 95% of American Jews today.

JEWISH SCHOOLING IN CHILDHOOD

Respondents reported a wide variety of Jewish schooling experiences in their childhood. Where they reported more than one type of schooling, they were classified according to their most intensive form of Jewish schooling, giving preference to day school over supplementary schools, twice a week schools over Sunday schools, and all schools over other forms of Jewish education such as private tutoring.

Using this classification system, we find the following distribution of formal Jewish education experiences:

- Jewish day schools: 11%
- Supplementary schools: 33%
- Sunday schools: 20%
- Other forms of schooling (e.g., tutoring): 5%
- No formal Jewish education: 31%

Table 1 shows this overall distribution, as well as variations in formal Jewish schooling by additional factors – age, gender, region, parents’ Jewishness, and denomination – that are discussed in the following sections.

Trends: Recent rise in day schools and steady levels with no education

Variations by age reveal long-term changes in educational participation.

Younger respondents are more likely to have reported attending Jewish day school than older respondents. The day school participation rate among the youngest adults (age 18-34) is 18%, double the rate, 9%, among those age 35-49.

The rise in day school attendance among younger Jews is counter-balanced by a commensurate decline in attendance at supplementary schools (from 37% among those ages 35-49 to 28% among those ages 18-34. Sunday school enrollments remain stable, standing at 20% among those 35-49 and 19% among those 18-34. Over the years, just under a third of American Jewish adults report receiving no form of Jewish schooling or tutoring. This proportion has remained steady across the age groups.

Narrowing gender gaps

Traditionally, Jewish boys received more Jewish education than Jewish girls. Accordingly, among the oldest adults, Jewish men report higher levels of Jewish education than their female counterparts. Of those 50 years or older, twice as many men as women attended day schools; at the other extreme, almost twice as many women as men report never having received any Jewish schooling. Additional evidence of the gender gap in Jewish education is found in the proportions who attended supplementary schools meeting twice a week or more and those attending Sunday schools. Among men, two to three times as many attended the former as attended the latter; among women, approximately equal proportions attended supplementary schools and Sunday schools.

In contrast with these sharply differentiated patterns of Jewish education among older men and women, the distributions by gender for those 18-34 are nearly identical. Over the years, men's patterns of Jewish education changed in two directions simultaneously: relatively more attended day schools, and more failed to attend any Jewish school in their youth. In contrast, women underwent growing levels of Jewish educational participation. The youngest women, in contrast with their elders, report higher levels of day school attendance, and lower levels lacking any Jewish schooling in their childhood years.

The result of these different patterns of change over time is that men and women age 18-34 have come to closely resemble one another in their Jewish educational experiences. These data strongly suggest changing parental decisions regarding their children's Jewish schooling. By the 1970s, Jewish parents apparently started treating the

Jewish education of their sons and daughters with relatively equal levels of seriousness and investment.

Regional variation: More educated in the Northeast, less in the West

Jews living in the four major U.S. Census regions of the United States differ in their patterns of Jewish schooling during their childhood. The Northeast, with its relative concentration of more traditionally-oriented Jews, report the highest levels of people who attended day schools, roughly double the level found in each of the other three major regions. Jews in the Northeast also report the fewest having attended exclusively Sunday schools, a relatively less intensive form of Jewish schooling.

The West also reports distinctive patterns of Jewish schooling. In particular, more Jews in the West than elsewhere report having received no formal Jewish education as youngsters. Combining the proportion of those attending day schools with those attending twice-a-week-or-more supplementary schools shows that only a third of Jews in the West report having reached these levels of Jewish schooling, compared to about two-fifths of those in the South and Midwest and just over half in the Northeast.

These education patterns parallel regional distributions of other measures of Jewish background, identity and engagement. Generally, the Northeast scores the highest of all regions, and the West tends to trail the other regions on such indicators.

Children of the in-married and the intermarried: Large educational variations

A large body of research has documented substantial variations in many forms of Jewish engagement between in-married and intermarried households. These patterns emerge as well with respect to Jewish education.

In comparing the adult children of two Jewish parents (i.e., in-married parents) with those who report only one Jewish parent (i.e., intermarried parents), important differences in childhood Jewish schooling emerge. The adult children of in-married Jews are four times as likely to have attended both Jewish day schools and supplementary schools. In contrast, adult children of the intermarried are three times as likely to report never having received Jewish schooling; in fact, a majority of the adult children of intermarried Jews said they did not receive any formal Jewish schooling when growing up. Rates of Sunday school attendance are slightly higher for Jews with two Jewish parents, while rates of other forms of Jewish schooling are slightly higher for those with one Jewish parent.

