

Hearts and Minds: Israel in North American Jewish Day Schools



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Five Key Findings:

- Not only is Israel education rarely contested in day schools, Israel actually serves as glue holding school communities together. Particularly in schools outside of the Orthodox sector, Israel is the single most important Jewish common denominator binding school families together.
- Israel educators fall into two categories: slightly over two thirds see their role as what we describe as *Exemplars*: they believe Israel education is best done by sharing something of themselves with students. Slightly under one-third of teachers, by contrast, encourage their students to learn about Israel through inquiry and study; we call these teachers *Explorers*. Both types of teachers are found in every day school sector, regardless of denominational affiliation. This last finding constitutes both an opportunity and a challenge: it suggests that there is great potential for professional development across denominational lines; it suggests also that all schools should be alert to how diverse the experience of Israel education is in their classrooms.
- Students' connection to Israel grows from their relationship to the Jewish people. Nurturing connections between students and Jews around the world contributes to their connection to Israel. Put differently, the road toward engagement with Israel runs through students' relationships to other Jewish collectives, wherever they are found.
- When parents model engagement with Jewish communal life, even when they are not specifically active in pro-Israel work, students are more likely to feel strongly connected to Israel. The involvement of parents with Jewish communal life is a stronger predictor of student connection to Israel than whether a student has been on a trip to Israel.
- Day school students are not all the same. In schools of every sector, a significant minority – between a quarter and a half – are relatively detached from Jewish life and especially from Israel. Schools can have their greatest impact on Israel engagement if they build connections with these detached students. While the more engaged students benefit from the school's reinforcement of commitments absorbed in the home, the less engaged students can have their negative perceptions of Israel converted into positive ones if the school creates a culture that is connected to contemporary Israel.

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Executive Summary

Sixty-five years after its establishment, Israel remains a central feature of Jewish educational programming in North America, perhaps nowhere more ubiquitously and intensively than in Jewish day schools. Anyone visiting such schools cannot but be struck by the omnipresent physical reminders of Israel, daily messages about Israel and the many special programs convened to memorialize or celebrate developments in Israel.

Given the omnipresence of Israel in so many Jewish day schools and the self-declared mission of most schools to foster an attachment to Israel, this project has sought to take the measure of Israel education by investigating the so-called inputs, outputs and outcomes of day school Israel education. The project's guiding questions were:

- What do schools and teachers seek to impart to students about Israel?
- What do schools actually communicate to their students?
- What do students take away from their educational experiences?

In order to answer these and other questions, a research team triangulated data from three primary sources gathered during the 2012-13 school year.

- We asked each of the 95 schools that participated in our project to answer questions about their practices in the area of Israel education. Members of the research team then visited over a dozen of those schools and observed a number of school trips to Israel to gather qualitative data on how and when material about Israel is taught.
- Some 350 teachers identified by their schools as involved with Israel education were surveyed about what it is they do in this area and how they perceive the efficacy of their work.
- The project also surveyed students themselves to learn how they think about Israel, how confident they feel in talking about it, which aspects of Israel resonate the most and the least with them, and how Israel fits into their larger worldview as citizens of the U.S. or Canada and as Jews. In total, we surveyed 4030 middle and upper school students in day schools.

Key findings

The Purposes of Israel Education:

- The highest priority of schools and their teachers is to cultivate emotional states. Israel education is “work on the heart.”
- When it comes to this emphasis on the affective, there is great consistency across schools and grade levels.
- Parents’ goals and educators’ intentions are largely aligned when it comes to teaching about Israel.
- Not only is Israel education rarely contested in day schools, Israel actually serves as glue holding school communities together.

How Schools “Do” Israel Education:

- There is a strong ritualized quality to the way that Israel is introduced in day schools; it is both routinized but also at the heart of peak moments in the school year.
- The most common site for learning about Israel in lower and middle schools is in the Hebrew language classroom where students encounter the country in a second language.
- Trips to Israel have become normalized as an educational practice. In the best instances, these trips serve as synthesizing and focal points for learning. Often, however, Israel trips are detached from the school curriculum. As a result, they frequently involve missed opportunities for deep learning.

