

THE EFFECTIVENESS OF
PREPARATORY TRACKS IN
JEWISH DAY SCHOOLS

MARVIN SCHICK

ADAR 5762

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	1
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	3
THE EFFECTIVENESS OF PREPARATORY TRACKS IN JEWISH DAY SCHOOLS	7
RESEARCH DESIGN	9
SUBGROUPS	10
THE FINDINGS	13
SUBGROUP ANALYSIS	14
SUMMARY OF FINDINGS	25
CONCLUDING OBSERVATIONS	26
APPENDIX 1—PREPARATORY TRACK STUDENT QUESTIONNAIRE	28
APPENDIX 2—SCHOOLS THAT HAVE RECEIVED PREPARATORY TRACK GRANTS	30

INTRODUCTION

AVI CHAI has provided significant support towards high school preparatory track programs over a period of several years. High school preparatory track grants totaled \$4.2 million from 1996 to 2001.

When the Project Trustee, Lauren Merkin, and the staff were considering a renewal of the grant, I suggested that sound philanthropy dictated that we attempt to assess the impact and effectiveness of the various AVI CHAI-supported tracks.

AVI CHAI is fortunate to have Dr. Marvin Schick as a senior advisor who agreed to take on the task of assessing the program. It was a worthwhile exercise, for although it demanded a considerable effort by him and Karen Hirsch, his associate, the information they obtained was of value beyond AVI CHAI's decision-making process. We hope that the data will help Jewish educators and administrators to better understand the considerable role of preparatory tracks in enabling students with weaker Jewish backgrounds to benefit from a day school education.

The research results, as you will see, leave no doubt about the effectiveness and impact a preparatory track can have on the pupil's grasp of the Hebrew language texts he/she is expected to master. In addition, the data show a meaningful leap in Judaic

practice and observance, which AVI CHAI sees as a central goal of day school education.

I commend the report for your review, as it will provide an overview of how day schools have endeavored to grapple with a central aspect of their community responsibility: providing an opportunity for a Jewish education to all children regardless of their prior educational background. Our purpose in making this research widely available is to encourage day school boards and principals to consider positively the thought of making preparatory tracks part of their educational mission.



Arthur W. Fried
Chairman

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

As day schools have figured more importantly in communal efforts to promote Jewish continuity, particular attention has been given to expanding day school opportunity for population sectors that historically have not favored this mode of elementary and secondary education. These efforts include the establishment of schools in under-served areas or for under-served groups, the expansion into middle- and high-school grade levels in schools that previously terminated in the lower grades,

and the provision of incentives to schools and parents aimed at promoting day school enrollment among Jews.

The AVI CHAI Foundation has played a leading role in these efforts by making day school education its foremost philanthropic priority in North America and by joining in activities that encourage others to support day schools. Support for preparatory track programs has been a key aspect of the Foundation's day school-centered initiatives. During the past six years, financial assistance has been given to Jewish schools, mainly at the high school level, that have set up special Jewish studies tracks geared to students who entered with little or no previous day school background. While some had attended a congregational supplementary school, usually as part of their Bar/Bat Mitzvah preparation, as a group these students were significantly behind their new classmates in Judaic skills and knowledge—and probably also in their level of observance. The function of preparatory tracks is to narrow the gap, the aim being to fully mainstream these students as quickly as possible.

The importance of day schools and the need to reach out to non-day school families do not ensure that the outreach and education will be effective. In

this period of rapid advanced assimilation, good intentions—accompanied by philanthropic assistance—may not bring about the desired results. To better gauge the effectiveness of preparatory tracks, AVI CHAI undertook a survey of the approximately 1,500 students who were enrolled in programs supported by the Foundation during the first five years of the project. Conducted by mail with a gift incentive provided to respondents, the survey generated a bit more than 500 completed questionnaires, a high rate of return in view of the considerable number of families that had moved as well as other factors.

Still, no claim can be made that the students who responded reflect the attitudes and behavior of those who did not. On the contrary, it needs to be recognized that the respondents are significantly more likely to be positive about their day school experience, as well as about their Judaic commitment, than those who did not.

Furthermore, no claim can be made regarding the long-term impact on the students. The survey gives us a snapshot and tells us what is included in the photo. This report provides an accurate picture of how 500 Jewish teenagers felt about their day school experience, either shortly after it was completed or when they were still in a Jewish school.

It does not tell us how these preparatory trackers will view the same experience down the road in life when they are adults.

THE FINDINGS

The survey (Appendix 1) included questions about student satisfaction, their level of observance and that of their families, their religious growth and change and their assessment of the academic program, both Judaic and general. The responses were further analyzed according to four subgroups: gender, North American/foreign-born, Orthodox/non-Orthodox schools and years enrolled in a Jewish school.

The responses point overwhelmingly to a favorable student view of their day school experience. Even if we recognize, as noted, that the respondents tended to be more positive than those who did not respond, the extent of their favorable assessment is impressive, even remarkable. As perhaps the most extraordinary illustration, preparatory trackers were asked how they felt “socially” in their new Jewish school. Eighty percent said they were happy and only 6% responded that they were unhappy. Social integration is perhaps the area where the day school experience might be expected to be most problematic for preparatory track students. The teenage years are, after all, a period of social development and pressure, of dating and self-esteem issues and of the stress of fitting in. Jewish schools, even the most liberal, severely limit social possibilities, both because they are small and because of their religious character. For preparatory trackers, there is the added potential stress factor of a new environment and new classmates. The multiple adjustments should have caused difficulty and stress and, at least among a considerable number, some measure of unhappiness. Yet,

only a handful of these students said that they were unhappy.

The statistics are also quite favorable when students assessed their schools’ curriculum. (Table 1)

Table 1: THE ASSESSMENT OF SCHOOL CURRICULUM

	Secular Studies	Judaic Studies
Strong	51%	57%
Satisfactory	43%	39%
Weak	6%	4%

Since these students had attended other schools, usually good public schools or private schools, they had an outside benchmark to refer to as they judged their day schools’ educational program. For all of the good points about Jewish schools, in key respects all but a relative handful cannot measure up to the best non-Jewish schools with respect to facilities, extra-curricular activities, electives and a host of educational enhancements. Still, only a few preparatory trackers felt that their school was weak educationally.

The students were asked whether they had become more observant. Fifty-eight percent said that they had, 37% indicated that their level of observance was about the same as it was during their pre-day school days, and 5% reported that they had become less observant. Asked whether they had acquired Jewish knowledge and skills, the results were affirmative across the board.

These and other findings described in the report provide evidence of the short-term efficacy of day schools, especially at the crucial high school level. Day school proponents can conclude that their advocacy has been well grounded, that the investment in schools that are religiously purposeful and which seek to attract students with a limited day school background has provided the desired results.

It scarcely contradicts either the findings or communal confidence in day schools to note that whatever has been achieved in educating and acculturating preparatory track students in Judaism, after graduation they remain Jews at risk. With few

exceptions, they will be confronted by ever more powerful assimilatory forces that will attempt to pull them in a direction away from what they had gained. What their Jewish education has given them is a better chance to overcome the risks.

THE EFFECTIVENESS OF PREPARATORY TRACKS IN JEWISH DAY SCHOOLS

This report discusses the short-term impact of Jewish day school education—primarily at the high school level—on teenagers who entered the school with little or no previous day school background. Some had attended a Jewish supplementary school, primarily as part of their Bar/Bat Mitzvah preparation, but even so, they were in most cases significantly behind their new classmates in Judaic skills and knowledge, as well as in their level of observance. A majority of the new day school

attendees came from immigrant families and therefore it is a safe conclusion that a majority of the students covered by this report had virtually no prior formal Jewish education.

For the Jewish portion of the curriculum, these students were enrolled in preparatory tracks—classes that are designed to teach them subject matter, such as Hebrew language, that mainstreamed students presumably have already mastered. The obvious educational goal is to mainstream preparatory track students as quickly as possible. Since it is part of the core mission of day schools to inculcate students in our religious tradition, the preparatory tracks had a collateral goal of raising the observance level of participating students.

The research reported here was undertaken on behalf of The AVI CHAI Foundation, which has provided funding for more than five dozen middle schools and high schools that have established preparatory tracks.¹ The primary thrust of the research was to ascertain the attitude of participating students toward their preparatory track experience shortly after it was concluded or, as in many instances, even as they continued to be enrolled in these programs. Obviously, no claim can be made regarding the long-term Judaic outcome of these teenagers. Still, it is useful from the perspec-

tive of both AVI CHAI and the Jewish community generally to determine student reaction to a more intensive religious environment and educational program than most had previously encountered.

Student indication that the programs were not to their liking or ineffective would make it highly unlikely that they could emerge from their high school years sufficiently strong or determined from a Jewish perspective to counteract the powerful assimilatory forces that are certain to enter and perhaps dominate their lives later on. On the other hand, a favorable reaction might mean that preparatory track students are religiously, if not also educationally, more or less on par with Jewish teenagers who had a similar but longer day school experience. All of these students—specifically

¹ The grants were \$2,500 per student with a maximum number of eight students at each of the middle and high school levels. The grants were made to the school, not to the parents. An institution with both middle and high school components could receive up to \$40,000 per year.