Denominational variations in Jewish education

Adult Jews raised in different denominational traditions report distinctive patterns of Jewish schooling. Those who said they were raised in Orthodox homes report having attended day schools far more often than other respondents, and even more than three times as often as those raised in Conservative homes. Those raised in Conservative families report the highest levels of attendance at supplementary schools. In contrast, those with a Reform background made equal use of supplementary schools and Sunday schools.

Of Jews who identified any denominational identity in their childhood homes, nearly nine in ten reported some sort of Jewish schooling. In contrast, among those who did not identify a Jewish denomination in which they were raised, the majority reported no Jewish schooling. Very likely, many of the parents of survey respondents who could

not assign a denominational label to their childhood household may not have belonged to a congregation, which for many Jews is an important institutional venue for enrolling children in some form of Jewish schooling.

INFORMAL JEWISH EDUCATION: YOUTH GROUPS, JEWISH CAMPS AND VISITING ISRAEL

Beyond schools, American Jews also participate in several forms of informal Jewish education while growing up, of which youth groups, Jewish camps, and Israel visits in organized frameworks are the most prevalent.

In several ways, the answers to the questions on two of these experiences – youth groups and camping – are somewhat less precise than those associated with Jewish schooling. The relevant questions here were worded as follows:

- Did you regularly participate in an organized Jewish youth group during high school?
- Did you attend a sleep away camp that had Jewish religious services or other Jewish content?

The question on Jewish youth groups requires respondents to make a quick judgment on what constitutes regular participation. Undoubtedly, respondents varied in terms of the frequency and duration of their involvement with Jewish youth groups. In like manner, they needed to determine whether any of the sleep-away camps they may have attended had “Jewish content.” This criterion may have elicited a wider definition of Jewish camping than is commonly used in Jewish communal circles, where a Jewish educational mission is usually emphasized in defining a camp’s Jewish content.

An additional measurement issue concerned travel to Israel as a young person (age 14-26, the age range customarily used by Israel experience professionals to encompass the target age group of their recruitment efforts). About a third of the respondents who reported such a trip also reported that they had traveled to Israel on an organized trip under Jewish communal sponsorship. On the basis of additional analysis (not reported here) that found little discernible differences on Jewish identity between those who went on an organized trip and those who went otherwise, this report includes any manner of visit to Israel.

In all, according to these definitions, the NJPS data show that over a quarter of today's adult Jews regularly participated in Jewish youth groups (26%) between ages 6 and 17, as many attended a Jewish camp (27%) during those ages, and 11% visited Israel between the ages 14 and 26. Table 2 shows the overall levels of participation in informal Jewish education, as well as variations by additional factors – age, gender, region, parents' Jewishness, and denomination – that are discussed in the following sections.

Trends: rise in Israel travel and camping, decline in youth groups

Age-related findings point to trend lines in these three forms of informal Jewish education. Reports of participation in youth groups decline from just under a third (31%) among those age 50-60 (the questionnaire restricted this question to those age 60 and younger) to just over a fifth among those 18-34 (22%).

The use of Jewish camping is fairly steady between the ages of 18 and 64 (just under a third), but is somewhat lower among those who are 65-74 and 75 and older. Since the vast expansion of Jewish educationally-oriented camps occurred in the decade

after World War II, the affirmative replies of so many elderly Jews today suggests that in answering the survey questions, they (and possibly the entire sample) applied a definition of “Jewish content” to their camping experience that is broader than the definition typically used by communal educators and camping advocates.

The percentage of those who visited Israel as a youngster is miniscule among those 65 and over. However, Israel trips increase to 15-16% among those under the age of 50, people who were born in 1950 or later, and therefore were in their college or adolescent years at some point after the 1967 Six Day War, when American Jewish travel to Israel began to increase substantially.

Gender variations: somewhat inconsistent

Consistent with the greater involvement of girls and women in religious activities generally throughout the Western world, many informal Jewish educators report higher levels of participation by females than by males. The NJPS data, however, do not uniformly support these reports from the field.

With respect to Jewish youth groups, women age 35-60 report higher rates of involvement as youngsters than do their male counterparts, but the frequencies are reversed for those 18-34. At all ages, men and women report about equal levels of participation as youngsters in Jewish camps and in travel to Israel.

Regional variations in informal education

As shown above, adults in the four major regions of the United States exhibit distinctive profiles of Jewish schooling. Regional variations with respect to informal Jewish educational experiences are similar but not quite as sharp.