Two Main Types of Teachers:

- The majority of teachers – 69 percent of those we surveyed – believe that Israel education is best done by sharing something of themselves with their students, and they’re quite certain about the outcomes they’re aiming to produce. We characterize these teachers as *Exemplars*.
- An important minority of teachers (31 percent) are *Explorers*. These teachers tend to be more circumspect about their goals. They believe that students should learn about Israel through their own inquiry and study.
- Teachers from each of these groups are found across day school sectors, regardless of denominational affiliations.

Not All Students Are Alike:

- Just as teachers are not uniform, students vary as well based on a range of background factors. Among 8th graders, we found two main types: the engaged (61 percent) and the detached (39 percent).
- Among 12th graders, we found three types. The hyper-engaged, just over 30 percent of the sample, seems to consist of student-leaders: they exhibit the attitudes and commitments of activists, and seem passionate about all manner of issues, with Jewish and Israel matters prominent among them.
- Those we characterize as engaged – just under 50 percent of the 12th grade sample – seem to represent an average Jewish high school student: one who is relatively motivated, generally interested in Jewish matters, and quite well-connected to Israel.
- The 12th graders we characterize as detached – 20 percent of the sample – are turned off mainly to religion, but not to all aspects of Jewishness. These students are not very interested in much of the Jewish content to which they are exposed in school, and about two-thirds of this group do not closely associate themselves with Jews around the world or with those for whom Israel is important. But these students are not completely alienated: Almost 65 percent of them conceive of themselves as highly or somewhat connected to other Jews in America.

What Do Students Take Away from Their School Experiences?

- Day school students typically conceive of Israel in abstract and essentially symbolic terms. They also have a limited sense of how life is actually lived in the Jewish state. But there are observable differences between students’ attitudes to Israel that correlate to their age, gender, personal denomination, school denomination and, to a lesser extent, location. As we have already indicated, there are sharp differences between how hyper-engaged, engaged and detached students think about Israel and the Jewish world. Students’ connection to Israel grows from their relationship to the Jewish people. Nurturing connections between students and Jews around the world contributes to their connection to Israel. Put differently, the road toward engagement with Israel runs through their relationship to the Jewish people.
- The more traditional the students and the schools they attend, the more they tend to see Israel as endangered. When schools pause frequently to offer special prayers for Israeli terrorist victims, as is often the case in Orthodox day schools, they may unintentionally convey that Israel is a weak, beleaguered and insecure country.

What Shapes the Outlook of Students?

- It is a well-established finding that schools alone do not shape the outlook of students. Other variables tend to be as important, if not even more important. And none is more determinative than the family. The denominational identification of the family is critically important in shaping levels of Jewish engagement, in general and specifically of connections to Israel.
- When parents model engagement with Jewish communal life, even when they are not necessarily active in pro-Israel work, students are more likely to feel strongly connected to Israel.
- Community is also an important determinant. If students live in a community with a dense Jewish population, they are more likely to feel at the center of Jewish life.

What Schools Do Best

Schools can and do have an impact. This is especially the case when they model concern for Israel by running special programs to mark important milestones in contemporary Israeli life. Schools can ameliorate the negative perceptions that students may have of Israel.

Schools exert the greatest positive influence on students from more detached families. They can do a good deal to heighten the emotional connections such students feel toward Israel. For more engaged students, schools reinforce what has been communicated in their homes, synagogues and extended families.

Policy Implications

Concerning Schools

1. Symbolic Israel with its resonance as the homeland and home of the Jewish people enables many different types of Jews to rally around Israel as a cause. This affective connection to Israel enhances the importance of Israel, even as it complicates the ability of schools to teach about Israel as a very real country with its own set of challenges and strengths. And yet in the long term, a strong relationship with Israel entails an affective connection based upon realism. Schools will have to find the balance between nurturing a love for Israel and exposing students to the complexities of the Jewish state.
2. Where much effort has gone into a Standards and Benchmarks project on *Tanakh*, and considerable investment has been made in coherent Hebrew language curricula and a Talmud curriculum, no similarly cohesive curriculum exists for Israel education. Here is an area of potential investment for funders. The challenge is not to generate entirely new materials, but to bring together material that is scattered and not easily accessible to teachers, as well as to provide up-to-date information on contemporary Israel.
3. To maximize the educational impact of their trips to Israel, schools must connect those trips to the curriculum that comes before their departure and after their return. Schools should consider the optimal educational timing

of the trips, rather than automatically assume that trips are best held in the final weeks of the school year. There is a great need to connect the content of trips with what students previously learned in school and what they will learn upon their return.

