

Learning about the work of the Rishonim at our Religious Schools

Part 1: Who Took The Survey

128

current students
(students who worked with Rishonim this year)

Sha'arey Shalom, Temple Sinai, Beth El, Morristown Jewish Center

7

former students
(worked with Rishonim in previous years)

Beth El

0

younger students
(not yet worked with Rishonim)

10

teachers

Sha'arey Shalom, Temple Sinai, Beth El, Morristown Jewish Center

9

administrators

Temple Sinai, Morristown Jewish Center, Golda Och, JEC, Emanu-El, Beth Shalom, B'nai Shalom, B'nai Abraham, Beth El

11

families

Sha'arey Shalom, Beth El

"Love first, then literacy. By building relationships with the Rishonim, the [youth] see Israel through their living eyes and begin to form their own love."

- Religious School Administrator



What you need to know in two pages

1. Few religious school students (grades 5-11) have been to Israel.

12% to be exact.

2. Most students report some knowledge about Israel and interest in Israel.

88% of students reported knowing a few things or a lot about Israel. 82% report being somewhat or very interested in Israel.

3. Many students do not have a strong sense of connection to Israel.

While more than half (57%) of students report the Rishon helped them to feel more connected to Israel, this number is considerably lower than last year (74%). Students' experiences at two schools largely attributed to this decrease.

4. Rishonim are "fun".

Students most commonly used the word "fun" to describe the Rishonim. Over 60% of current students report they wish they could spend more time with the Rishonim.



What you need to know in two pages (page 2)

5.

Overall, educators/administrators give the program high ratings.

All responding educators/administrators "agree" or "strongly agree" their students are excited when Rishonim come to class and they are a favorite activity of students.

6.

Significant differences noticed in increased knowledge about Israel.

Teachers/Administrators noticed less differences in their students' confidence talking about Israel. They also perceived the Rishonim increasing students' sense of connection to Israel, which contradicts students' perceptions.

7.

New year = same challenges.

Specifically in areas of communication, balancing schedules, and classroom management.

8.

Parents think favorably about the program.

The majority of families that responded were from one religious school. From this sample, the majority believe the program greatly enhances the Religious School's Israel education.

9.

The Rishonim program is good for Federation's reputation.

Many teachers/administrators report this program positively impacted their perception of Federation. Many also said it hasn't changed their perception. 73% of parents know it is a program of Federation.

10.

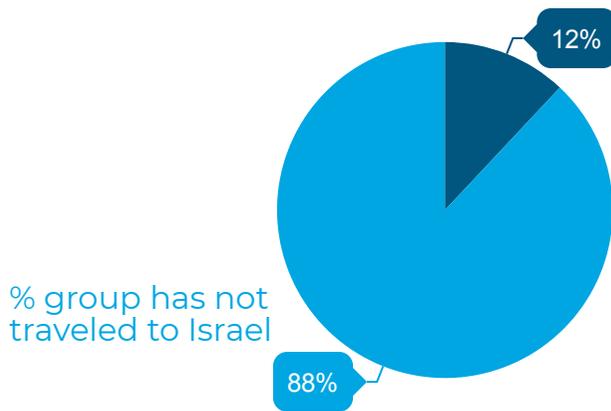
Sample size is still an issue.

Many schools did not comply with our ask to get information from teachers, administrators or families. Our learnings are only as strong as the information we collect. We need to identify strategies that will increase participation in our program learning and evaluation.

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Part 2: Students relationships with Israel

% group traveled to Israel

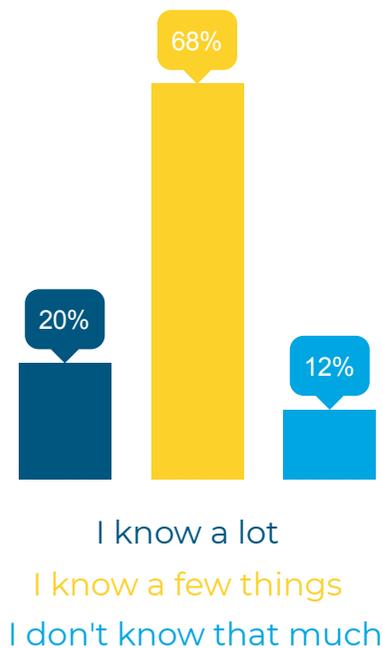


Very few of the religious school students have traveled to Israel.