There are schools—notably those that serve immigrant and outreach populations—that have more eligible students than AVI CHAI has provided support for.

There is a collateral program directed at all preparatory trackers, including those for whom the schools do not receive an AVI CHAI grant. Each student is provided with a mini-Judaica library as a gift from the foundation, the aim being to encourage these students to read and study Jewish books at home.

The research on which this report is based covers the entire cohort of preparatory trackers who received the mini-libraries.

including those who had been in a Jewish school from the start—remain young Jews at risk. For all of the religious fortification they may have received during their formative years at home, in school and shul, camp and elsewhere, they might still veer away from Jewish identity and commitment as they grow into adulthood, become more independent, and establish their own careers, homes and life patterns.

This research did not attempt to determine how schools view preparatory tracks. In a sense, the evidence is mixed on this front. The feedback to AVI CHAI and other research conducted on behalf of the Foundation by Dr. Leonard Matanky suggests a high level of satisfaction. Moreover, participating schools have reported that nearly half of the students who were initially enrolled in preparatory tracks supported by AVI CHAI were eventually mainstreamed for their Jewish studies classes.

There is, however, another side to the story. After five years of providing financial inducements and, along with others, marketing the message of how important day school education is to Jewish continuity, AVI CHAI has not discerned an appreciable rise in preparatory track enrollment at the high school and middle school levels.

More than two-thirds of the schools assisted under AVI CHAI's preparatory track initiative are under Orthodox sponsorship, which reflects the overall distribution of day school enrollment in the U.S. As my recent day school census indicates, 80% of all day schoolers are in Orthodox institutions. More than half of the total day school enrollment is in yeshiva-world and chassidic schools that are overwhelmingly clustered in the greater New York City metropolitan area.

Because of space, educational issues and ideological considerations, yeshiva-world and chassidic institutions are no longer—and many have never been—on the radar screen for preparatory track candidates. As for Centrist and Modern Orthodox day schools, interest in preparatory tracks varies,

with a declining tendency to accept students with limited religious educational backgrounds. In many instances this is because of space constraints, but there also is growing concern that such students might negatively impact on the image, educational program or character of the schools.

This leaves immigrant and outreach schools, all of which are Orthodox-sponsored. Their mission and student-body are tailor-made for the preparatory track profile. It is therefore not surprising that a significant proportion of the students enrolled in schools whose tracks have been supported by AVI CHAI were foreign-born, primarily in the Former Soviet Union (FSU). Even in this rather small educational sector, there is a treading of water, rather than growth, as immigration from the FSU has declined greatly and as American Jewish communal interest in the situation of Russian Jews has waned. It is telling that some of the schools established to serve such students have closed.

Community, Solomon Schechter (Conservative) and Reform day schools are another obvious source for preparatory track enrollment. When AVI CHAI first examined day school enrollment in the early 1990's, 1,500 students attended non-Orthodox high schools in the U.S. The figure has more than doubled and the trend is certain to continue as additional non-Orthodox high schools are being established in under-served communities and as non-Orthodox parents express greater receptivity toward extending their children's full-day Jewish education into the high school years. A considerable number of Community, Conservative and Reform elementary schools that previously terminated before the 8th grade have already extended or plan to extend their program through the full complement of elementary school grades.

All of these schools are potential vehicles for preparatory track programs and many have reached out to families that have previously shied away from day schools. However, in the older non-Orthodox high schools, preparatory track growth has been

modest, while some of the newer high schools do not yet have a sufficient enrollment or financial base to sustain sizeable separate preparatory tracks. As the day school census demonstrated, the geographic and denominational dispersal of American Jews has resulted in an enormous number of small, even tiny schools, particularly at the high school level.

While there are non-Orthodox high schools with a fair number of preparatory track students, the usual practice in these schools is to combine preparatory trackers with veteran day schoolers who are weak students. It may be that even the non-Orthodox schools, like the Centrist and Modern Orthodox schools, do not want to have too many beginners.

Nor is there much of an indication that more than a relatively small number of Jewishly-committed parents who have not previously sent their children to a day school look favorably on a full-time Jewish high school. Tuition at these high schools is at the high end of the range and it may serve as a powerful disincentive, especially in those situations where schools do not provide significant scholarship assistance.

It may also be that the more favorable attitude toward day school education in non-Orthodox circles has paradoxically limited, to an extent, the need for preparatory tracks. The pattern of a steady and sharp decline in day school enrollment as grade level rises has been reversed somewhat, so that increasingly in the middle- and high-school grades, the enrollment pool consists primarily of students who were enrolled in day school during their early school years.

RESEARCH DESIGN

Toward the end of the 1999-2000 school year, a questionnaire was mailed to the approximately 1,600 students who had been enrolled in schools—again, mainly high schools—that received preparatory track support

from AVI CHAI.² In the cover letter accompanying the questionnaire, recipients were told that those who completed and returned the document would receive an \$18 gift certificate to Amazon.com. There were 506 returned questionnaires, a response rate of more than 30%.

Americans are a nation of movers, a phenomenon that almost certainly is especially pronounced among immigrant groups, which in the years immediately after their arrival have not yet established firm geographic or communal roots. Approximately 150 questionnaires were returned because the family had moved or the address was wrong. Among the surveys that arrived at the right address, it is likely that a considerable number were not seen by the intended recipient. A considerable number of the early (first and second program years) preparatory track students were collegians during the 1999-2000 school year. They and perhaps some younger students do not live at home for all or much of the year and the questionnaire may not have been forwarded to them. At the same time, it is not idle speculation to suggest that there were questionnaires that arrived at the right address but which were not opened or seen by the intended recipients.

It is not possible to know how many of the preparatory track students actually received and saw the questionnaire. I believe that the 506 survey respondents represent at least 40% and perhaps as many as 50% of the students who saw the questionnaire.

I have much faith in mail surveys. The approach is less intrusive than telephone surveys and therefore avoids the stress and attendant features that may undermine the reliability of telephone responses. A mail survey allows for a measure of reflection. When this factor is added to confidence in the integrity of students as they undertake an assignment of this kind, I believe that the data that follows is an accurate portrayal of the views and experiences of a significant number of students.

² The questionnaire and list of schools are appended to this report.

However, no claim can be made other than that Jewish students who are enrolled in preparatory tracks have said this or that about the issues covered in the survey. Specifically, no claim can be made that the students who responded reflect the behavior and opinion of those who did not. To the contrary, it is necessary to recognize in a way more pronounced than might be true of other surveys, that the respondents are significantly more likely to be positive about their Jewish school experience and about their Judaic commitment than those who did not respond.

SUBGROUPS

The questionnaire responses have been grouped into several categories and the results are presented in the next section. The statistics were also analyzed according to the following four variables or subgroups:

- Gender
- North American/Foreign-born
- Orthodox/Non-Orthodox schools
- Years enrolled in a Jewish day school

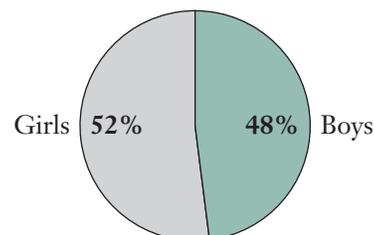
As a rule, subgroup data is included in this report. However, because the responses to certain questions were extraordinarily one-sided, no useful purpose could be served by including these statistics. In general, when more than 90% of the total cohort responded in the same direction, subgroup data is not provided.

The following comments are intended to provide a context for understanding these four factors.

GENDER

We do not have the breakdown according to gender for the entire preparatory track cohort involved in AVI CHAI's program, although the impression is that there is about an equal distribution.

OF THOSE STUDENTS WHO RESPONDED, THE DISTRIBUTION WAS AS FOLLOWS:

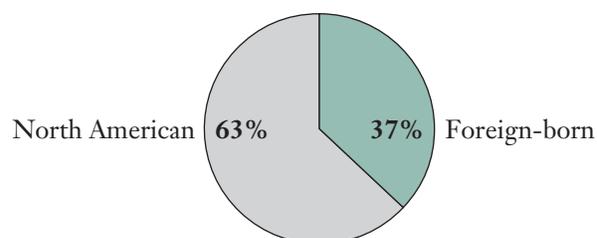


The usual assumption is that females are more likely to respond, a hypothesis that has support in survey research. There is no corollary assumption, however, that girls—or for that matter, boys—are more or less likely to provide positive responses.

NORTH AMERICAN/FOREIGN-BORN

With respect to place of birth, the responses do not reflect the distribution in the overall sample. A majority of preparatory track enrollees were foreign-born, which isn't surprising in view of the large number of immigrants from the Former Soviet Union, as well as the efforts that have been made—certainly in the past—to reach out to such families.

THE DISTRIBUTION OF RESPONSES WAS AS FOLLOWS:



It should be noted that the North American grouping includes about 50 students who were born in Canada. In any case, it is clear that the response rate of students born in North America was by a comfortable margin more than twice that of the foreign-born.³ Almost certainly, this reflects in part the significantly greater geographic mobility of immigrant families. There is, in short, a much greater probability that among these families, our mail did not reach the intended destination or recipient.