4. We learned from students and from school administrators how meaningful for students are the relationships they develop with young Israelis – *shinshinim* and *b'not sherut* – as well as with teacher-shlichim. No one can deny that schools pay a high financial price when they utilize Israeli emissaries, but the encounter with Israeli near-peers adds a dimension greatly valued by students. The enthusiasm of young people who teach Israeli popular culture to American students is infectious and leaves an impression.

Concerning Teachers

5. Two distinct populations of teachers engage in Israel education in day schools. *Exemplars* make an important contribution to the vitality of Israel education in schools, especially in the Hebrew language classroom where many seem to be located. And *Explorers* make a critical contribution to the thoughtful engagement of students. Although it is delicate work, schools should seek ways to encourage interaction and collaboration between these two distinct populations. This might result both in a broadening of the goals of Israel education and also greater effectiveness in achieving those goals.
6. One of the most surprising findings of our analysis of the teacher survey data was how evenly distributed *Exemplars* and *Explorers* are across the different day school networks. Between two-thirds and three-quarters of the teachers in all of the sectors we studied, regardless of denominational affiliation, were identified as *Exemplars*. The commonalities we have identified suggest that there is great potential for professional development across denominational lines. If schools join together when they access resources for teacher learning, they can achieve important economies of scale and at the same time extend the possibilities for cross-institutional collaboration. It also may be fitting that Israel – the greatest project of the entire Jewish people in recent centuries – serves as a bridge for schools that otherwise may not cooperate with one another.

7. In most day schools, Jewish studies and Jewish education are geared toward the cultivation of commitments and beliefs. In these terms, Jewish education is an inherently counter-cultural activity. The general studies classroom is often oriented to different values: to critical thinking and to asking tough questions. In these circumstances, any effort to develop outcomes for Israel education that go beyond the affective should begin by examining how Israel can be taught more fully through opportunities within the general studies curriculum. Our site visits revealed small numbers of often isolated teachers engaged in this work in science, history and literature departments, and in the general studies sections of elementary schools. An initiative to connect high functioning educators in these fields will yield rich results for schools.

Concerning Students

8. The circumstances of family background and other personal traits translate into differences in the way students relate to Israel (and also to the Jewish religion). Our analysis has found two quite distinct student types among 8th graders and three distinct types among 12th graders within schools of every affiliation. Schools must factor in these differences if they aspire to reach all their students – and they must recognize that one size does not fit all. When schools invest in faculty to coordinate Israel education, and when they provide experiences that connect with current events in Israel, they can make a discernible difference to the attitudes of the large minority of their students who come from less engaged Jewish homes.
- Foundations and central agencies might play a role in stimulating pedagogic reflection on ways to address the various student types in order to maximize the impact of a day school education upon *all* students, and not only in the area of Israel education.
9. Parent role-modeling makes a great difference in shaping the extent and quality of children's commitment to Jewish life, including to Israel. The things students see their parents actually do make an impression. Students who see

their parents participate in Jewish community activities, whether or not these activities are related to Israel, are far more likely to feel strongly connected to Israel. Schools should provide parents with occasions for modeling involvement in Jewish communal life.

10. The messages schools deliver implicitly or explicitly about Israel are taken to heart by students. Orthodox students, especially in the Centrist Orthodox sector, far more than other students, tend to see Israel as vulnerable. We hypothesize that this results from messages their schools are delivering by dwelling on terrorist attacks and the need to pray for Israeli victims. Educators need to reflect on the unintended consequences of well-intentioned emphases. The point is not to censor or to keep students ignorant, but to provide them with a nuanced and age-appropriate understanding of Israel and the challenges it faces.
11. Israel education is not a world unto itself. Time spent learning about Jews in other communities will not ultimately be at the expense of the goals of Israel education. Our findings suggest that such study and connections will catalyze the growth of engagement with Israel, provided neither the Jewish people nor Israel is treated as an abstract or mythical entity. Foundations and central agencies can lead this curricular reorientation through grants aimed at stimulating curricula and programs that connect North American day school students with Jewish peers from across America and around the world. Critically, these bodies can prompt schools to ground what they teach about Israel in the value of *Klal Yisrael*.
12. An understanding of contemporary Israeli society, along with its challenges and achievements, does not necessarily conflict with a positive orientation and commitment to the State. Such an orientation would require schools to hire personnel who have the kinds of insiders' knowledge to teach about contemporary Israel. Beyond that, it would also require an emphasis not only on Israel as a symbolic and religious center but also as an actual country with its own set of challenges and strengths.

