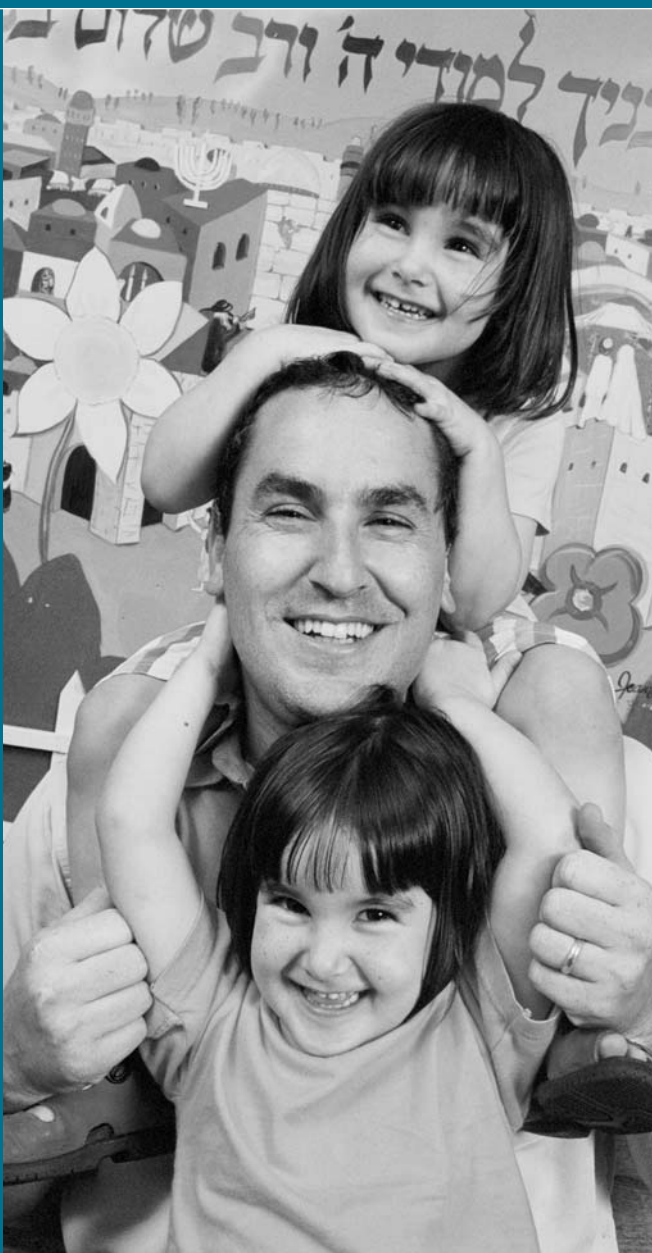


United Jewish Communities
Report Series on the
National Jewish Population Survey 2000-01



The Impact of Childhood
Jewish
Education
on Adults'
Jewish
Identity:

Schooling, Israel Travel,
Camping and Youth Groups

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INTRODUCTION

JEWISH COMMUNAL POLICYMAKERS, PRACTITIONERS AND RESEARCHERS have long been concerned with the question of the “impact” of Jewish education.¹ Put most simply this question asks: Does Jewish education make a difference? In the long run, does Jewish education influence the Jewish identity of adults 20, 30, 40 and more years after they have experienced one or more forms of Jewish education? More specifically, what kinds of Jewish education exert what sorts of influence, of what magnitude, upon each of several Jewish identity outcomes?

Ideally, we would like to study the impact of Jewish education today upon adult Jewish identity thirty years from now. Clearly, such a study would demand that we wait decades for definitive conclusions. Another possibility is to examine the impact of Jewish education today in the short term; but then we would explore only the attitudes, knowledge, and behavior of today’s youngsters and adolescents with no guarantee that current patterns of Jewish identity will be reflected in their adulthood, twenty or thirty years from now.

A third alternative, the one taken here, is to examine the long-range impact of Jewish educational experiences undergone years and decades ago upon today’s Jewish adults. Of course, we know full well that they experienced their childhood Jewish education earlier in time and that educational experiences today do not entirely replicate those experienced long ago. Jews, Jewish identity, and Jewish education have all changed considerably over the last few decades. Nevertheless, knowing how different sorts of Jewish schools and informal Jewish educational experiences influence the Jewish identity of today’s adults can help us understand the effectiveness of Jewish education in contemporary times.