It may also be that because immigrant students and their families are less acclimated to the American educational and social environment, they are less likely to respond. I believe that parents of American-born students can be expected to encourage their children to respond, perhaps also to respond in a more positive direction that indicates appreciation for the opportunity to be enrolled in a Jewish school. Immigrant families, on the other hand, are certainly less comfortable with English-language documents and so there isn't the same instinctive feeling that it is necessary to complete and return the questionnaire.

On the other hand, foreign-born students are primarily enrolled in schools that are especially geared to serve their educational and cultural needs, presumably also to provide a comfortable socio-psychological setting. For this reason alone, the foreign-born students who do respond may be more likely to indicate a favorable reaction to the Jewish school experience.

On balance, I believe that the disparate response rate between the American and foreign-born cohorts affected the results in a distinctively favorable direction. The American-born students who are day school attendees tend to be in families that are moving in the direction of greater Jewish commitment and this is reflected, in fact, in the decision to send their children to a Jewish school. The signifi-

cance of the decision becomes clearer when we recognize that the survey essentially covers the high school years. That is when many non-Orthodox day school graduates are switched out of a Jewish school. When families that previously did not send their youngsters to a Jewish school choose a Jewish high school, they are opting for an institution that is almost certainly small and pales in comparison with competing high schools, including tuition-free public schools. Thus, the selection of a Jewish high school is a message of expanding Judaic commitment.

There isn't necessarily a similar sense of commitment or movement among the foreign-born prior to their enrollment in a Jewish school. It is true, of course, that immigrant families that select a Jewish school are demonstrating a receptivity toward Jewish education that is not evident in the vast majority of Jewish immigrant families, particularly those from the Former Soviet Union. What continues to be lacking, however, in most instances is persuasive evidence that Jewish education is a manifestation of a growing commitment to Jewish practices and beliefs.⁴

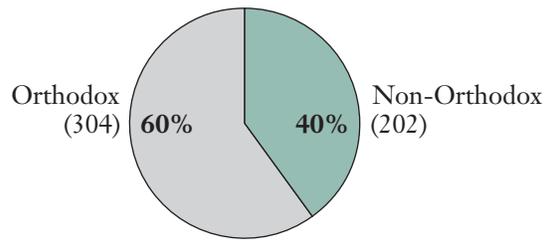
Put otherwise, the choice of a Jewish high school may be as much or more the outcome of a decision to reject the educational alternatives—almost always local public high schools—as unsafe as it is a statement of commitment to religious Jewish education. Furthermore, there are social reasons why a Jewish high school is chosen. Immigrant parents want their children to cluster together and this opportunity is provided in schools that specifically cater to immigrant families.

³ Some of the foreign-born came from English-speaking countries, notably South Africa.

⁴ I recall a visit to an Orthodox girls high school in Chicago which at the time was making a strong effort to educate Russian girls. I met with a group of about fifteen graduating seniors who came from the FSU. Only one of them could say that either she or her family had become more observant or Jewishly involved during the four years of Jewish high school attendance. What struck me most was the strong indication by these students that Jewish life was not on their radar screen.

TYPE OF SCHOOL

OF THE RESPONDENTS, 60% ATTENDED SCHOOLS UNDER ORTHODOX SPONSORSHIP:



The preponderance of Orthodox school enrollees is not surprising, in view of the pattern of Jewish day school attendance, particularly at the high school level. What may be surprising, in fact, is the relatively small numerical disparity between the Orthodox and non-Orthodox school attendees. After all, not only do Orthodox institutions constitute 80% of all U.S. day school enrollment, the figure is well above 90% at the high school level. As noted, all of the immigrant schools are sponsored by the Orthodox and as already indicated, the participation of this cohort in the survey was quite low. It also may be that the leadership of immigrant, as well as outreach, schools did less to encourage student participation than the leadership of other schools.⁵

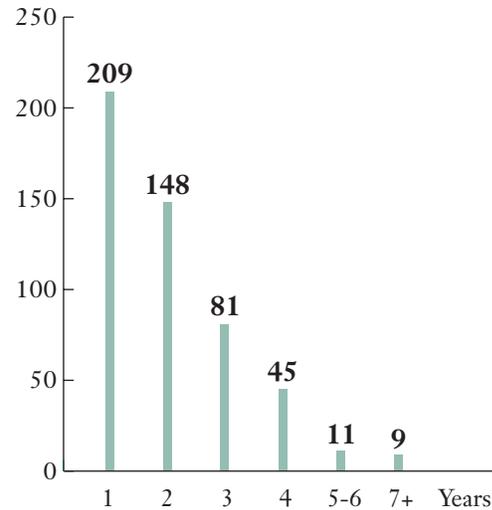
It is probably pointless to speculate whether non-Orthodox or Orthodox school attendees are more or less likely to respond favorably about the experience. Because the behavioral gap is apt to be narrower in non-Orthodox schools, it may be expected that they would receive a more favorable rating. At the same time, the Orthodox immigrant schools have a rather homogenous student population, a factor that may result in a greater comfort level.

YEARS IN SCHOOL

The survey was conducted during the fifth year of AVI CHAI's program. Some of the preparatory trackers had entered the program after they completed one or more years in a Jewish day school. While a substantial majority of the students were in their first or second year of day school attendance,

some of those who responded had been enrolled for a considerably longer period.

THE BREAKDOWN IN RESPONSES ACCORDING TO THE NUMBER OF YEARS IN A JEWISH SCHOOL IS AS FOLLOWS:



It is logical to expect that the longer a student stays in a Jewish school, the more positive she/he is about the experience. Re-enrollment in a school is usually a conscious choice that presumably indicates a level of satisfaction. This should be especially true of preparatory track students and their families, since the decision to switch to a day school ordinarily required a good deal of thought. If the students/families were not satisfied, in all likelihood there would be another move.

It should be the case that the longer a student remains in a Jewish school, the more likely it is that he/she is being influenced in the direction of greater Jewish knowledge, identity and observance. This should be reflected in the survey responses. In fact, there was no pattern to the responses and therefore no conclusions to be drawn. Accordingly, the discussion that follows does not include data and analysis regarding years in school.

⁵ There is, admittedly, much speculation in this section. There is no firm evidence to go by, and we do not know whether certain schools encouraged their preparatory trackers to respond to the survey. However, the speculation is not entirely idle because there was a high response rate from a select group of schools.

THE FINDINGS

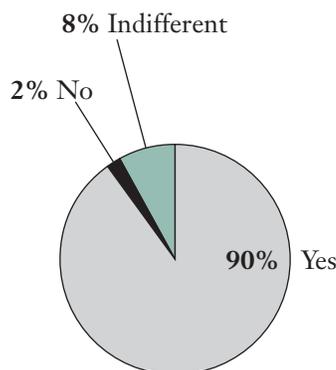
In presenting the survey results, it is necessary to point out that because the responses to certain questions were overwhelmingly favorable, the ability to subject the data to detailed subgroup analysis is limited.

SATISFACTION LEVEL

Students are known to be direct, even blunt, about the schools they attend, and they do not appear to be in the aggregate averse to expressing dissatisfaction. There is a perception that teenagers, in particular, are an unhappy lot. There are issues of self-esteem, relationships with parents, siblings and friends and confusion about their lives. There may be a measure of exaggeration in this snapshot, yet there is certainly more than a measure of truth.

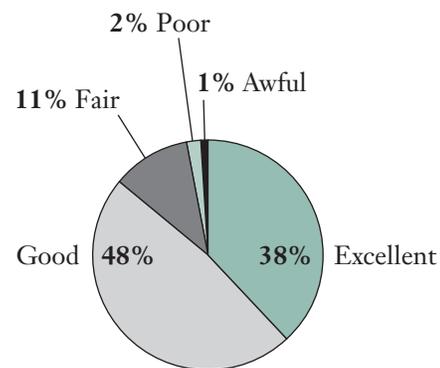
Preparatory track students may face an added emotional and educational burden because they are in a new—at times unfamiliar—environment and the process of adaptation can be stressful. They must adapt socially and perhaps also religiously, and these adjustments may trigger discomfort or unhappiness about the experience.

WE ASKED THE COHORT WHETHER THEY WERE HAPPY TO HAVE STUDIED IN A JEWISH SCHOOL (QUESTION 7) AND THIS IS WHAT WE WERE TOLD:



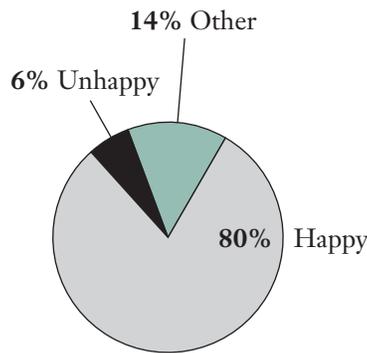
Even when the “No” and “Indifferent” categories are combined, the percentage indicating satisfaction is truly astounding. It is necessary, of course, to keep in mind—here and elsewhere—that the students who responded to the survey are in the aggregate significantly more likely to be positive about their Jewish educational experience than those who did not. Even so, there is something remarkable about the results. It is evident that schools with preparatory tracks have succeeded in integrating these students into the total school environment in a way that advances their emotional contentment.