Introduction

"Teaching about Israel has become far more difficult over the past 25 years. It used to be that all my students knew the names of Moshe Dayan, Golda Meir and Yitzchak Rabin. Now those heroes have passed from the scene, and it is far harder to get kids to relate to the new Israel."

- A high school teacher

Sixty-five years after its establishment, Israel remains a central feature of Jewish educational programming in North America, perhaps nowhere more ubiquitously and intensively than in Jewish day schools. Anyone visiting such schools cannot but be struck by the omnipresent physical reminders of Israel in classrooms whose walls are festooned with maps of Israel and photographs of Zionist and Israeli heroes, whose standard activities include the singing of Israeli songs and dancing the Israeli Hora, where modern Israeli Hebrew is the preferred form of pronunciation in Modern Orthodox, Conservative, Reform and Community day schools and where group trips to Israel often serve as a reward for years of study and participation. Many day schools with a Zionist orientation also set aside time for special activities over the course of the school year, including memorial services on Israel's Remembrance Day, celebrations on Independence Day and Jerusalem Day and assemblies at times when current events in the Middle East warrant particular attention.

Though it is easy to take this great investment of effort and attention for granted, the ubiquity of Israel education is worthy of inquiry. For one thing, Israeli society and American Jewry have both evolved considerably since Israel's founding – seemingly in radically different directions. In the United States, where Israel was seen in the era after the Six Day War as heroic, some of its luster has been tarnished by the intractable conflict with Palestinians and the drumbeat of criticism leveled against Israel by American elites whose views matter to many American Jews. Israel, in turn, has developed its own culture, one far removed from the pioneering ethos that once captivated an American Jewry eager to serve as a big brother to its somewhat backward and impoverished Israeli coreligionists: It now ranks among the international leaders in the fields of cyber technology, military hardware, medicine and fashion, and needs far less philanthropic support. For another, family ties between American and Israeli Jews have become attenuated: Where once families were divided between European refugees who made their way to the land of Israel and those

who traveled west to the New World, the passing of the older generations has left fewer Jews in both countries with direct family connections. And for still another reason, both Jewries have acculturated to radically different environments: Israelis to an ethos that continues, although less so in recent years, to value an organic communal life centered on family, friends and national service; American Jews have acculturated to a highly individualistic society where ties to the Jewish collective have grown attenuated for a good many Jews.

To complicate this picture, we note countervailing opportunities that make new forms of engagement between the two largest sectors of world Jewry more feasible. New technologies have brought teachers based in Israel into the day school classroom through the miracle of videoconferencing and Skype; social media has created opportunities for schools in both countries to connect their students to one another in twinning programs. Travel back and forth has also become far faster and more economical. And even curricular materials and Israeli cultural products can be adapted rapidly and relatively easily for use in day schools.

Despite the controversies that Israel engenders in some quarters of the adult population, day schools seem to be relatively immune to those battles: Parents and educators alike regard Israel as a valuable glue unifying the school community. Some parents seek an inoculation of Zionism for their children before they encounter the often bitter criticism of Israel heard on some university campuses. Schools report that even parents who themselves harbor critical views of Israel are content to have their children develop warm connections to the Jewish state; they seem to feel that their children can always develop a more nuanced perspective in college or thereafter.

All of these developments suggest that a new era has dawned for the field of Israel education. The moment is therefore ripe to examine how day schools are enacting their mission to teach about Israel, what students are absorbing and whether day schools have kept up with the new realities of Jewish life in Israel and the United States or whether they still employ curricula and approaches from an earlier era.