This report utilizes data from the National Jewish Population Survey

1. See, for example, Bock 1976; Cohen 1974, 1988, 1995, 2000; Goldstein and Barack Fishman 1993; Himmelfarb 1974, 1979; and Rimor and Katz 1993. Full citations are at back of report.

METHODOLOGICAL NOTE

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

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

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

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

In this report, the following variables were asked of the more engaged population only: trips to Israel, Jewish camping, the importance of being Jewish, and three of the components of the ritual scale, fasting on Yom Kippur, lighting Shabbat candles, and keeping kosher at home. Rather than limiting the analysis, this report assumes that those who were not asked these questions would have answered “no” to the behavioral questions (e.g., no Jewish camping experience) and would not have answered “very important” to the item on the importance of being Jewish.

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

(NJPS) 2000-01 to analyze the impact of various forms of respondents' past Jewish education upon selected measures of current Jewish identity. The analysis accounts for the type of Jewish homes and experiences of respondents in their childhood and adolescent years, understanding that these factors also influence current Jewish identity levels.

SELF SELECTION: A DIFFICULT ISSUE

ANY ANALYSIS TRYING TO ASSESS “IMPACT” CONTENDS WITH NUMEROUS CONCEPTUAL AND METHODOLOGICAL DIFFICULTIES. Perhaps the most trying is the question of self-selection. That is, we know that users of extensive and intensive forms of Jewish education come from homes and communities blessed with significant resources for nurturing and sustaining Jewish identity. Moreover, the users of one kind of Jewish education often make use of other kinds. In other words, those with stronger Jewish resources tend to be those who receive stronger Jewish educations. The task for the analyst is to isolate the effects of Jewish education from other factors.

Data and Measures

Given these issues, this analysis incorporates three types of measures from NJPS 2000-01:

- ▶ Jewish education, both formal and informal
- ▶ Jewish environment of the childhood home and community
- ▶ Jewish identity

NJPS has detailed information about formal Jewish schooling in both elementary and high school years, as well as the three major forms of informal Jewish education, youth groups, camps, and Israel experience.

Respondents reported a wide variety of formal Jewish schooling experiences. Where they reported more than one type of schooling, they were classified according to their most intensive form of Jewish schooling, giving preference to day schools over supplementary schools that met twice or more per week, supplementary schools over Sunday schools (or

other programs that met once a week), and all schools over other forms of Jewish education such as private tutoring. Thus, respondents who attended a supplementary school several times a week as well as a Sunday school were classified in the former category.

In addition, preliminary examination of the data found that respondents differed in terms of length of schooling. Hence, the Jewish education measure distinguishes those with six or fewer years from those with seven or more years for each type of schooling. A large number of supplemental school youngsters discontinued their Jewish schooling after five or six years, suggesting a policy-relevant dividing point.

For informal educational experiences, the analysis examines three experiences:

- ▶ attending a Jewish summer camp when growing up
- ▶ participating in a Jewish youth group during high school
- ▶ traveling to Israel during ages 14-26 (the age range customarily used by Israel experience professionals as the target of their recruitment efforts).

More detailed information on informal education is generally unavailable. For example, NJPS does not reveal the duration of participation in youth groups, the intensity of Jewish content in summer camps² or the educational intensity of trips to Israel.

In the past, many surveys contained only minimal information on childhood home and other experiences. As a result, researchers may have given too much “credit” to Jewish education in creating and sustaining Jewish identity. Fortunately, NJPS asked numerous questions about the childhood homes and experiences of today’s adults. These include: parents’ religious denomination (a proxy for intensive Jewish home observance); parents’ Jewish status (two born Jewish parents or one born

Jewish parent); household Shabbat practices when the respondent was a child; the presence of a Christmas tree in the childhood home; and the extent of respondents’ Jewish friendship ties in high school. Although this list is not exhaustive, its size and diversity does provide sufficient information to measure the Jewish environment of today’s adults when they were children and adolescents.

Lastly, NJPS contains a rich set of Jewish identity variables that cover both behaviors and attitudes. In this analysis, we examine the following selective but diverse set of measures:

- ▶ in-marriage
- ▶ in-group friendships
- ▶ ritual practices
- ▶ synagogue membership
- ▶ importance of being Jewish
- ▶ emotional attachment to Israel.