WE ALSO ASKED THE STUDENTS TO RATE THEIR TOTAL JEWISH SCHOOL EXPERIENCE (QUESTION 15) AND THESE RESULTS WERE OBTAINED:



Here, too, the satisfaction level is very high although a bit below what it is for the question that dealt with student happiness. If we combine the “Excellent” and “Good” responses, the positive responses amount to 85% of the cohort. Even if the intermediate “Fair” responses are regarded as unfavorable, only 14% of the students expressed dissatisfaction with their Jewish high school experience.

ANOTHER QUESTION (QUESTION 16) ASKS HOW THE STUDENTS FELT “SOCIAL” IN THE SCHOOL. THEY RESPONDED:



This is perhaps the area where the greatest degree of unhappiness might be expected. The teenage years are a period of social development and social pressure, of dating and fitting in and much else. Jewish schools severely limit social possibilities, both because they are small and also because of their religious nature. Indeed, the small size of Jewish schools is often given as a primary reason why parents do not send their children to a Jewish high school, even if the youngsters attended a day school for all of the elementary grades.

For preparatory trackers, there is the added problematic factor of a new environment and new

classmates. That 80% of these students were positive about the social aspect of their being in a Jewish school must be regarded as a strong expression of satisfaction. This is true even if the students who responded “Other” are considered to have been dissatisfied. Incidentally, a number of these “Other” students appended brief notes to their responses indicating that at times they were happy socially and at times they were not. Or they said there were things that they liked and some things that they did not like about their schools.

SUBGROUP ANALYSIS

In view of the overwhelmingly positive responses to these three questions, the four variables described earlier—gender, American- or foreign-born, Orthodox or non-Orthodox schools and years in school—cannot have an appreciable bearing on the data. Still, because this cluster of questions regarding student satisfaction is of special significance in understanding how the preparatory trackers viewed their Jewish school experience, a subgroup breakdown is provided. (Tables 2, 3 & 4, Pages 14-15)

Table 2: ARE YOU HAPPY TO HAVE STUDIED IN A JEWISH SCHOOL?

	Boys	Girls	American-Born	Foreign-Born	Orthodox School	Non-Orthodox School
Yes	87%	91%	88%	93%	94%	84%
No	3%	2%	2%	3%	1%	3%
Indifferent	10%	7%	10%	4%	5%	12%

Table 3: RATING OF JEWISH SCHOOL EXPERIENCE

	Boys	Girls	American-Born	Foreign-Born	Orthodox School	Non-Orthodox School
Excellent	32%	42%	41%	31%	35%	40%
Good	51%	45%	42%	57%	51%	43%
Fair	12%	9%	13%	8%	11%	11%
Poor	3%	2%	3%	2%	2%	3%
Awful	2%	1%	1%	2%	1%	2%

Table 4: HOW STUDENTS FELT “SOCIALY” IN THEIR JEWISH SCHOOL

	Boys	Girls	American-Born	Foreign-Born	Orthodox School	Non-Orthodox School
Happy	81%	78%	81%	76%	79%	80%
Unhappy	7%	5%	5%	8%	7%	5%
Other	12%	17%	14%	15%	14%	15%

Inasmuch as 90% of the students indicated they were happy, it is not surprising that the overall pattern is substantially maintained in the subgroups. Boys apparently were somewhat less satisfied than girls, the American-born less than the foreign-born, 10%—a perhaps significant statistic—of the non-Orthodox attendees were less happy than those in Orthodox schools and first-year preparatory track students and those enrolled four years or more were the most satisfied. One of seven male respondents was either indifferent or unhappy, as compared with one of thirteen girls. Is this because boys tend to be more negative?

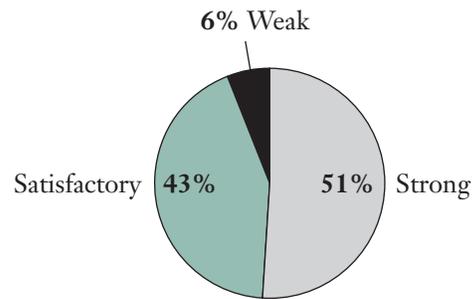
There is probably a ready explanation for the greater level of satisfaction among the foreign-born and Orthodox-school attendees. These subgroups overlap. Nearly all of the immigrant schools are Orthodox-sponsored and these schools shape their programs to meet the needs of the foreign-born. Girls were more positive about their school experience, although the gap narrows when the “Excellent” and “Good” responses are combined, as I believe they should be. By a margin of 10%, more American-born described their school experience as “Excellent”; once again, the combination with “Good” responses alters the picture. What is most striking about this set of figures is how few students across the board used either “Poor” or “Awful” to describe their school experience.

Obviously, the pattern of satisfaction extends throughout the subcategories, with, as previously noted, male students tending to be a bit more dissatisfied. A high level of social satisfaction extends throughout these groupings.

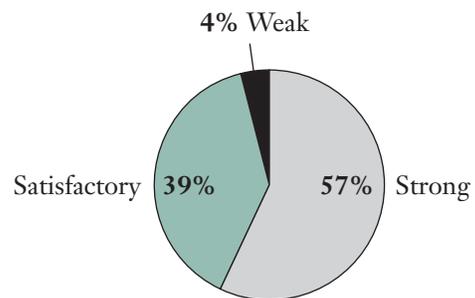
ACADEMIC RATING OF THE SCHOOLS

We wanted to know how the respondents judged their schools as educational institutions, since the students have attended other—presumably non-Jewish—schools, there is something of an outside benchmark. They know what to expect academically of a school, certainly with regard to the core academic program. We first asked the preparatory trackers to rate the secular studies program and then the Judaic component.

WITH RESPECT TO THE SECULAR PROGRAM (QUESTION 13), HERE ARE THE RESULTS:



WITH RESPECT TO JEWISH STUDIES (QUESTION 14):



As is true with survey research generally, it is not always clear what respondents had in mind when they selected particular choices. “Satisfactory” can

indicate just that, namely that while students do not regard the academic program as particularly strong, they believe it to be of reasonably good quality. Or, a “Satisfactory” response may indicate that the program is considered to be so-so. I would imagine that there were students who intended their “satisfactory” response to be an expression of a positive rating, while others doubtlessly meant to convey a more negative assessment.

However the “Satisfactory” responses are viewed, it is telling that for each question, more than half of the students considered the program to be “Strong,” while only 6% and 4% respectively selected “Weak.”

I believe that these figures are quite positive, especially with respect to the secular studies program. The students who responded previously attended, in the main, reasonably good public schools and some went to private schools. In key respects—their new Jewish school did not measure up to what they had previously experienced—facilities, libraries, extra-curricular activities, electives and a host of educational enhancements—yet only about 5% of the respondents said that their school was weak, either in the core academic program or in Jewish studies.

The subgroup distribution of responses was as follows: (Tables 5 & 6)

Once more, the girls gave the more favorable rating, although the margin between them and the boys is not great. However, the percentage differentials on these two questions for the American-born/foreign-born and Orthodox/non-Orthodox subgroups provide an opportunity for some additional analysis.

Although the assessment is generally positive throughout, particularly if “Satisfactory” is regarded as a favorable response, there is an interesting and perhaps telling disparity on these two questions between Orthodox and non-Orthodox school attendees. Preparatory trackers enrolled in non-Orthodox schools were significantly more favorable, with the gap quite substantial in the assessment of the secular studies programs. Fully two-thirds of the students who attended non-Orthodox schools rated the secular programs as “Strong,” an extraordinarily affirmative rating. The comparable figure for Orthodox schools is 41%. It is safe to say that the disparity is probably an index of the stronger core academic programs offered at non-Orthodox institutions. These schools emphasize secular studies over the Judaic component, while the Orthodox schools attempt to achieve at least a parity between the two parts of the curriculum. Put in other terms, non-Orthodox schools know that in order to attract students and stay in business, they must have a respectable academic program.

Table 5: ASSESSMENT OF SECULAR STUDIES PROGRAM

	Boys	Girls	American-Born	Foreign-Born	Orthodox School	Non-Orthodox School
Strong	51%	52%	54%	47%	41%	67%
Satisfactory	42%	44%	41%	47%	52%	29%
Weak	7%	4%	5%	6%	7%	4%

Table 6: ASSESSMENT OF JEWISH STUDIES

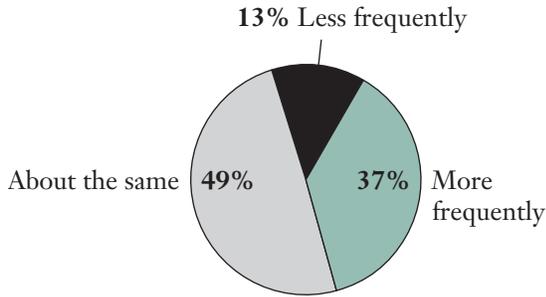
	Boys	Girls	American-Born	Foreign-Born	Orthodox School	Non-Orthodox School
Strong	57%	57%	59%	55%	54%	62%
Satisfactory	37%	41%	37%	41%	42%	34%
Weak	6%	2%	4%	4%	4%	4%

Even with respect to Jewish studies, a more favorable assessment was given by students who were enrolled in non-Orthodox schools. A “strong” rating was given by 62% of the respondents, as compared with 54% for the Orthodox schools. In fact, both assessments must be regarded as quite favorable. The more positive view of the non-Orthodox school preparatory trackers may result from the greater willingness of their schools to construct a Jewish studies curriculum that is closely attuned to the expectation of students.