To take the measure of Israel education in day schools in the current environment, a far-ranging research project was conducted during the 2012-13 school year under the auspices of

The AVI CHAI Foundation. Its goals were to learn more about the so-called inputs, outputs and outcomes of day school Israel education:

- What do schools and teachers seek to impart to students about Israel?
- What do schools actually communicate to their students?
- What do students take away from their educational experiences?

Recognizing that students are shaped by many experiences, not only by what their schools try to teach, this research project also scrutinized the range of factors that might shape the thinking of students – everything from gender differences and adolescent development to parental, communal, regional and denominational influences. Ultimately, this study aims to increase understanding about where schools exercise the greatest leverage and where schools are likely to have less of an impact: We seek to understand how schools can make the greatest difference to how students think and feel about Israel.

Research Design

In order to answer these and other questions, the research team triangulated data from three primary sources.

(i) An inventory of school practices and select site visits:

We asked each of the 95 schools that participated in our project to answer questions about their practices in the area of Israel education. Members of the research team then visited over a dozen of those schools to gather qualitative data on how and when material about Israel is taught, how schools celebrate Israel on special occasions such as *Yom Ha'Atzmaut* and how schools portray Israel graphically in public displays. Researchers also accompanied three school groups during their trips to Israel to learn first-hand what happens during such visits.

(ii) A survey of teachers:

We surveyed some 350 teachers identified by their schools as involved with Israel education about what it is they do in this area and how they perceive the efficacy of their work. We asked them what they aim to accomplish when teaching about Israel and what they believe affects students' perceptions of Israel.

(iii) A survey of students: Simultaneously, we surveyed students themselves to learn how they think about Israel, how confident they feel in talking about it, which aspects of Israel resonate the most and the least with them and how Israel fits into their larger worldview as citizens of the U.S. or Canada and as Jews. In total, we surveyed 4030 middle and upper school students in day schools, comprising 2340 8th graders, 1139 12th graders, 195 7th graders, plus 361 11th graders.

The 95 schools participating in the study include Centrist Orthodox, Modern Orthodox, Conservative, Reform and Community day schools. These schools, then, do not constitute a random sample of the universe of North American Jewish day schools: Those that opted in are probably predisposed to learn more about Israel education. It is not unreasonable to assume that schools in our sample have a greater commitment to Israel education than those that chose not to participate. (A detailed discussion of the research design and methods employed appears in Appendix A.)

How to Read This Report

The intended audience for this study consists of educators in day schools and in other settings who have an interest in Israel education, lay leaders of school boards and communal organizations committed to Israel education, academic students of Jewish education, foundation personnel who invest in Israel education and others with a strong interest in the connections of American Jews with Israel. In order to address these disparate audiences, we have relegated more technical questions to the Methodological Appendix and have sought to minimize the use of statistical jargon.

Readers familiar with the field of day school education will find that the qualitative data in Sections I and II revisit and refine findings from previous studies in this field. These sections paint a picture of what schools are trying to do and of what they actually do. Sections III and IV are based on extensive surveys of teachers and students; they provide an unprecedented insight into teachers' goals and expectations, and into what students take away from these experiences. In Section V – bringing together all that we have learned – we answer the central question that animates this study: How can schools make the greatest difference to how students think and feel about Israel?



"In a bubble" -
Community high school
students walk through
the empty streets of
Hebron

Israel Education - Toward What Ends?

Contemporary Ferment about the Purposes of Israel Education

In recent years, questions about what constitute reasonable goals for Israel education in the Diaspora have taken on new urgency. To be sure, educators have been wrestling with variations of this challenge since the birth of the Jewish State, if not before. Ten years ago, Barry Chazan, a pioneering researcher on Israel education, noted that such questions “never seem to go away.”¹

What has always made these questions difficult to answer is that they not only express an educational problem sharpened by the great geographic distance of young people from the object of study; they also constitute an ideological problem. “Israel education for what?” is embedded in deeper considerations about the place of Israel in North America. And as a recent paper points out, Jewish policymakers, funders, researchers and educators appear reluctant to confront their own ideological stance toward Jewish education, Jewish life and Israel.²

Recent debates about the purposes of Israel education have been stimulated by two new developments. One is the emergence of data suggesting that younger American Jews seem more “distant” from Israel than their elders. A controversy has ensued about the meaning of such data – are they a reflection of a life cycle effect or a cohort effect, of a time in life or a new generation that has been shaped by a radically different worldview?³ And what, if anything, might Israel education do to mitigate the apparent drift? A second new factor contributing to recent debates is the arrival upon the scene of Birthright

¹ Chazan, B. (2005). “Schechter’s Lament: Israel and Jewish Education Once Again.” *Agenda: Jewish Education*, 18, 4–5.