More specifically, in-marriage measures whether the current spouse of each married respondent is Jewish (either a born Jew or a convert to Judaism) or, if the respondent is widowed or divorced, whether his or her most recent spouse was Jewish (again, either born Jewish or converted to Judaism). In-group friendships measure whether respondents said that all or most of their closest friends are Jewish. Ritual practice is an index (or scale) that sums five individual practices: attending or holding a Passover Seder, lighting Chanukah candles at least some nights, fasting on Yom Kippur, always or usually lighting Sabbath candles, and keeping kosher at home. Synagogue membership captures whether respondents currently belong to a congregation.

Of the two attitudinal measures, the importance of being Jewish derives from a question asking respondents, “How important is being Jewish in your life?” Respondents were given four options: very, somewhat, not very

2. The NJPS question on Jewish summer camps required respondents to determine whether any of the sleep-away camps they attended had “Jewish content.” This criterion may have elicited a wider definition of Jewish camping than is commonly used in Jewish communal circles, where a Jewish educational mission is usually emphasized in defining a camp’s Jewish content.

or not at all. The measure reports on those who said “very important.” Similarly, attachment to Israel comes from a question asking respondents, “How emotionally attached are you to Israel.” Here, too, respondents were given four options – very, somewhat, not very or not at all – and the measure reports on those who said “very attached.”

In the discussion and tables that follow, five of the six Jewish identity measures – in-marriage, in-group friendships, synagogue membership, the importance of being Jewish, and emotional attachment to Israel – are percentages (e.g., the percent who married a Jew). The sixth measure, ritual practices, is expressed as the average number of rituals that are practiced out of 5 total rituals.

THE SAMPLE: BORN OR RAISED JEWISH, U.S.-BORN AND UNDER 50

TO MAXIMIZE THE POLICY RELEVANCE OF THE RESULTS, the analysis is restricted to respondents who met three conditions:

- ▶ They had at least one Jewish parent or were raised as Jews
- ▶ They were born in the United States
- ▶ They were under fifty years of age at the time of the survey (born 1951 or later).

The reasons for these choices are fairly straightforward. Jews by choice generally did not engage in Jewish educational experiences in their youth. In addition, many foreign-born Jews, especially those from the Former Soviet Union or Israel, report low levels of formal Jewish education as described in the NJPS questions. As immigrants, however, they also report high levels of in-marriage and in-group friendships, as well as high levels of attachment to Israel. Including them in the analysis would confound the results.

Finally, the analysis takes into account that Jewish educational opportunities and experiences have changed considerably over time; for

example, travel to Israel became much more common after 1967. The differences are such that patterns reported by the oldest respondents may well be less relevant for understanding contemporary patterns of Jewish education and identity than those reported by younger, more recently educated adults. Those born just after 1950 report markedly higher rates than their elders in attendance at day schools and in travel to Israel. Given the interest in drawing inferences from this analysis for today’s Jewish children, it makes sense to restrict the analysis to younger adult respondents whose patterns of behavior and experience may more closely resemble today’s children and adolescents than would the patterns of respondents born before 1950.

FINDINGS

HAVING SET UP THE ANALYSIS, THE REPORT TURNS NOW TO EXAMINING AND EXPLAINING THE EMPIRICAL FINDINGS.

Baseline findings showing statistical associations between past Jewish education and current Jewish identity are presented first, followed by a discussion of the potential confounding effects of other factors from respondents’ childhood homes and experiences. Lastly, a statistical procedure – called Multiple Classification Analysis (MCA) – is introduced that isolates and highlights the impact of Jewish education on Jewish identity by controlling for the effects of the other factors.

Baseline Findings

Tables 1 and 2 display Jewish identity indicators for those who experienced various forms of Jewish education. It is important to emphasize that analyses reported in these two tables have not yet controlled for other factors (i.e., Jewish environment when growing up) that may also affect Jewish identity.

One general pattern demonstrated in Table 1 is that those who participated in any Jewish educational program score higher on almost all forms of Jewish identity than those who received no Jewish education. For example, among those who received no Jewish schooling, 33% married a

TABLE 1.

Baseline findings: formal Jewish education and Jewish identity indicators.