With respect both to Jewish youth groups and Jewish camping, Jews of the Midwest and the Northeast report slightly higher rates of utilization than do those now living in the South and the West. Rates of travel to Israel in the younger years are somewhat higher in the Northeast than elsewhere, and lowest in the South. As noted earlier, older Jews reported youth travel to Israel far less than did those born after 1950, possibly pulling down the rates for the South with its relatively large population of retirees in Florida and elsewhere.

Children of the in-married and the intermarried: Large variations in informal education

The adult children of in-married and intermarried parents display significant differences in informal Jewish educational experiences. Adults who had two Jewish parents report having belonged to a Jewish youth group almost five times as often as do children of the intermarried (34% versus 7%). The respective figures for camping (32% vs. 10%) are comparable. The two groups also vary widely with respect to having been to Israel in the teen or young adult years (13% as against 4%).

These findings parallel those reported above for formal Jewish schooling. In short, no matter which measure of Jewish education we use, the adult children of two

Jewish parents were engaged in Jewish educational experiences in their younger years far more frequently than those with one Jewish parent.

Together, formal and informal educational experiences point to weak patterns of Jewish socialization among the adult children of intermarried parents. By definition, they have just one Jewish parent and only one side of their extended family of grandparents, aunts, uncles and cousins is Jewish. They report very few Jewish educational experiences. In contrast, the adult children of in-married parents, by definition, report the presence of two Jewish parents, in the vast majority of instances (at least four times out of five) were enrolled in some type of Jewish schooling, and were much more likely to have an informal educational experience. Substantial differences between these two groups of adults in terms of current Jewish engagement (see UJC's report on NJPS entitled "Strength, Challenge and Diversity in the American Jewish Population," available at www.ujc.org/njps) reflect differences in their Jewish socialization experiences.

Denominational variation: only minor gaps among the denominationally identified

In key respects, patterns of informal education depart from those reported for formal Jewish schooling. Today's adult Jews raised in Orthodox, Conservative, and Reform homes report nearly equivalent rates of participation in Jewish camps and in visiting Israel. However, somewhat larger gaps characterize youth group participation, with Conservative-raised Jews slightly surpassing their Orthodox-raised counterparts, and both exceeding those raised in Reform homes. In addition, and consistent with the patterns for formal Jewish education, those raised in all three denominations report far

higher rates of informal Jewish educational engagement in their youth than do those who reported no particular denominational identity in their childhood families.

CONNECTIONS BETWEEN FORMAL AND INFORMAL JEWISH EDUCATION

Both Jewish schooling and informal educational experiences are related to important factors like age and region. Are they also related to each? That is, are Jews who had specific types of formal education also more likely to have participated in informal programs and experiences?

Table 3 provides information that helps answer this question. The table is divided into three parts. Each part contains information on a different age group: the top part is about 18-34 year olds, the middle part about 35-54 year olds, and the bottom part about those who are 55 and older. Within each age group, the table displays the relationship between formal schooling (listed across the top) and informal Jewish educational experiences (listed down the left side). For example, in looking at those ages 18-34 who attended Jewish day school, 39% participated in a Jewish youth group, 61% went to a Jewish camp, and 27% visited Israel. In contrast, among those ages 18-34 who received no formal Jewish schooling, just 3% were involved in a Jewish youth group, 6% attended a Jewish camp, and 4% traveled to Israel.

Looking at all age groups, it is clear that more intensive forms of Jewish schooling are associated with greater participation in youth groups, camps, and Israel travel. In general, day school students report the highest levels of participation in these three kinds of informal Jewish education, followed in order by supplementary school

students and Sunday school students, and then by those who received other forms of education or none at all.

This overall pattern, however, can be refined first by examining the informal education of those who attended day schools and supplementary programs. Importantly, Jews who are now 18-34 years old do not differ with respect to having participated in youth groups and Israel trips, suggesting that supplementary school families may be especially amenable to recruitment by these types of informal educational programs. While the similarity in youth group participation appears to be consistent across the age groups, rates of participation in Israel trips have converged only in the youngest group of adults. In contrast, the gap in Jewish camping experience between 18-34 year olds who went to day schools and supplementary programs has not narrowed.

Second, the gaps in informal education experiences between supplementary and Sunday school students have grown considerably over the years. Among those 35-54, differences in informal participation of roughly 5-10 percentage points existed between those attended supplementary and Sunday schools. In contrast, among those 18-34, the gaps between supplementary and Sunday school participants in informal programs are consistently 20 percentage points. In addition, former Sunday school students who are age 18-34 report lower levels of informal education than their counterparts who are age 35-54. These results suggest a weakening over time of the ability of one-day-a-week schools to deliver significant Jewish educational impact.