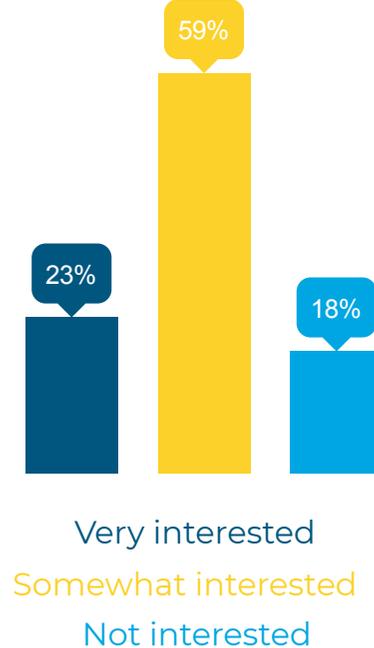
The majority of the students are not Israeli, nor have an Israeli parent. Only about 17% of the responding student population reported having an Israeli parent.

Demographically most of the students identify as Reform, and 70% report both parents identify as Jewish.

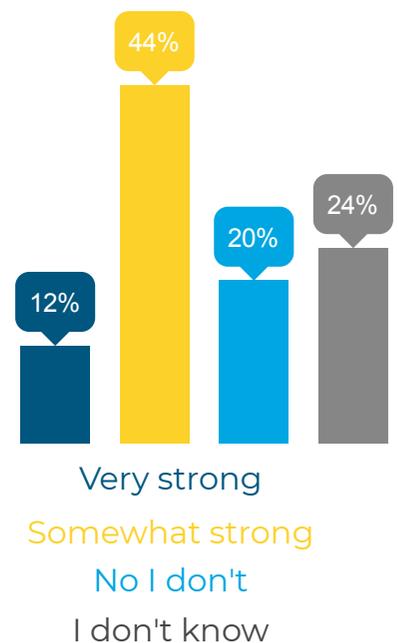
How much do you feel you know about Israel?



Are you interested in Israel?



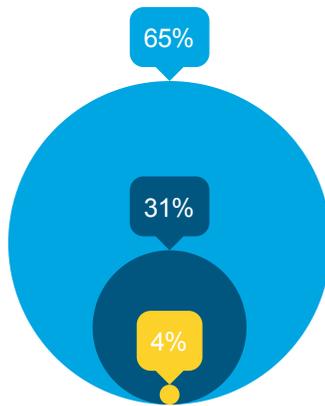
Do you feel a strong sense of connection to Israel?



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Part 3: What this year's students are saying about their experience with the Rishonim

Did you enjoy spending time with the Rishonim?

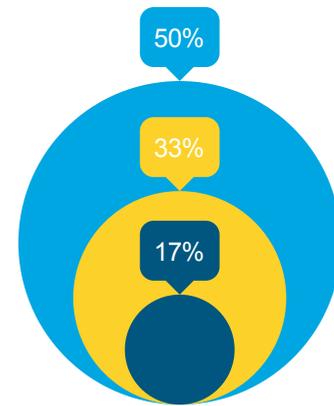


Yes, I wish I could spend more time

Sometimes I enjoyed spending time

I did not enjoy/don't remember spending time

Was spending time with the Rishon one of your favorite activities?



Yes

I don't know

No

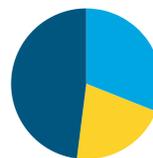
62% OF THE STUDENTS SAY THE RISHON MADE THEM MORE INTERESTED IN ISRAEL THAN THEY WERE BEFORE
57% OF THE STUDENTS SAY THE RISHON HELPED THEM TO FEEL MORE CONNECTED TO ISRAEL

FUN
INTERESTING
GOOD
AWESOME

What word would you use to describe your experience with Rishon?

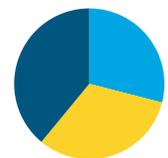
UNIQUE
AMAZING
COOL
INTERESTING

What word would you use to describe Israel?



Do you want to stay in touch with the Rishon?

Yes No Not Sure



Do you want to visit the Rishon in Israel?

