

Kadimah School: The Pursuit of Scholastic Excellence and Religious Commitment

Executive Summary*

**NOTE: Adding or subtracting fractional numbers may have resulted in slightly more or less than 100%.*

Dr. Stanley Dickson, Professor Emeritus SUC at Buffalo

Karen L. Zakalik, Marketing Consultant

Kadimah School is a transdenominational Jewish community day school in Buffalo, New York. In its 44 years of operation, like many Hebrew day schools across North America, it has done little in the way of tracking its alumni and knowing concretely the benefits its graduates have derived from their day school education. To that end, and to demonstrate to Buffalo's Jewish community leadership the positive effects a day school education has on Jewish identity, commitment, and philanthropy Dr. Stanley Dickson and Karen L. Zakalik initiated a study of the school's graduates. They developed a questionnaire to quantify Jewish identity and practice, academic achievement, and the career and life choices of its alumni.

Records of the school were reviewed and a list of graduates from 1964 to the present was compiled. Current address information was obtained and the beginnings of an alumni database were begun with approximately 450 names. The first class to graduate was in 1964 from sixth grade. In 1972 the school program was extended to eighth grade. Since then Kadimah has been a Nursery through Eighth grade school.

The study was limited to the graduates from the years 1964-1992. The survey population was 201 graduates who were at least 10 years post-graduation from Kadimah School. Fifty-one responded to the survey comprising a 25% rate of response. The mean, standard deviation and statistical confidence

intervals were calculated to determine the probability of obtaining the same results, 95 times out of 100, or better, if the remaining 75% of the graduates who were sent the survey had responded. Additional statistical tests were done to evaluate significant differences, if any, between those who classified themselves as “observant” (i.e. Shomer Shabbat), “Somewhat Observant”, “Varied/Inconsistent”, “Minimally Observant”, and “No or Little Religious Practices”.

THE TOPICAL AREAS COVERED BY THE QUESTIONNAIRE

- Religious Practice and Identification Inquiry
- Jewish Communal Life Involvement and Service
- Ranking of Courses of Study and Their Influence
- Post High School Educational Data
- Background Information on the Graduate and Their Family

Religious Practice and Identification analyzed parent religious practice, synagogue affiliation, graduate’s current religious practice, affiliation, synagogue membership, and Jewish high school experience, as well as the regularity of graduates engaging in various Jewish religious practices.

Jewish Communal Life Involvement and Service examined frequency of attendance and participation in Jewish overnight camps, youth groups, travel to Israel, and other Jewish community organization involvements as members, volunteers, and donors.

Ranking of Courses of Study and Their Influence on the graduate was sought to understand the influence of Judaic Studies regarding Jewish identification and practice, and Secular/General Studies on the respondent's post-high school academic and career choices.

Post-High School Educational Data was to learn level of education achieved, area of major, academic ranking and honors received, as well as the Jewish extra-curricular involvements of the graduate.

The Background Information of the Graduate and Their Family sought to identify the personal status of the graduate (e.g. married, single, divorced, separated, in a committed relationship); the religion of spouse/partner, how they identify themselves within the Jewish religious spectrum, did they attend a Jewish day school, and their level of academic achievement. If the graduate has children are they attending a Jewish day school vs. supplemental Hebrew school or some other program, and the parent's satisfaction with the Jewish education their children are receiving.

KEY FINDINGS

- The breakdown of respondents was 43% male and 57% female.
- The average age of the males was 35.8 years, and for the females was 34.2 years.
- The average age of the group was 34.9 years.
- The average number of children for the total group was 1.62 children.
- 69% of the respondents indicated they are members of a synagogue.
- The religious affiliation indicated by the respondents was: 49% Conservative, 29% Orthodox, 18% Reform, 3% Reconstructionist, and 2% Unaffiliated.

Jewish Rituals and Activities

	<u>Frequently</u>	<u>Occasionally or Infrequently</u>	<u>Never</u>
• Daily Minyan	13%	22%	65%
• Friday Evening Services	22%	48%	30%
• Saturday Morning Services	43%	40%	18%
• High Holy Days	87%	10%	2%
• Observe Yahrzeits	41%	24%	36%
• Jewish Holidays other than High Holidays	55%	39%	6%
• Laws of Kosher	65%	22%	14%
• Mikveh	14%	8%	78%
• Life Cycle Events (Bar-Bat Mitzvah, etc.)	75%	26	0%

Some differences were noted between the “observant” group and the other groups for some of these practices. The observance of the High Holidays, Life Cycle Events, Kashrut, and other Jewish Holidays seemed to be the practice for the majority of subjects.

