



Frequently Asked Questions about Jewish Day Schools

What is day school education?

Day schools provide children with Jewish and general education in a nurturing environment that provides a strong sense of community and Jewish identity. Day schools are private elementary, middle and high schools supported by Jewish communities.

What do you mean by “day school enterprise”?

There are over 700 day schools in North America reflecting the ideological spectrum of the Jewish experience. When we speak of the day school enterprise, we refer to how these schools, and their supporters, represent a national endeavor that has an impact on the entire Jewish community. As an “enterprise,” day schools require coordinated advocacy efforts, strategic planning, and system-wide actions on key issues such as personnel, affordability, fundraising, leadership, student recruitment, and advocacy.

What are the different types of day schools?

Most Jewish day schools in North America follow the same grade structure as public schools: K-5 for elementary schools, 6-8 for middle schools, and 9-12 for high schools.

Of the 700 day schools in North America, 79% are affiliated with Orthodox institutions, 10% with the Conservative movement, 8% have Community affiliations, and 3% are affiliated with the Reform movement.

A community Jewish day school is unaffiliated with any specific denomination. These schools attract a pluralistic student body.

Why is the number of day schools and day school students growing so rapidly?

Until the middle of the 20th century, it was considered “un-American” for religious groups to educate their children in non-public schools. The public school system was the preferred way into the melting pot of American society. Hence, most of the Jews who arrived in the early part of the 1900s, as well as their children and grandchildren, received their education in public schools.

In the 1960s, a cultural shift began to affirm religious, and ethnic pluralism within the United States. This shift redefined the relationship of religious groups to American society and opened the door for rapid proliferation of Jewish day schools across the country. This trend was started initially in the Orthodox community, but eventually spread to the Conservative and Reform movements as well.

In Canada, where there never was a melting pot ethos, day schools were established immediately upon the arrival of the Jews to those communities in the early 20th century. To this day, the Canadian day school enterprise enrolls a much greater percentage of the community's children.

More recent concerns about intermarriage and Jewish continuity have brought greater attention and resources to day schools. In addition, Jewish parents are seeking a high-quality Jewish and general education that will yield a Jewishly-literate next generation. Day schools, through the intensity of their program and the quality of their instruction, have become attractive places to acquire an education. As the demand for quality Jewish education has grown, so have the number and diversity of Jewish day schools.

How do schools provide both Jewish and general studies education?

Some day schools offer what is known as a "dual curriculum," offering traditional school subjects like math, English, and social studies as well as Judaic subjects, like *Tanakh*, Jewish history, and Hebrew. Other schools opt for an "integrated curriculum" where students cover both general and Jewish studies in the same classroom setting. For example, an integrated curriculum might include teachings about Hanukah in a course on ancient world history. Both pedagogic models offer close personal attention, encourage critical thinking, and create "habits of mind" that prepare students well for future studies. Whichever model is followed, day school education enables children to make full use of their time, all the while experiencing the "best of both worlds."

How do day schools prepare their students for the larger world?

Jewish day schools—elementary, middle, and high schools—offer a rigorous curriculum that prepares students for college and post-graduate study. Nearly all graduates of liberal or modern Orthodox day schools attend secular colleges and universities, and graduates of day schools attend the most prestigious public and private colleges at disproportionately high rates. Among a recent study of 60 Detroit-area high school valedictorians, a remarkable 23 of these students were graduates of a Jewish elementary or middle school.

More broadly, Jewish day schools provide young people with an extensive peer community that supports a positive and knowledgeable Jewish identity. According to a recent study, **79% of Jewish day school graduates marry Jews, and 72% of day school graduates choose day school education for their own**

children. Graduates of day schools are equipped with a level of Jewish literacy that enables them to make life decisions inspired by Jewish values, traditions, texts, and culture. It also predisposes them to living actual Jewish lives. At a recent gathering of student leaders at the Northwestern University Hillel foundation, 70% indicated that they had attended a Jewish day school.

How are day schools supported financially?

Like other agencies in the Jewish community, day schools depend on a number of sources for financial support. These include:

- Tuition is the largest proportion of most schools' operating budgets.
- Federations support the day schools in their communities, usually through a direct allocation based on a per-capita formula. In addition to annual allocations, federations often provide assistance with capital and endowment campaigns.

Schools are called upon to provide an increasing amount of their own support. Schools conduct fundraising campaigns for their annual budget (including scholarships), capital expenses, and endowments. Parents, grandparents, and alumni are natural supporters of the schools to which they have a connection. Yet an increasing number of donors have no direct connection to the school which they support. They recognize the tremendous capacity of day schools to further Jewish continuity. Day schools are considered essential and valuable institutions to any thriving Jewish community.