Yes No Not Sure

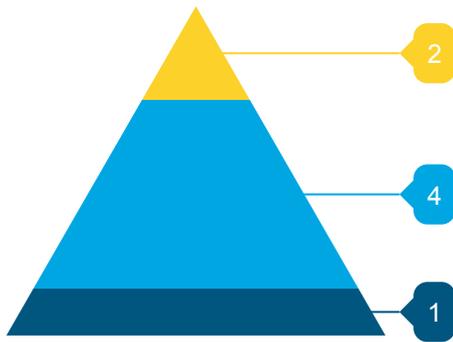
The majority of students report very favorable experiences with the Rishonim over the past year. Generally positive words were used to describe both the Rishonim and Israel.

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Part 4: How much sticks?*

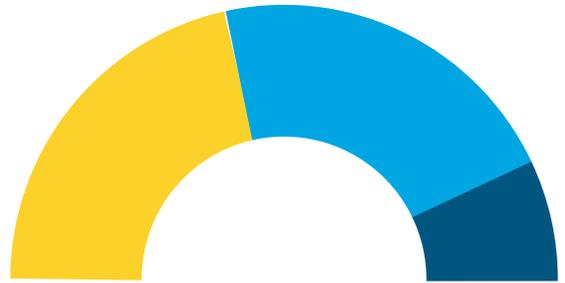
We asked former students of Rishonim:

Do you remember the Rishonim?



Yes, very well!
Sort of.
Not really.

Did you enjoy spending time with the Rishonim?



Yes!
Sometimes.
I don't remember the Rishonim

100% can name at least 1-2 things they learned from the Rishonim.

57% can name 3 things.

"She made JLC more fun."
- Beth El Student



One word to describe your experience with the Rishonim:

FUN
COOL
SO SO
REFRESHING

*All 7 student respondents are from Temple Beth El.

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Part 5: Educators/Administrators:

Overall Program Rating:



The majority of educators/administrators have worked with Rishonim for 2-3 years and 4-6 years. A few have worked with the Rishonim for more than 6 years.

My students are very excited when Rishonim come to class:

The Rishonim experience is a favorite activity of my students:



Educators' perceptions of differences in students:

Increased knowledge about Israel

Increased interest in Israel

Increased sense of connection to Israel



Haven't Noticed **Some Differences** Significant Differences

Haven't Noticed **Some Differences** Significant Differences Not sure

Some Differences Significant Differences Not sure

Increased confidence talking about Israel

Increased feeling that Israel is important to Jewish history and future

Educators and administrators both overwhelmingly report seeing significant differences in students' knowledge of and connection to Israel. These groups are less sure about increases in confidence talking about Israel.

Haven't Noticed **Some Differences** Significant Difference Not sure

Haven't Noticed **Some Differences** Significant Differences Not sure

Context: The Rishonim spend the majority of their time at the participating schools running formal educational activities compared to social engagements. More than half (56%) serve as the primary educator on Israel Education and 44% are used to complement the teacher.

On a scale of 1 to 10, how much do you think the Rishon experience will "stick" with your students?



Not at all

They won't forget the Rishon

All educators gave the "stick factor" at least a "6". The most common responses were "7" and "9".

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Part 5: Educators/Administrators (cont'd)

What are some of the challenges you have experienced working with the Rishonim?



Time

"Not enough time!"

"Mindfulness of scheduled activities."

"There's never enough time! We wish we could have them spend even more time with us."

Communication

"Language skills - heavy accent could be a problem."

"Heavy accent is sometimes a problem for the kids to understand."

Classroom Management

"Developing age appropriate program for younger grades."

"It was a struggle for them to deal with difficult students."

"Varying levels of comfort with group management."

What value do the Rishonim bring to your classroom?



Generate excitement about Israel

"The Rishon brings a piece of Israel to our congregation. The high school students were afraid of traveling to Israel, now they wholeheartedly want to visit Israel as soon as possible."

Teaching about Israeli life & first-hand authenticity

"Establishes a relationship of students to Israel based upon interactions with Rishon and the Rishon sharing personal stories and experiences."

Their youthfulness... the children can relate better

"Anyone that is a SABRA (born in Israel), young, and motivated has so much to offer. The knowledge is tremendous and the students relate to them being so young and so much fun!"