PERSONAL AND FAMILY OBSERVANCE

We wanted to know about the observance level of the preparatory trackers and their families, with a special interest in whether there had been any change in recent years, perhaps as a consequence of the Jewish school experience.

WE FIRST ASKED ABOUT THE FREQUENCY OF STUDENT SYNAGOGUE ATTENDANCE, AS COMPARED WITH WHAT IT HAD BEEN PREVIOUSLY (QUESTION 17).



One of the general goals of Jewish schools is to encourage a higher level of observance, specifically including regular synagogue attendance. Accordingly, that half of the students report no increase in attendance may be regarded as disappointing. Still, nearly three times the number of students said that they now attend more frequently than those who indicated that they attend less often. Moreover, the post-Bar/Bat Mitzvah teenage years usually show a decline in synagogue attendance, as it is no longer compulsory in those congregations that require participation in services as a precondition for Bar/Bat Mitzvah preparation. Accordingly, even the one in seven students who said that they now attend synagogue less often may be regarded as individuals who are in the main no less observant in other respects than they were in the past but who no longer see the necessity to attend on a regular basis.

It also should be noted that most Jewish schools have in-school services, and attendance may be mandatory. It is difficult to assess whether mandatory school services affect synagogue attendance. It may be that because of their in-school experience students are more inclined to attend synagogue on Shabbat and the holidays. On the other hand, it may be that there are students who, because they are required to attend services during the week, are less likely to go to synagogue on Shabbat and the holidays.

The subgroup statistics are as follows: (Table 7)

Table 7: FREQUENCY OF SYNAGOGUE ATTENDANCE

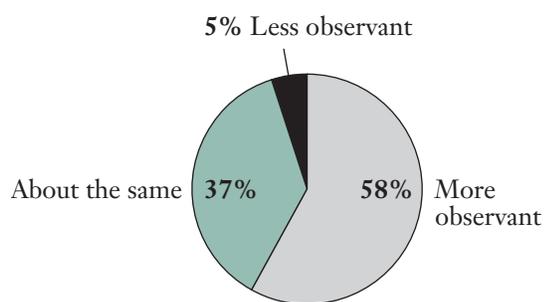
	Boys	Girls	American-Born	Foreign-Born	Orthodox School	Non-Orthodox School
More frequently	40%	34%	33%	44%	46%	24%
About the same	49%	50%	54%	42%	44%	58%
Less frequently	11%	16%	13%	14%	10%	18%

The subgroup data provides additional insight. Perhaps surprisingly, girls appear to be less positively affected than the boys. One out of each six girls said that she attended less often than she used to, compared with 11% of the boys who reported a drop in synagogue attendance.

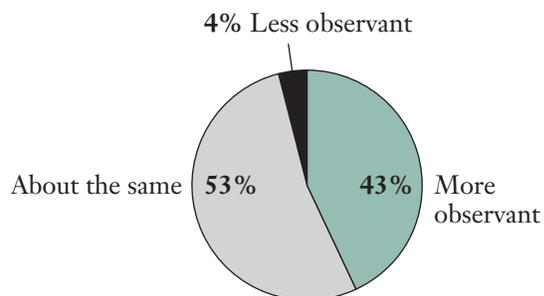
As for the American/foreign-born, there is substantially greater movement in a positive direction among the foreign-born. A possible explanation for this is that many of these students did not go to a synagogue on a regular basis prior to their day school experience. The American-born, on the other hand, were more likely to attend prior to their enrollment in a day school, as for many this was a requirement for the Bar/Bat Mitzvah preparation.

Since the foreign-born cluster to a considerable extent is in Orthodox schools, it is not surprising that these schools exhibit a strong beneficial impact on synagogue attendance. It is certain that the Orthodox institutions are more determined than the non-Orthodox to encourage synagogue participation, as well as observance in other areas.

WE ALSO ASKED THE STUDENTS WHETHER THEY HAD BECOME MORE OBSERVANT AS A RESULT OF THEIR JEWISH SCHOOL EXPERIENCE (QUESTION 20). THEY RESPONDED:



AS FOR THEIR FAMILIES' LEVEL OF OBSERVANCE (QUESTION 21), THEY SAID:



This is an impressive set of figures. Only a small proportion of the students (or their parents) had become less observant, although the teens are a period when religiosity often begins to wane. Not so with the overwhelming number of preparatory trackers. It is to be expected that a majority of families are “about the same” in their level of observance. Parents send their children to a Jewish school so that the youngsters may get a Jewish education and perhaps other Judaic enhancements and, with some exceptions, not for the purpose of upgrading their own religiosity.

Even with this caveat, it is noteworthy how many families may have become more observant. Students perceive that 42% of their families are now more observant, which is a strong indication of the ability of day schools to have an indirect beneficial impact on parents. Of course, the most positive statistic concerns the students themselves, for a comfortable majority of the entire cohort indicates that they are more observant because of their Jewish school experience. The questions relating to personal and family observance need to be examined as well from the perspective of the subgroups. (Tables 8 & 9, Page 19)

There are two ways to look at this set of responses. The first is to consider the statistics as a more or less reliable barometer of actual behavior. The second is to regard them as an index of self-perception and not necessarily as an indication of how the students themselves and their families have behaved religiously.

I am inclined to think that the former is the more acceptable explanation. These students are, after all, preparatory trackers who have transferred to a Jewish school years after their formal education began. This alone suggests that when they first entered the Jewish school, they were already in a stage of religious development. Their school environment and the Jewish courses they took should have expanded their Jewish growth, since the potential was already there. Furthermore, because they are in most instances in a religious setting which

Table 8: THE IMPACT OF A JEWISH SCHOOL ON PERSONAL RELIGIOUS OBSERVANCE

	Boys	Girls	American-Born	Foreign-Born	Orthodox School	Non-Orthodox School
More observant	56%	59%	52%	68%	66%	45%
About the same	38%	36%	42%	28%	30%	47%
Less observant	6%	5%	6%	4%	3%	8%

Table 9: THE IMPACT OF A JEWISH SCHOOL ON FAMILY OBSERVANCE

	Boys	Girls	American-Born	Foreign-Born	Orthodox School	Non-Orthodox School
More observant	43%	43%	40%	47%	51%	30%
About the same	53%	54%	58%	47%	45%	67%
Less observant	4%	3%	2%	6%	4%	3%

to one extent or another conveys messages about Shabbat, the holidays, Kashrut and other observances, we should imagine that they can gauge whether they and their families have changed religiously.

As suggested previously, this is probably less true of the foreign-born students whose choice of a Jewish school likely is less of an indicator that they are in a stage of religious development. Their decision is far more reflective of concern about public schools than it is a determination to become more observant. The availability of schools that essentially cater to a single immigrant group creates a comfort level that usually has little to do with a conscious embrace of a more Jewish life style. But for them, as well, there is a potential for growth which the school can further.

Looking at the subgroup data, it is apparent that gender is not a factor. But place of birth and type of school are. By a wide margin over those who were born in North America, foreign-born preparatory trackers reported that they had become more observant. This suggests that while immigrant students and their families may not have selected a Jewish school primarily because of the desire to grow religiously, their being in a religious institution affected them in a positive way. This should constitute for those who believe in day school education, a strong vote of confidence in the efficacy of these schools. This conclusion is buttressed by the data that show

that two-thirds of the students in Orthodox schools say that they have become more observant.

It should be underscored that the figures relating to the North American-born and those enrolled in non-Orthodox schools, while not as favorable as the data for the foreign-born and Orthodox schools, are also rather encouraging. More than half of the American-born said that they are now more observant, while the comparable figure for preparatory trackers in non-Orthodox schools is 45%.

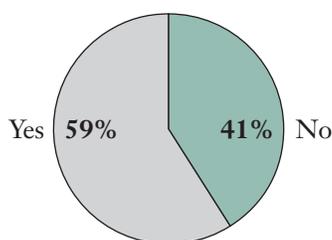
It is not surprising that the numbers are not as positive when the students assess the direction of their families' religiosity. The fact that for both the Orthodox and non-Orthodox school subgroups there is a 15% differential between those who say that they have become more observant and those who report greater observance on the part of their families lends credence to the strong showing by preparatory trackers when they report the religious direction they are taking.⁶

⁶ A word of caution may be in order. Enrollment in a Jewish school establishes for many preparatory trackers—and perhaps for veteran students as well—a kind of automatic greater degree of observance. After all, schools schedule religious services that are usually mandatory, food is always kosher and, more generally, the stress is on religious practice. For the students who come from homes of lesser religiosity, it should hardly be surprising that during the period of enrollment in a Jewish school they report that they become more observant.

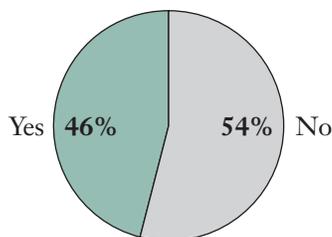
Overall, student reports of family observance show that a significant number have moved in the direction of greater religiosity. Again, it must be remembered that especially with respect to the American-born, many parents and families had already demonstrated a greater level of observance prior to their children being enrolled in a Jewish day school.