CONCLUSIONS

When they were youngsters, today's American Jewish adults engaged in a wide variety of Jewish educational experiences, embracing both different types of schools and informal Jewish education alternatives. Younger people report having participated in day schools, Jewish camping and Israel travel at higher rates than their elders. In contrast, fewer young adults than older adults were active in Jewish youth group in their high school years. Significantly, the gender gaps in Jewish education that characterized older Jews have largely ceased to exist among those under 35.

With a few exceptions, Jews now living in the Northeast generally report more intensive and extensive Jewish educational experiences than those living elsewhere, while Jews in the West report lower levels of engagement in Jewish schooling and less marked patterns of variation in informal Jewish education. The children of intermarried parents received far less exposure to Jewish education of all sorts than did the children of in-married Jewish parents; most children of intermarried parents, in fact, received no Jewish schooling. Respondents display predictable patterns of formal Jewish schooling along the conventional continuum of denominations from more to less traditional, but more varied patterns of informal experiences according to their childhood denomination. Those with denominational identities in their childhood years report higher levels of participation in all forms of Jewish education than those lacking such identities, likely reflecting differences in their families' affiliation with congregations.

These findings suggest both challenges and opportunities with respect to Jewish educational participation. Reducing the consistent minority of Jews, approximately 30%, who do not receive any Jewish education when growing up may well stand as the most

significant educational challenge to the communal system. In a variety of ways, the findings point to the importance of institutional infrastructure (a stronger feature of the Northeast than of the West) and synagogue affiliation (as inferred from the denominational patterns of educational engagement). Strengthening Jewish institutions and connecting families to them is both a prelude and a consequence of Jewish educational engagement. The Jewish educational experiences of the children of intermarried parents also pose a major challenge to the Jewish educational and communal system. In intermarried families, exposure of children to Jewish educational experiences is relatively rare. The generally low levels of Jewish socialization in intermarried homes means the children of intermarried couples, on average, possess fewer resources to engage in conventional Jewish life at home or the community when they are adults, and are much more likely themselves to marry someone who is not Jewish, thus repeating intermarriage across generations (see UJC's report on NJPS entitled "Strength, Challenge and Diversity in the American Jewish Population," available at www.ujc.org/njps)

At the same time, changes in Jewish educational experiences reflect important communal successes. The elimination of the gender gap in formal Jewish education points importantly to the removal of cultural barriers to encouraging girls and young women to acquire as much Jewish education as boys and young men. In addition, changes toward more intensive forms of formal education, especially day schools, among younger Jews are a significant highlight of the survey findings. Together, age and gender-related changes point to the possibility for change generally in Jewish educational endeavors and the ability of organized Jewry to chart new directions and make a difference in the educational experiences of its youth.

In sum, the American Jewish population presents a portrait of significant and growing diversity with respect to Jewish educational experiences. It has experienced growth in the proportion obtaining intensive Jewish educational experiences, while the share of the population receiving little or no Jewish education has remained steady and is disproportionately concentrated in families with one Jewish spouse and weaker connections to Jewish institutions. This increasingly diverse population presents challenges to communal institutions to develop distinctive Jewish educational policies that are responsive to the population's various groups, if such policies are to be effective in engaging more Jews in Jewish life.

Table 1. Formal Jewish education of adult Jews when ages 6-17.

	Day school	Supplementary program	Sunday school	Other	None	Total
Total	11%	33%	20%	5%	31%	100%
Age						
18-34	18	28	19	4	31	100
35-49	9	37	20	3	30	99
50-64	8	36	22	4	30	100
65-74	7	33	20	6	34	100
75+	7	32	20	11	30	100
Gender						
Female	9	28	22	4	36	99
Male	13	38	18	6	25	100
Gender by age						
Female 18-34	18	27	19	3	33	100
Male 18-34	18	29	19	5	30	101
Female 35-49	8	34	23	4	32	101
Male 35-49	11	40	17	3	28	99
Female 50-64	5	29	26	3	38	101
Male 50-64	13	43	18	5	21	100
Female 65-74	5	22	25	6	42	100
Male 65-74	8	45	15	6	25	99
Female 75+	4	27	20	8	40	99
Male 75+	10	37	19	15	19	100
Region						
Northeast	16	35	17	4	27	99
Midwest	6	32	28	4	29	99
South	7	38	20	5	31	101
West	8	25	22	6	39	100
Parents						
In-married	13	40	21	4	22	100
Intermarried	4	10	18	7	62	101
Denomination Raised						
Orthodox	37	39	9	5	11	101
Conservative	10	56	19	4	11	100
Reform	4	38	40	4	15	101
Reconstructionist ¹	0	56	38	0	6	100
Just Jewish	8	19	19	7	47	100
Other Jewish	12	24	21	8	35	100
None	7	14	14	9	55	99

Entries are percentages that total to 100% across each row (row totals may be 99% or 101% due to rounding).