How do the Rishonim help you meet your goals surrounding Israel education?



"We want our kids to feel an attachment to our homeland, to understand Israel and her politics and to not be afraid to go and see and walk the steps of our ancestors - all successful with the Rishon."

"The Rishonim are great because they always come ready with material. Our Rishon always had either a game, an Israeli map, or used the media to teach. Their English was great and they were able to present very well covering all the lessons."

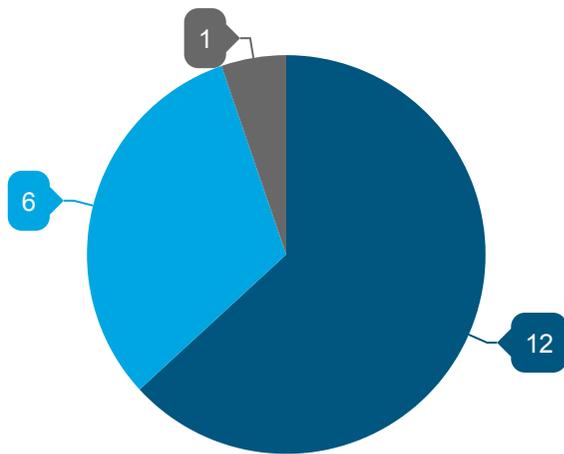
"There is nothing like up close and personal to teach students about Israel and Israeli life."

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Part 5: Educators/Administrators (cont'd)

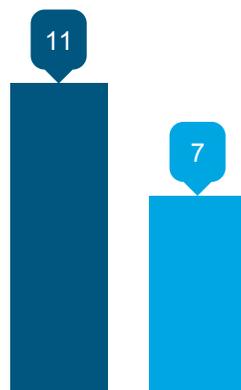
How well trained do you feel the Rishonim are??

For social interaction to engage children



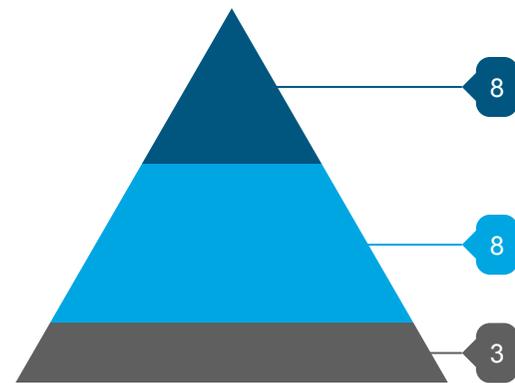
Well trained
Sufficiently trained
Poorly trained

In their ability to run educational activities



Well trained
Sufficiently trained

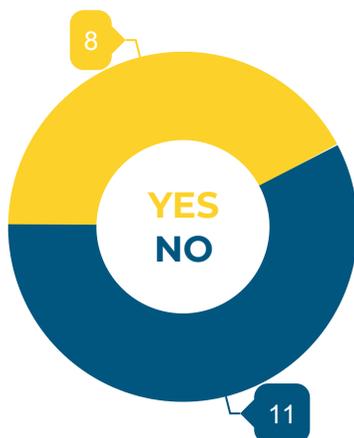
To serve as a resource for staff to run Israel activities



Well trained
Sufficiently trained
Not sure/Poorly trained
Not sure

Overall, both administrators and educators believe the Rishonim are well trained in the above-mentioned areas.

Would you like to have a Rishon at your organization more often than you currently do?



How has the Rishonim program affected your perception of, or relationships with, Jewish Federation of Greater MetroWest, if at all?



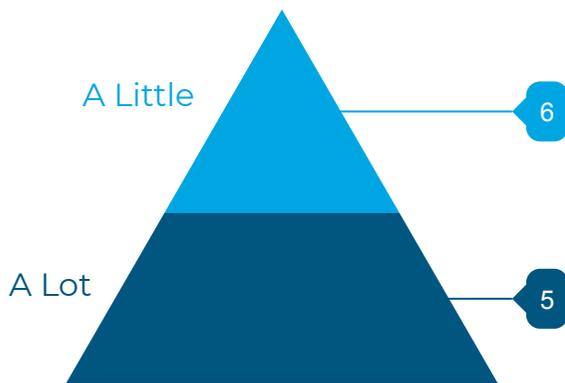
Most educators would not like more Rishonim, half of educators do.