	In-married	Most/all closest friends Jewish	Ritual scale (average out of five)	Synagogue member	Being Jewish very important	Very attached to Israel
Day school:						
7-12 years	96%	74%	4.6	84%	86%	67%
Day school:						
1-6 years	82	35	3.3	53	59	38
Supplementary school:						
7-12 years	76	32	3.1	56	51	36
Supplementary schools						
1-6 years	63	25	2.7	44	36	21
Sunday school:						
7-12 years	60	20	2.6	36	35	12
Sunday school:						
1-6 years	42	17	2.3	30	28	13
No Jewish education	33	7	1.8	12	16	12

Jew, as compared with 42% among those who attended Sunday schools for 1-6 years, and 76% among those who attended supplementary schools for seven years or more.

A second pattern seen in Table 1 is that rises in the level of childhood Jewish schooling are almost always associated with increases in adult Jewish identity years later. Day school alumni outscore supplementary school alumni, who in turn outrank Sunday school graduates. In addition, within each category, those attending for more years tend to outscore those who attended for fewer years.

Table 2 shows that the three forms of informal Jewish education also are associated with substantial differences in adult Jewish identity. For

TABLE 2.

Baseline findings: informal Jewish education and Jewish identity indicators.

	In-married	Most/all closest friends Jewish	Ritual scale (average out of five)	Synagogue member	Being Jewish very important	Very attached to Israel
Jewish youth group						
Yes	75%	41%	3.3	58%	57%	37%
No	49	16	2.3	28	27	17
Jewish camping						
Yes	77	41	3.3	59	56	41
No	46	14	2.3	25	25	14
Israel travel						
Yes	80	45	3.5	60	67	53
No	51	18	2.4	32	29	17

example, former Jewish youth group participants are one and half times more likely than those who did not participate in youth groups to have married someone Jewish (75% vs. 49%). Similarly, former campers are three times as likely as non-campers to report feeling very attached to Israel (41% vs. 14%). Those who traveled to Israel as adolescents or young adults report, on average, one more ritual observance than those who did not visit the Jewish State (averages of 3.5 vs. 2.4 out of five rituals).

Other background factors: the benefits of a strong Jewish environment

In short, no matter the measures examined, the baseline findings above show that childhood Jewish education is linked to higher levels of Jewish

identity in the adult years. However, simple statistical association does not demonstrate causality or impact. Possibly confounding factors (e.g., childhood home and community) must be taken into consideration.

First, separate analyses show that those with “stronger” Jewish homes and experiences when they were growing up – as measured by having two born Jewish parents, lighting Shabbat candles in the childhood home, the absence of a Christmas tree, and close Jewish friends in high school – also have higher scores on the same current Jewish identity measures examined above.

To further complicate the picture, Jewish educational experiences and “stronger” Jewish homes in childhood are also associated with each other. Compared to those without Jewish educational experiences, those who received some Jewish education – either formal or informal – more likely came from homes with two rather than one born Jewish parent. In addition, their families lit Shabbat candles more often and had Christmas trees in their homes less often, and they had more close Jewish friends in high school.

As a result, the circle of association is complete: Jewish education, other Jewish home experiences, and current Jewish identity are all linked to each other. If both Jewish educational experiences and other childhood experiences are associated with current Jewish identity, how can we determine the independent impact of Jewish educational experiences by themselves? The remaining task is to untangle the confounding effects, in order to discern the separate and direct effect of Jewish education upon Jewish identity.

Isolating the impact of Jewish education on Jewish identity

A well-known statistical procedure called Multiple Classification Analysis (MCA) allows us to factor out differences in Jewish background factors (home and other experiences), in an attempt to isolate the “pure” effects of Jewish education on Jewish identity.

In order to do this, MCA controls for the five background factors mentioned earlier: number of parents who were born Jewish; proportion

of friends in high school who were Jewish; the frequency with which Shabbat candles were lit; the absence of a Christmas tree at age 10; and parents’ denomination. The procedure also controls for three present-day demographic factors that many other analyses have indicated affect current levels of Jewish identity: age, region of the country, and household composition (e.g., married couple vs. single, or the presence of children).³

In effect, MCA levels the playing field by comparing different categories of Jewish education (i.e., no schooling vs. day school for 7 years or more; or campers vs. non-campers) as if each category scored equally on all the other control factors listed above. In doing so, it essentially removes the current Jewish identity advantages of Jewish educational alumni due to their other childhood experiences and to current demographic factors, and compares them with their less Jewishly educated counterparts, who generally did not benefit from additional advantages in childhood Jewish socialization.