We next tried to learn about Kashrut, first asking whether the home is kosher. We then inquired whether the family observes Shabbat and, separately, whether the student does.⁷

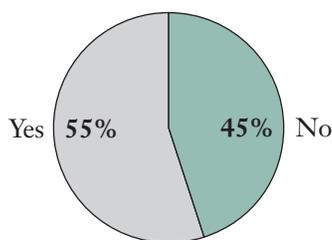
AS TO WHETHER THE HOME IS KOSHER (QUESTION 22):



WITH RESPECT TO FAMILY SABBATH OBSERVANCE (QUESTION 23a):



AS FOR PERSONAL SABBATH OBSERVANCE (QUESTION 23b):



In view of the low (and declining) level of Kashrut observance outside of Orthodoxy, it is significant that 60% of preparatory track homes observe kosher requirements in one fashion or another. These homes are considerably above the norm in contemporary Jewish life.⁸ Much the same can be said about

Sabbath observance, although not quite half of preparatory track families apparently observe the Sabbath in some religious sense.

The students themselves display a higher level of observance than their families, which confirms the previous indications that as compared with their families, preparatory trackers have achieved greater religious development.

Statistics for the subgroups follow, with the exception of years in school, a factor that does not appear to be particularly relevant here. (Tables 10, 11 & 12, Page 21)

Gender obviously is not a factor in Kashrut observance. As expected, students in Orthodox schools are more observant than those in non-Orthodox institutions. At the same time, the small 4% gap between the American-born and the foreign-born may be narrower than might have been anticipated.

Gender is marginally more of a factor in Sabbath observance, with boys and their families both higher on the religiosity scale. It is noteworthy that two-thirds of Orthodox school preparatory trackers observe the Sabbath, although only half their families do, a statistic that suggests that the schools are having a definite impact. A similar statistical gap of 16% exists between foreign-born students and their families. Here, too, the data indicates that the schools—primarily Orthodox—are effective.

⁷ It was left to the students to interpret Kashrut and Sabbath observance in terms of what they understood to be the appropriate standard. What might be regarded as the appropriate level of observance by some students probably would be looked at as inadequate by other students.

⁸ This is at least double the figure for Conservative Jewish homes in which the parents are synagogue members. The 1994-95 study of recent Conservative Bnai/Bat Mitzvah celebrants show that but 18% of the boys and 21% of the girls felt it important to have a kosher home. A parallel study indicated that 24% of Conservative synagogue members keep kosher, while but 6% of American Jews who identify themselves as Conservative but not synagogue members adhere to kosher food rules. (Jack Wertheimer, "Conservative Synagogues and Their Members," Jewish Theological Seminary, 1996.)

Table 10: IS THE HOME KOSHER?

	Boys	Girls	Orthodox School	Non-Orthodox School	American-Born	Foreign-Born
Yes	60%	59%	64%	50%	60%	56%
No	40%	41%	36%	50%	40%	44%

Table 11: FAMILY SABBATH OBSERVANCE

	Boys	Girls	Orthodox School	Non-Orthodox School	American-Born	Foreign-Born
Yes	48%	44%	50%	40%	51%	38%
No	52%	56%	50%	60%	49%	62%

Table 12: PERSONAL SABBATH OBSERVANCE

	Boys	Girls	Orthodox School	Non-Orthodox School	American-Born	Foreign-Born
Yes	58%	53%	66%	40%	56%	54%
No	42%	47%	34%	60%	44%	46%

Interestingly, the statistical breakdown on Sabbath observance is exactly the same for both non-Orthodox school attendees and their families which suggests that the non-Orthodox schools are not having an additive impact in this area.

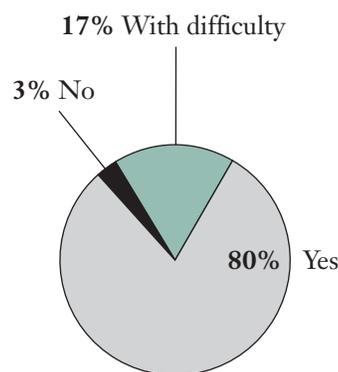
JEWISH KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS

Schools are, at the core, educational institutions and students are there to study and learn. With respect to preparatory tracks, the upgrading of students' Judaic skills and knowledge is a primary goal, along with the parallel mission of upgrading Jewish commitment and involvement.

The preparatory trackers were asked six questions that attempted to assess where they stood on several key indicators of Jewish knowledge and skills. In evaluating their responses, it is critical to be mindful that many of the students—more than 40% of the total cohort—were toward the end of their first year in a Jewish day school when the survey was conducted. Another 30% were in their second year. Accordingly, it may be too early to assess how successful the schools have been in educating their

students. As we will see, however, the students themselves report quite satisfactory results.

WE WANTED TO KNOW WHETHER THE STUDENTS ARE ABLE TO DAVEN (PRAY) FROM A SIDDUR (QUESTION 10a). BY A HUGE MARGIN THEY COULD, ALTHOUGH SOME HAD DIFFICULTY:

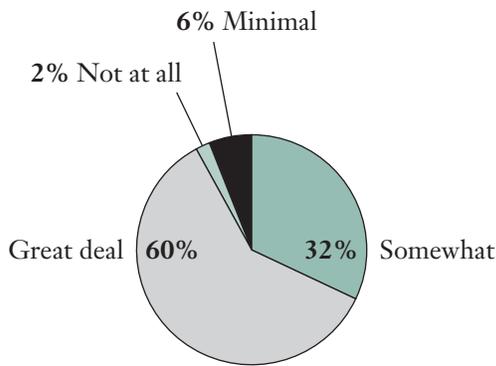


Because the numbers are overwhelmingly positive for all subgroups, a subgroup breakdown is not provided here. It is useful to point out that the American-born students were as apt to encounter difficulty using a Siddur as the foreign-born. Each group had about 17% of its cohort in the “With Difficulty” category. A possible explanation for this is the previously underscored propensity of the

foreign-born preparatory trackers to enroll in Orthodox schools where presumably more emphasis is placed on tefila and in teaching students how to daven.

The difficulty rate for non-Orthodox enrollees was 24%, or about twice that of the preparatory trackers in Orthodox schools, which may bear out the suggestion that I have just made.

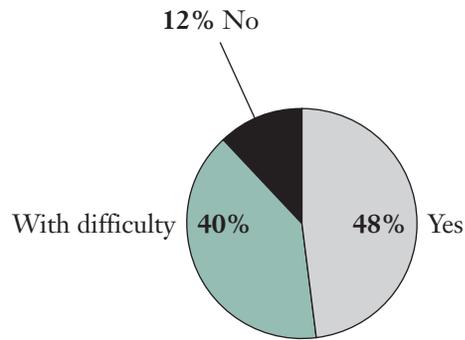
WE ALSO ASKED THE STUDENTS WHETHER THEIR JEWISH CLASSES HAD LED “TO AN IMPROVEMENT” IN THEIR HEBREW READING SKILLS (QUESTION 8). THIS QUESTION IS CLEARLY RELATED TO THE ABILITY TO PRAY FROM A SIDDUR. HERE ARE THE RESPONSES:



This is another set of truly impressive figures. They become more impressive when we note again the very large number of preparatory trackers who were in their first or second year of study in a Jewish day school. It is remarkable that 92% of the cohort say that the classes they took in the Jewish school led to an improvement in their Hebrew reading skills. Furthermore, skill in reading Hebrew is something that a student should be readily able to assess. There is nothing imprecise about the question or about the response categories.

As we know, many Jewish schools focus on Hebrew reading skill as the core of their Jewish studies curriculum. It may well be that it is not enough to teach students how to read. But it is certainly the case that without this ability, there is little hope that the preparatory trackers will advance much further in their Jewish knowledge. We can say confidently that schools—across the board—have succeeded admirably.

WE ALSO FOCUSED (QUESTION 10b) ON THE ABILITY TO “READ AND COMPREHEND THE CHUMASH” (BIBLE). AS EXPECTED, THE RESULTS WERE NOT AS POSITIVE AS HEBREW LANGUAGE SKILLS OR THE ABILITY TO DAVEN FROM A SIDDUR:



In fact, this set of figures may be difficult to interpret because actually two things were asked: 1) ability to read and 2) ability to comprehend. These obviously are different skills and the latter represents a significantly higher degree of achievement than the former. Presumably, on the basis of the responses to the two previously reported questions, the number of preparatory trackers who can read the Chumash is considerably above the 48% reported here. It may also be noted that the Chumash is a difficult book in many respects and comprehension does not come easily.

Table 13: CHUMASH (BIBLE) COMPREHENSION

	Orthodox School	Non-Orthodox School	American-Born	Foreign-Born
Yes	50%	45%	49%	47%
No	12%	12%	11%	13%
With difficulty	38%	42%	40%	40%

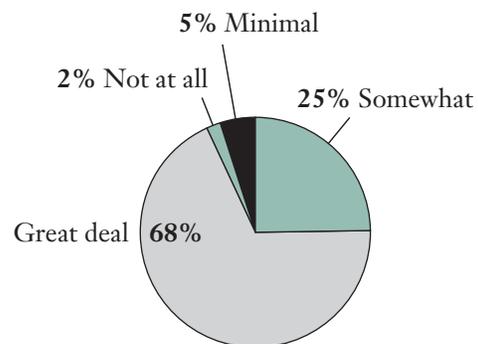
By a small margin a bit fewer than half of the preparatory trackers said that they could both read and comprehend, while 40% indicated that they could do so “With Difficulty.” Presumably quite a few of this latter group can read a Chumash. Moreover, it is once more necessary to keep in mind that a large majority of the respondents were either in their first or second year in a Jewish school. For many of them this was their first introduction to the study of Chumash.