The Rishonim program is good for Federation's reputation in Religious Schools, per our respondents. In their concluding remarks, many express gratitude and appreciation for partnership with Federation.

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Part 6: What Your Families Are Saying

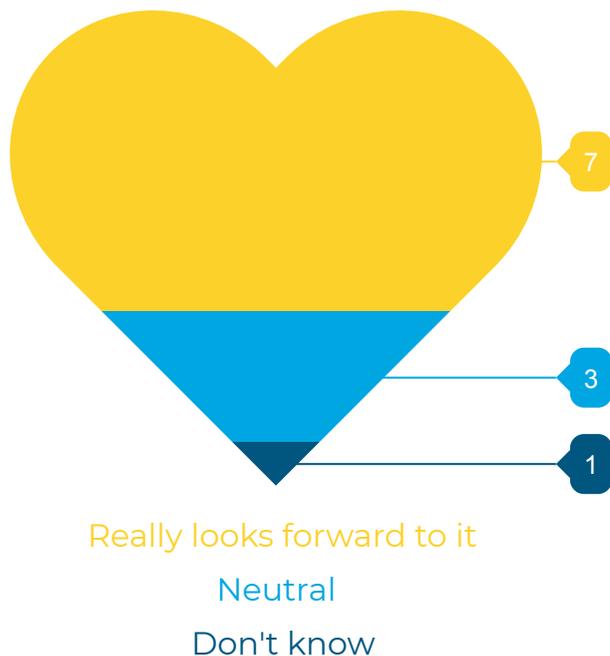
How much do families know about the program:



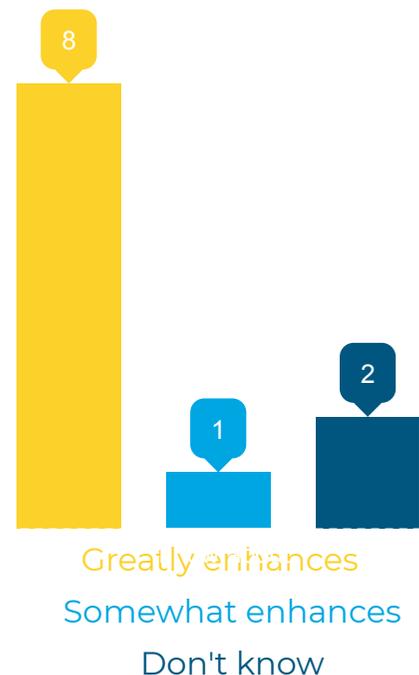
64% of parents have met a Rishon

73% of parents that are aware that this is a program of Jewish Federation of Greater MetroWest NJ

Parents perception of how much their children enjoy the program:



Parents perception of how much the Rishonim enhance the Religious School's Israel education:



We asked four congregations to poll their religious school families about the Rishonim program. However, only 11 families responded and 10 were from Sha'arey Shalom (1 was from Beth El). Overall the parents perceive their children to really enjoy the program and that it enhances Israeli education at the school.

Most parents that responded have met a Rishon and know it's a program of the Federation.

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Part 7: Breathing Life Into Numbers

"I think it is an essential and a fantastic part of the experience at Beth El for my 5th grader. She looks forward to seeing S every week (or so) and always talks about his fun, relevant programs and songs! I love that there is a real Israeli older kid who can make the direct connection between Israel, which seems so mysterious, and New Jersey! Really significant message that we are sending our children. Thank you!"

- Religious School Parent

Students' voices...



"I had a great time and learned a lot about Israel."

"Having a Rishon this year made this a great experience and he taught me a lot of cool things."

"I wish we had more time with him."



"They help bring Israel to life. When they talk about Israel, play games infusing Israel and share stories about Israel, they add the greatest sense of authenticity as they are Israel to many of our students."

- Religious School Administrator

"Very successful at making a human, kid to kid connection to Israel. Teachers would like to see more factual knowledge (geography and history) being imparted."

- Religious School Educator

"We strive to give our students a well rounded experience and knowledge of Israel. The Rishonim have a very large part in creating the experience of Israel outside of Israel."

- Religious School Educator