One additional consideration must be made in terms of chronology and causality. Generally, formal Jewish schooling precedes, and in some ways leads to, informal Jewish educational experiences. Accordingly, the analysis of formal Jewish schooling controls only for the Jewish background and demographic factors noted above. The analysis of each informal experience – camping, youth groups and Israel travel — controls for these factors, as well as for formal Jewish schooling and for each other.

The analysis of informal education experiences effectively asks to what extent do youth groups, Jewish camping and Israel travel in one’s youth contribute to Jewish identity above and beyond Jewish schooling, as well as independently and net of one another. As an example, the analysis presents the impact of an Israel experience, taking into account the fact that many such people also went to day schools and Jewish summer camps, participated in Jewish youth groups, and tend to come from Jewish homes affiliated or identified with more traditional Jewish denominations.

3. Details on how these variables were coded for the analysis are available from the UJC Research Department.

TABLE 3.

Table 3. Multiple classification analysis: the impact of formal Jewish education on Jewish identity indicators, controlling for Jewish background and demographic factors.

	In-married	Most/all closest friends Jewish	Ritual scale (average out of five)	Synagogue member	Being Jewish very important	Very attached to Israel
Day school: 7-12 years	73%	38%	3.8	61%	64%	55%
Day school: 1-6 years	77	32	3.2	47	58	39
Supplementary school: 7-12 years	73	30	3.0	53	51	35
Supplementary school: 1-6 years	65	28	2.9	49	40	21
Sunday school: 7-12 years	67	28	2.7	44	40	16
Sunday school: 1-6 years	55	29	2.7	39	39	18
No Jewish education	63	25	2.7	33	36	20

Table 3, which reports the MCA for formal Jewish schooling, reveals the following patterns:

1) In general, attendance at a day school seven years or more exerts the most powerful positive impact upon Jewish identity. To take an illustrative example, with all other things being equal, a projected 36% of those with no Jewish schooling claim that being Jewish is very important to them, as contrasted with fully 64% of those with 7 or more years of day school. This group of former day school students surpasses the other schooling categories, controlling for the Jewish background and demographic factors, on almost all measures of Jewish identity. (The one exception is intermarriage, where those with seven or more years of day school, owing

to their very strong parental homes, statistically trail those with fewer than seven years of day school. This curious and counter-intuitive result demonstrates the influence of home and other Jewish background factors in explaining part of the association of Jewish educational experiences with Jewish identity.)

2) Attendance at a day school for 1-6 years exerts an impact upon Jewish identity that somewhat trails that associated with more years of day school, but ahead of all other schooling configurations (with one exception for synagogue membership). In fact, after statistical adjustment for other factors, people who went to day schools for 1-6 years surpass all other groups in the likelihood of marrying someone Jewish.

3) Attendance at supplementary schools (meeting two or more days per week) for 7-12 years also exerts a discernible positive impact upon Jewish identity. While the levels of impact for supplementary schools tend to trail slightly those associated with attending day school for 1-6 years, there is again a notable exception. Once statistical controls are made, those who went to supplementary school for 7-12 years are more likely than those who attended day school for 1-6 years to be a current synagogue member.

4) Other forms of Jewish schooling have weaker impacts on most measures of Jewish identity. Relative to those with no Jewish schooling, there are no consistent, positive impacts for in-marriage, ritual practices, and attitudes toward Israel associated with attendance at supplementary school for 6 years or less or at Sunday school for any number of years. For example, the adjusted rates of feeling very attached to Israel stand at 20% for those with no schooling, 18% for Sunday school attendance 1-6 years, 16% for Sunday school attendance of 7 years or more, and 21% for those attending supplementary school 6 years or less. Small jumps in Jewish identity occur between those with no education and any form of education regarding Jewish friendships and attitudes toward being Jewish. Only with respect to synagogue membership is there a step-by-step increase in moving from those with no Jewish education to those with Sunday school and supplementary education for 1-6 years.

The results for informal Jewish education, seen in Table 4, demonstrate that of the three types of informal Jewish education, travel to Israel tends to exert a more powerful impact upon adult Jewish identity, but this is not always the case. To take an example, the net difference between participants and non-participants in feeling that being Jewish is very important – after controlling for Jewish background, demographic factors, Jewish schooling and the other forms of informal experiences – stands at 17 percentage points for Israel travel (58% to 41%), 6 percentage points for camping (48% to 42%) and 5 percentage points for youth groups (48% to 43%). Similar patterns hold for feeling very attached to Israel, and to lesser degrees for intermarriage and ritual practices. In addition, on almost all measures the impact of Israel travel rivals that of day school attendance for 1-6 years or supplementary schooling for 7-12 years.