¹ Data for Reconstructionist should be interpreted cautiously due to small number of cases.

Table 2. Informal Jewish education of adult Jews, when ages 6-17 for youth groups and camping, ages 14-26 for Israel trips.

	Jewish youth groups	Jewish camping	Israel trips
Total	26%	27%	11%
Age			
18-34	22	32	15
35-49	27	30	16
50-64 ¹	31	29	11
65-74	-	21	3
75+	-	13	1
Gender			
Female	28	27	11
Male	24	28	11
Age by Gender			
Female 18-34	20	31	17
Male 18-34	24	32	13
Female 35-49	31	31	17
Male 35-49	23	29	15
Female 50-64 ¹	36	27	10
Male 50-64 ¹	27	31	12
Female 65-74	-	20	1
Male 65-74	-	22	5
Female 75+	-	13	2
Male 75+	-	13	1
Region			
Northeast	28	31	14
Midwest	29	27	10
South	25	24	8
West	22	23	10
Parents			
In-married	34	32	13
Intermarried	7	10	4
Denomination Raised			
Orthodox	40	39	16
Conservative	44	36	15
Reform	28	33	14
Reconstructionist ²	45	41	5
Just Jewish	16	20	8
Other Jewish	17	27	8
None	12	18	9

Entries are percentages within each cell. Because categories of informal education are independent of each other, rows do **not** total to 100%.

- Indicates question not asked of these age groups.

¹ Ages 50-60 for Jewish youth groups.

² Data for Reconstructionist should be interpreted cautiously due to small number of cases.

Table 3. Formal Jewish schooling and informal Jewish educational experiences.

	Day school	Supplementary program	Sunday school	Other	None
Age 18-34					
Jewish youth groups	39%	39%	17%	0%	3%
Jewish camping	61	47	28	12	6
Israel trips	27	27	8	0	4
Age 35-54					
Jewish youth groups	41	42	33	9	8
Jewish camping	56	40	35	14	7
Israel trips	33	21	14	6	4
Age 55 and older					
Jewish youth groups ¹	36	48	32	6	10
Jewish camping	35	29	26	17	8
Israel trips	14	4	4	5	3

Entries are percentages within each column and each age group. Because categories of informal education are independent of each other, columns within each age group do **not** total to 100%.

¹ Ages 55-60 for Jewish youth groups.

Methodological Note

The National Jewish Population Survey 2000-01 is a nationally representative survey of the Jewish population living in the U.S. The survey was administered to a random sample of approximately 4500 Jews. Interviewing for NJPS took place from August 21, 2000 to August 30, 2001 and was conducted by telephone. The sample of telephone numbers called was selected by a computer through a Random Digit Dialing (RDD) procedure, thus permitting access to both listed and unlisted numbers in all 50 states and the District of Columbia. The margin of error when the entire sample is used for analysis is +/- 2%. The margin of error for subsamples is larger.

The NJPS questionnaire included over 300 questions on a wide variety of topics, including household characteristics, demographic subjects, health and social service needs, economic characteristics, and Jewish background, behavior and attitudes.

The NJPS questionnaire was divided into long-form and short-form versions. The long-form version was administered to respondents whose responses to selective early questions indicated stronger Jewish connections; these respondents represent 4.3 million Jews, or over 80% of all U.S. Jews. The short-form version, which omitted many questions on Jewish topics, was given to respondents whose answers on the same selective early questions indicated Jewish connections that are not as strong (they represent an additional 800,000 Jews).

The most important implication of this design decision is related findings on Jewish connections. Descriptions of Jewish involvement and identity that are restricted to the more engaged Jewish population (4.3 million Jews) would, in many cases, be somewhat less strong if they had been collected from all respondents representing the entire Jewish population.

In this report, two variables were asked of the more engaged population only: trips to Israel and Jewish camping. Rather than limiting the analysis, this report assumes that those who were not asked these questions would have answered “no” had they been asked. If, instead, those who were not asked these questions had actually participated in the experiences at the same rate as those who were asked the questions, then the report’s assumption about them answering “no” produces an overall underestimate of 2 percentage points for trips to Israel and 5 percentage points for Jewish camping. In all likelihood, the underestimates are even smaller, because those with weaker Jewish connections now are less likely to have participated in these activities as youngsters.

For further methodological information, see the Methodological Appendix in *The National Jewish Population Survey 2000-01: Strength, Challenge and Diversity in the American Jewish Population*, A United Jewish Communities Report (available at www.ujc.org/njps.)