Communal Life Involvement and Service

- 78% Attended Jewish overnight camps (22% Never)
- 98% Participated in Jewish youth groups (2% Never)
- 76% Went to Israel for vacation and/or programs (24% Never)
- 96% Connection with a JCC (4% Never)
- 90% Contribute to Federation and other Jewish charitable organizations (10% Never)
- 70% Serve on boards and committees of Jewish organizations (30% Never)

Ranking of Judaic Study Courses and Their Influence as Perceived by Respondent

• Hebrew Language	96% Influential	4% Not Influential	
• Torah	88% Influential	8% NI	4% NA
• Talmud	55% Influential	25% NI	20%NA
• Prophets	61% Influential	33% NI	6%NA
• Jewish Philosophy	67% Influential	17% NI	16% NA
• Jewish History	88% Influential	8% NI	4% NA
• Jewish Law and Ethics	86% Influential	8% NI	6% NA
• Jewish Holidays	96% Influential	4% NI	
• Jewish Customs and Practices	96% Influential	4% NI	

The Jewish Studies courses ranked “Very Influential” were: Hebrew (47%), Jewish Customs and Practices (47%), Jewish Holidays (41%), Torah (22%), Jewish Law and Ethics, and Jewish History (20%), Jewish Philosophy (16%), Prophets (12%) and Talmud (10%). The three receiving the lowest ranking could be due to age, maturity, and amount of study devoted to the subject at the time the respondent was in Middle School (Grades 5-8 at Kadimah).

Ranking of Secular/General Study Courses and Their Influence as Perceived by Respondent

• Math	92% Influential	6% Not Influential	NA
• English	98% Influential	2% NI	NA
• Science	78% Influential	16% NI	6%NA
• Music	53% Influential	41% NI	6%NA
• Art	84% Influential	16% NI	NA

- Social Studies 47% Influential 35% NI 18% NA
- Physical Education 47% Influential 35% NI 18% NA
- Computer Science 12% Influential 14% NI 71% NA

The secular courses of study ranked “Very Influential” were: Math (47%), English (37%), Science (27%), Social Studies (22%), Physical Education (12%), Music and Art (4%). Low rating of computer science may be due to changes in school resources as well as the change in relative importance and use of computers since 1992 to present versus 1964-1992 experience of students.

All of the respondents graduated from high school, and 16% indicated they were in the upper 1% of their class academically. An additional 42% indicated they were in the upper 10% of their class academically. Fifty-six percent (56%) of this group indicated they graduated with honors or awards.

Post High School Education Data

- 98% graduated with at least a baccalaureate degree (2% did not earn a degree at all)
- 37% only a baccalaureate degree
- 31% also earned a masters degree
- 29% also earned a doctorate degree

Major Subject Areas

- Social Sciences 22%
- Business and/or Accounting 22%
- Humanities 18%

Sciences 14%

Distinctions Earned

60% Indicated they were on Dean's List

39% Indicated they graduated cum laude, magna cum laude or summa cum laude

10% Indicated they were elected to Phi Beta Kappa

55% Indicated they participated in on campus Jewish clubs like Hillel

Background Information on Subjects and Their Families**

73% Married 22% Single 6% Committed Relationship

***NOTE: Those who indicated that they are either married or in a committed relationship 95% of their spouses/partners are Jewish, and 5% are not Jewish.*

Religious Identification of Spouses/Partners

54% identify themselves as Conservative

22% identify themselves as Orthodox

19% identify themselves as Reform

5% identify themselves as not Jewish

Religious Education of Spouses/Partners

28% Spouses/Partners attended Hebrew day school

39% Spouses/Partners attended supplemental Hebrew school

28% Spouses/Partners did not attend supplemental Hebrew school

5% Spouses/Partners obtained Jewish education at home

Religious Education of Offspring

54% of the Respondents children are attending a Hebrew day school

35% are attending a synagogue or supplemental afternoon Hebrew school.

10% are receiving their Jewish education at home.

1% is not receiving a Jewish education.

All of the subjects expressed satisfaction with religious and secular education of their children. Only one child was not receiving any Jewish education.

Ninety-four percent (94%) of the respondents reside in 17 different states in the United States, and six percent (6%) have made aliyah to Israel since graduating from Kadimah. They have chosen occupations and professions representing a microcosm of vocations associated with a highly educated group.

Respondents have indicated they were physicians, dentists, attorneys, accountants, marketing managers, actuaries, social workers, teachers, office executives, psychologists, etc. One subject chose to be an American Sign Language interpreter in Hebrew.

MAJOR CONCLUSIONS

- Kadimah graduates achieve scholastic excellence beyond expectations. They have pursued advanced degrees and chosen occupational ventures and professions consistent with their academic success and outstanding scholastic performance.
- Kadimah graduates have retained their commitment to Judaism and have chosen spouses/partners who are their academic equal and religious counterpart. Their religious practices

are consistent with their dedication to Judaism, and they are bestowing this identity and commitment to their progeny where by all of the children (except one) are being given a Jewish education that the parent feels is satisfactory or better than satisfactory.

- Kadimah graduates have accomplished this within American culture without giving up their religious identity and practices as Jews. They are an exceptional group of individuals who reflect credit upon themselves, their parents, teachers, school, and Jewish community.

Kadimah School is currently engaged in a capital and endowment campaign to build its own facility with the intent of expanding its program to include high school. The results of this study suggest that the Kadimah School of Buffalo, by virtue of it's the educational excellence achieved by its graduates, is worthy of receiving broad Jewish community support in its plans for a building. Additionally the institution has the solid foundation for developing an ongoing relationship with its alumni and as well as engaging them in the capital and endowment campaign now underway.

Lastly, other Jewish day schools should consider undertaking a similar study of their graduates. If similar results are obtained across the United States and Canada a consortium of schools could work together in bringing Jewish day school education to a higher level of access for all Jewish children of school age in North America.