The subgroup distribution for Orthodox/non-Orthodox schools and American-born/foreign-born sheds further light. (Table 13)

The data is nearly uniform across the subgroups, so that Orthodox schools do only marginally better than the non-Orthodox and there is no appreciable difference between American and foreign-born students. This is in contrast with the more positive data emerging from subgroup responses regarding religiosity. It may be that, for example, Orthodox schools have a better batting average in getting students to be observant—because they explicitly focus on this—than they have in imparting certain Jewish educational skills. Or, perhaps more likely,

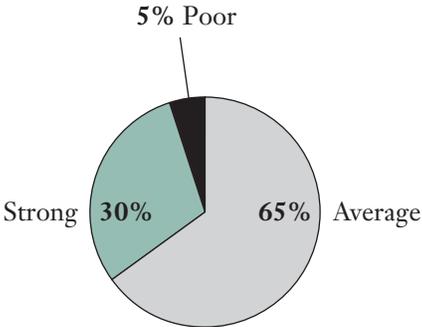
since the preparatory trackers are comparing themselves with classmates who especially in the case of Orthodox schools are usually considerably more advanced than they are, their responses do not necessarily mean that Orthodox schools are not doing better in absolute terms.

A SECOND QUESTION (QUESTION 9) WAS ASKED ABOUT CHUMASH SKILLS AND THE RESPONSES SHED ADDITIONAL LIGHT ON THE SUBJECT. WE WANTED TO KNOW THE EXTENT TO WHICH THEIR CLASSES LED “TO AN IMPROVEMENT IN YOUR KNOWLEDGE OF CHUMASH.” WE WERE TOLD:



In a sense, these statistics reflect a considerable turnaround in how the students viewed their progress in Chumash. While many preparatory trackers continue to have difficulty, especially with respect to comprehension, more than two-thirds said that their knowledge of Bible improved because of the coursework they took. Another one in four indicated some improvement, while fewer than 10% said that the classes had little or no beneficial impact. This is still another set of remarkably favorable statistics.

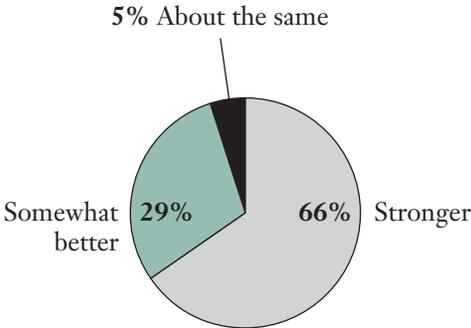
WE WENT FROM CHUMASH TO JEWISH HISTORY, ASKING THE STUDENTS TO ASSESS THEIR KNOWLEDGE OF THE SUBJECT (QUESTION 11). HERE IS THE BREAKDOWN OF HOW THEY PERCEIVED THEMSELVES:



As with “Satisfactory” that was discussed previously, “Average” is an imprecise term that is subject to different understandings on the part of those who use it, as well as those who may choose to interpret the responses. To some, it means a ranking below “Good.” To others, it may mean that—perhaps in this case—the students believe that they are holding their own. Whichever interpretation was predominant among the students, it remains that nearly one-third of the cohort was confident in their knowledge of Jewish history, a rather substantial number in view of the Jewish educational backgrounds of these students. It is also telling that just

five percent of the preparatory trackers describe themselves as “Poor.”⁹

THE FINAL QUESTION TO BE CONSIDERED (QUESTION 12) ASKED STUDENTS TO INDICATE WHETHER THERE HAD BEEN AN IMPROVEMENT IN THEIR JEWISH STUDIES SKILLS. WE SPECIFICALLY ASKED WHETHER THEIR KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS WERE ABOUT THE SAME, SOMEWHAT BETTER OR STRONGER THAN THEY WERE BEFORE THEY ENTERED THE PREPARATORY TRACK. THIS IS THE OVERALL DISTRIBUTION:



All but five percent of the preparatory trackers reported improvement, with two-thirds characterizing their Jewish knowledge and skills as “Stronger” than they had been. This is all the more remarkable because, as underscored previously, 40% of the cohort were still in their first year in a Jewish school and another 30% were in their second year. Whatever else we may think of preparatory tracks or any other aspect of day school education, for these students the Jewish schools they are in are working.

⁹ Apart from the point raised in the text, this question, as others, is not predicated on anything approaching an objective standard. High schoolers whose knowledge of Jewish history is actually poor may believe that they are strong in the subject, perhaps because they have no reference point or are comparing themselves to peers whose knowledge is even weaker than theirs. It’s doubtful, however, that teenagers whose knowledge is substantial would indicate that they are weak in this regard.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

1. I have referred to the survey as a snapshot and that is exactly what it is. A snapshot includes whatever is encompassed in the photo. What is not included is not part of the snapshot. Of course, it is possible to infer from what is excluded. This report covers 500 preparatory track students. It gives an accurate picture of how they felt at a particular point in time about their Jewish school experience. It does not provide information about the students who did not respond and it also does not indicate how those who responded will feel about the same experience down the road after they have left their school and entered adulthood. Here, too, the metaphor of a snapshot applies. A photo taken of a 15-year-old student will present a different picture than a photo taken ten years later of the same person.
2. The responses we received present an extremely positive profile of Jewish high school and day school education. When I initially took a quick look at the data, it was readily evident that preparatory tracks were succeeding. As I have reflected further and examined the statistics in terms of the several subgroups, I have become even more impressed by the achievements of the participating schools.
3. This is true across the board, although Orthodox schools generally have a higher success rate. In particular, much has been achieved with regard to foreign-born students, a high proportion of whom attend Orthodox institutions. All schools, however, are doing at least a credible job.
4. If the data were subjected to factor analysis, doubtlessly what would emerge is a more precise profile. Thus, we would be able to determine whether the students who are less than satisfied about their school experience or about the social environment were, in the aggregate, the respondents who said that their Judaic skills had scarcely been enhanced. But I doubt that factor analysis would disturb the general pattern that emerges, in view of the significant number of questions that received an overwhelmingly positive response.
5. Whatever has been achieved in educating and acculturating preparatory track students in Judaism, at the end of the day or whenever they leave their Jewish schools, they remain Jews at risk. What their education has given them is a better chance to overcome the risks. These students gained a measure of fluency in Hebrew, a skill that is certain to make them more comfortable in synagogue and more confident in their religiosity. Their knowledge of Jewish subjects—such as Bible and history—was also improved. It is inevitable that this will result for some in greater Judaic commitment.

CONCLUDING OBSERVATIONS

1. We know that the schools have done a rather good job educating their preparatory trackers. We also know that the support provided by AVI CHAI has not had an appreciable additive effect in generating additional preparatory track students or in encouraging Jewish high schools that do not have preparatory tracks to establish them. It is the case, though, that the Foundation's funding has eased the financial burden for the participating schools.
2. With the possible exception of some immigrant and outreach schools, preparatory track subventions have not had an appreciable impact on tuition charges. Participating schools have not reduced tuition or offered scholarships to these students as a consequence of the philanthropic support they have received. The unavailability of special tuition assistance is almost certainly a factor in diminishing the attractiveness of a Jewish high school to families of children who did not previously attend a Jewish day school. In most instances, these children went to a tuition-free public school throughout their elementary school years. The transfer into a Jewish high school entails a tremendous leap in the cost of education, a leap that must be a disincentive to families thinking about a Jewish high school. In all likelihood, the disincentive is propelled by three other factors. Jewish high school tuition is especially high; scholarship assistance is hard to come by in virtually all non-Orthodox high schools and many Modern Orthodox institutions; and as the high school years approach, parents are already fretting about how they will afford the huge cost of college education.

On the other hand, schools can claim—and usually rightly—that preparatory tracks entail an additional expense and that it is therefore difficult for them to also provide scholarship assistance. Whatever philanthropic money they receive is only a way of alleviating the additional financial burden.

3. Apart from providing much-deserved assistance to schools that are promoting an important Jewish educational goal by operating preparatory tracks, it is questionable whether outside philanthropic support can significantly alter the attitude or actions of school officials as they determine whether to recruit and admit preparatory trackers. In fact, most of the schools that have received AVI CHAI support have little choice in the matter. This is obviously true of the Orthodox-sponsored immigrant and outreach schools which educate a significant proportion of all preparatory trackers since this is their core mission and clientele. Non-Orthodox high schools, which invariably seek to cast their recruitment net across much of the spectrum of American Jewry, are probably not in a position to reject applicants with little or no day school background. They need these students to help provide a firm financial and enrollment base. Furthermore, at non-Orthodox schools, preparatory trackers tend to fit in well with students with more day school experience whose Judaic knowledge and skills may be limited.
4. We know that what is called a preparatory track varies greatly from school to school. In some institutions, such as the immigrant and outreach high schools, the entire Jewish studies curriculum can be regarded as catering to students with little or no background. At the other end of the spectrum, there are schools with few preparatory trackers, and they usually attend classes with veteran day schoolers who happen to be weak students. Accordingly, there is a threshold issue of what constitutes a preparatory track, an issue that is especially relevant to schools that have a rather minimalistic Judaic curriculum.