In general, participating in Jewish youth groups and camping are associated with smaller increases in Jewish identity than Israel travel. Two important exceptions, however, are synagogue membership, where camping has nearly double the impact of Israel travel, and having Jewish friends, with similar increases associated with all three types of informal education. Very importantly, the impact on Jewish identity associated with camping and youth groups are equal to or larger than those associated with 1-6 years in supplementary schools and all Sunday school attendance.⁴

With this said, the hypothetical combination of the three forms of informal education (a configuration experienced by just six percent of the adults respondents analyzed in this report) is associated with rather significant levels of impact upon the Jewish identity indicators. The combined effect of participating in youth groups, camping and Israel travel amounts to 12 percentage points for in-marriage, 16 percentage points for having mostly Jewish friends, four-tenths of a ritual (out of five), 20 percentage points for synagogue membership, 28 percentage points for feeling that being Jewish is very important, and fully 35 percentage points in feeling very attached to Israel.

4. As mentioned in footnote 2, the NJPS question on Jewish camping did not distinguish camps with a Jewish educational mission from those that cater to Jewish youths but do not have a Jewish educational mission. As a result, the findings reported here may underestimate the effects of attending camps with a Jewish educational mission.

TABLE 4.

Multiple classification analysis: the impact of informal Jewish education on Jewish identity indicators, controlling for Jewish background and demographic factors and other informal experiences.

	In-married	Most/all closest friends Jewish	Ritual scale (average out of five)	Synagogue member	Being Jewish very important	Very attached to Israel
Jewish youth group						
Yes	68%	33%	3.0	50%	48%	28%
No	66	27	3.0	45	43	26
Jewish camping						
Yes	69	32	3.0	52	48	33
No	65	28	2.9	43	42	23
Israel travel						
Yes	71	34	3.2	51	58	45
No	65	28	2.9	45	41	22

CONCLUSIONS

MANY, BUT NOT ALL, FORMS OF JEWISH EDUCATION

exert measurable, positive impacts upon almost every form of Jewish identity examined here. Day schools, attending supplementary schools for seven years or more, and Israel travel exert the largest, consistent measures of influence. Jewish camping and youth group exert more modest but nonetheless across-the-board effects. The influence of supplementary schools is mostly limited to those who attended seven years or more. This finding is consistent with other research that has shown attending supplementary schools for less than seven years, or attending Sunday

schools for any duration, has an impact on joining synagogues but little else. With this said, participation in all forms of informal Jewish education substantially elevates adult Jewish identity indicators. Importantly, the combination of youth groups, camping, and Israel travel produces notable increases in all available indicators of Jewish identity.

The findings illuminate several policy issues:

First, as a general rule, they testify to the **efficacy of almost all forms of Jewish education**. With the sole exception of Sunday school (as a once-a-week phenomenon), Jewish education enhances Jewish identity, however measured, years down the road. This finding suggests a communal interest in promoting almost all forms of Jewish education.

Second, **more intensive** forms of education and **longer durations** of education exert more impact than their counterparts. This finding suggests an interest in promoting intensive education (e.g., day schools), and in lengthening the years of attendance at supplementary schools that meet twice a week or more.

Third, **the weak performance of Sunday Schools** (when they constitute the only form of Jewish schooling) as an instrument for enhancing Jewish identity requires attention. Several explanations may be operating here. Alternatives include deficiencies in basic structure, teachers, leadership, and/or curriculum. Another possibility is that such schools tend to serve youngsters from families with relatively low levels of Jewish engagement, reinforcing their relative distance from conventional Jewish life.

Fourth, **the strong performance of Israel** travel for young people argues powerfully for ongoing communal support of Israel experience programs.

Fifth and finally, the results suggest **a model of effective Jewish education** for youngsters in supplementary schools. Such a model would combine seven or more years of supplementary school with two or three forms of informal Jewish education. Such a model is well suited for

strongly enhancing the Jewish identity of youngsters whose families prefer schooling routes other than day schools.

Certainly all these implications bear further exploration and examination. Nevertheless, this analysis does serve to illuminate some of the major policy options for Jewish schooling and informal Jewish education.

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