The status of preparatory tracks is part of a larger question that needs to receive greater attention. As organized American Jewry makes an expanding commitment to day school education and enrollment continues to grow at a

rapid pace, there is a need to reflect on the quality and goals of the school—particularly its Judaic curriculum. In much the same way that it is universally recognized that there is an obligation to insist on standards in the core academic curriculum, the community must begin to grapple with the valid question of whether too many schools are offering too weak a Judaic program to justify the investment or to ensure the outcomes that are expected from religious schools.

Put otherwise, there is a difference between a day school that adheres to Jewish standards and aspires to influence its students in the direction of greater religiosity and a day school that in the final analysis is no more than an educational institution under Jewish auspices.

Because the evidence presented in this report demonstrates the potential of preparatory tracks, it is even more obligatory to maintain appropriate Jewish educational and religious standards.

APPENDIX I

PREPARATORY TRACK STUDENT QUESTIONNAIRE

- 1 a. Gender Male Female
b. Age _____
2. Name of your Jewish high school and grade when entered

3. How many years have you been (or were you) in the school?
4. School (high school or college) you are now attending and grade _____
5. If you have completed high school, were you graduated from a Jewish high school?
 Yes No
6. Were you born in the U.S.?
 Yes No

Overseas (specify country)?

7. Are you happy that you have studied in a Jewish high school?
 Yes No Indifferent
8. To what extent did your Jewish high school classes lead to an improvement in your Hebrew reading skills?
 A great deal Somewhat
 Minimal Not at all
9. To what extent did your Jewish high school classes lead to an improvement in your knowledge of Chumash (Bible)?
 A great deal Somewhat
 Minimal Not at all
10. a. Are you now able to: daven (pray) from a Siddur?
 Yes No With difficulty

b. Read and comprehend the Chumash?
 Yes No With difficulty
11. How would you consider your knowledge of Jewish history?
 Strong Average Poor
12. Are your Jewish knowledge and skills generally
 About the same as before high school
 Somewhat better
 Stronger
13. With respect to secular (non-Jewish) studies, how would you rate your high school?
 Strong Satisfactory
 Weak
14. With regard to Jewish studies, how would you rate your school?
 Strong Satisfactory
 Weak
15. How would you rate your Jewish high school experience?
 Excellent Good Fair
 Poor Awful

16. Socially, in high school did (do) you feel

- Happy Unhappy
 Other
-

17. Nowadays, do you attend synagogue?

- About the same as before high school
 More frequently Less frequently

18. Have you visited Israel?

- Yes No

If yes, how often since you entered high school? _____

19. As compared to when you were age 14, do you regard yourself as

- More observant Less observant
 About the same

20. As a result of your high school experience, do you regard yourself as

- More observant Less observant
 About the same

21. Compared to what it used to be, is your family

- More observant Less observant
 About the same

22. Is your home kosher?

- Yes No

23. a. Does your family observe Shabbat?

- Yes No

b. Do you observe Shabbat?

- Yes No

24. Does your Jewish high school experience influence the ways in which you make decisions? If so, how?

25. If you wish to receive an Amazon gift certificate, please write your name and mailing address or your name and e-mail address:

APPENDIX 2

SCHOOLS THAT HAVE RECEIVED PREPARATORY TRACK GRANTS

School Name	City	State
Akiba Hebrew Academy	Merion	PA
Akiva Jewish Academy	St. Louis Park	MN
Be'er Hagola Institute for Girls	Brooklyn	NY
Beit Yaakov Ohel Simcha High School	Flushing	NY
Ben Lipson Hillel Community High School - Samuel Sheck Hillel Community Day School	North Miami Beach	FL
Beth Chana Academy High School for Girls	Orange	CT
Beth Tfiloh Community School	Baltimore	MD
Bialik High School	Cote St. Luc	Quebec, Canada
Block Yeshiva High School	St. Louis	MO
Charles E. Smith Jewish Day School	Rockville	MD
Columbus Torah Academy	Columbus	OH
Community Hebrew Academy of Toronto	Downsview	Ontario, Canada
Cooper Yeshiva High School for Boys	Memphis	TN
Donna Klein Jewish Academy	Boca Raton	FL
Ecole Maimonide	Ville St. Laurent	Quebec, Canada
Ezra Academy	Forest Hills	NY
Fasman Yeshiva High School	Skokie	IL
Frisch School	Paramus	NJ
Hanna Sacks Bais Yaakov High School	Chicago	IL
Hebrew Academy - Lubavitch	Huntington Beach	CA
Hebrew Academy of Cleveland/ Yavne High School for Girls	Cleveland Heights	OH
Hebrew Academy of San Francisco	San Francisco	CA
Hebrew High School of New England	West Hartford	CT
Herzliah High School - Snowdon	Montreal	Quebec, Canada
Herzliah High School - St. Laurent	St. Laurent	Quebec, Canada
Hillel Community Day School	North Miami Beach	FL
Hillel Yeshiva High School	Ocean	NJ
Hyman Brand Hebrew Academy	Overland Park	KS
Ida Crown Jewish Academy	Chicago	IL
Joseph Wolinsky Collegiate	Winnipeg	Manitoba, Canada
Machon Academy	Lawrence	NY
Margolin School for Girls	Memphis	TN
Merkaz Bnos High School	Brooklyn	NY
Mesivta of Allegheny County	White Oak	PA
Mesivta Ohr Torah	Douglaston	NY
Midrash Lman Achai	Forest Hills	NY
Milken Community High School	Los Angeles	CA
Moshe Aaron Yeshiva High School	South River	NJ
Nefesh Academy	Brooklyn	NY
Netan Eli High School	Los Angeles	CA
New Atlanta Jewish Community High School	Dunwoody	GA
New Haven Hebrew Day School	Orange	CT
New Jewish High School	Waltham	MA

School Name	City	State
Northwest Yeshiva High School	Mercer Island	WA
Ohr HaEmet Institute	Los Angeles	CA
Ora Academy	Rochester	NY
Pardes School	Beachwood	OH
Rabbi Alexander S. Gross Hebrew Academy	Miami Beach	FL
Rabbi Alexander S. Gross/Fana Holtz High School of the Hebrew Academy of Greater Miami	Miami Beach	FL
Rabbi Naftali Riff Yeshiva	South Bend	IN
Regional Institute for Torah & Secular Studies	Cincinnati	OH
Robert M. Beren Academy	Houston	TX
Rubin Wishkin High School-Hebrew Academy of Atlantic County	Egg Harbor Township	NJ
Shalhevet Middle School and High School	Los Angeles	CA
Shearis Israel	Brooklyn	NY
Shevach High School	Flushing	NY
Simkin Middle School	Winnipeg	Manitoba, Canada
Sinai Academy	Brooklyn	NY
Solomon Schechter High School of Long Island	Glen Cove	NY
Solomon Schechter High School of New York	New York	NY
Solomon Schechter Middle School of Nassau County	Glen Cove	NY
Solomon Schechter Upper School of Essex & Union	West Orange	NJ
Tarbut V'Torah Community Day School	Irvine	CA
Temima High School for Girls	Atlanta	GA
Tikvah High School for Girls	New Haven	CT
Torah Academy of Brooklyn for Boys	Brooklyn	NY
Torah Academy of Greater Philadelphia (Girls)	Ardmore	PA
Torah Academy of Greater Philadelphia (Sol Sved Boys' Division)	Philadelphia	PA
Torah Academy of Suffolk County	Commack	NY
Torah High Schools of San Diego - Boys	La Jolla	CA
Torah High Schools of San Diego - Girls	San Diego	CA
Valley Torah High School Boys Division	Valley Village	CA
Valley Torah High School Girls Division	Sun Valley	CA
Vancouver Talmud Torah High School	Vancouver	British Columbia, Canada
Yavneh Academy of Dallas	Dallas	TX
Yeshiva Atlanta High School	Atlanta	GA
Yeshiva Beit Yitzchak Irving Zucker College	Hamilton	Ontario, Canada
Yeshiva BeRachel David / Torah High School of Queens	Richmond Hill	NY
Yeshiva Binat Chaim	Forest Hills	NY
Yeshiva Chanoch Lenaar	Brooklyn	NY
Yeshiva Darkei Avoseinu	Brooklyn	NY
Yeshiva High School of Boca Raton	Boca Raton	FL
Yeshiva High School of the Hebrew Academy of Cleveland	Lyndhurst	OH
Yeshiva of Greater Washington	Silver Spring	MD
Yeshiva Ohr Eliezer	Brooklyn	NY
Yeshiva Rambam	Brooklyn	NY
Yeshivat Akiva / Akiva Hebrew Day School	Southfield	MI
Yeshivat Shaarei Torah (Boys)	Brooklyn	NY
Yitzchak Rabin High School	Nepean	Ontario, Canada

NOTES



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