² Grant, L., Werchow, Y. & Marom, D. (2013). “Israel Education for What? An Investigation into the Purposes and Possible Outcomes of Israel Education.” The Consortium for Applied Studies in Jewish Education. <http://casje.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/06/Purposes-of-Israel-Education.pdf>

³ The debate is played out in *Contemporary Jewry*, Vol. 30, No. 2-3, October 2010, Special Issue on the Distancing Hypothesis.

Israel, the provider of a free Israel experience on a mass scale. Having brought over 350,000 Jews to Israel between the ages of 18 and 26, Taglit, as it is called in Hebrew, seems to conceive of the Jewish State less as a valued end in itself and more as a means to something else: the strengthening of Jewish identity in the Diaspora.

Some efforts have been made to rethink Israel education in response to these developments. Recent proposals have urged that Israel ought to be seen as “a core element of Judaism and the collective Jewish experience wherever it is lived,” and that Israel education ought to cultivate “social engagement” between young Jews; serve a vehicle for the “up-building of peace;” or constitute an authentic Jewish “conversation.”⁴

Within day schools, the purpose of Israel education has also come under scrutiny. One study, for example, found that despite bold mission statements about the centrality of Israel, day schools tended to draw few connections between their professed goals and their actual educational activities. Instead of animating school practices and driving decisions about how to allocate scarce resources and setting curricular priorities, mission statements about Israel often serve as empty slogans.⁵

What Day Schools Say They Are Trying to Accomplish: Working on the Heart

In light of all these continuing debates over the purposes of Israel education, this project was especially eager to determine

⁴ Grant, L. (2008). “A Vision for Israel Education.” Paper Presented at the Annual Conference of the Network for Research in Jewish Education. Retrieved from <http://virtualmelton.huji.ac.il/mod/resource/view.php?id=119>; Kopelowitz, E. (2005). “Towards What Ideal Do We Strive? A Portrait of Social and Symbolic Engagement with Israel in Jewish Community Day Schools.” Survey commissioned by RAVSAK and The Jewish Agency for Israel. Retrieved from <https://www.researchsuccess.com/images/public/articles/RavsaReport.pdf>; Sinclair, A. (2003). “Beyond Black and White: Teaching Israel in Light of the Matzav.” *Conservative Judaism*, 55(3): 69–80; Isaacs, A. (2011). “Israel Education: Purposes and Practices.” In Miller, H., Grant, L. & Pomson, A. (eds) *International Handbook of Jewish Education*. Dordrecht: Springer.

⁵ Pomson, A. & Deitcher, H. (2010) “Day School Israel Education in the Age of Birthright,” *Journal of Jewish Education*, 76(1): 52–73.

how day schools define their aims. Consistent with previous research, we found that the goals of Israel education are indeed formulaic and frequently unhelpful in guiding educational decision-making related to the cognitive realm. But, we also learned, these goals are also thoroughly consistent across schools and also peculiarly coherent. For educators at least, they do not seem to exist as empty slogans. Over and over, their goals are directed towards the cultivation of emotional states: identification, allegiance and attachment. Israel education in day schools, we have found, is to a large degree a practice of working on the heart.

It quickly became clear during field visits that schools place the highest priority upon nurturing the affective connection of students to Israel. Again and again, we were told that schools aspire to instill a “love” for Israel in their students. At a strongly Zionist day school under Modern Orthodox auspices, our team observer came away with the following impression: “The school’s goals are more affective than anything else. Nearly everyone interviewed agreed that it is about love and pride and a sense of ownership of Israel as a homeland that drives their Israel education efforts.” Describing her visit to another school, another member of the research team noted, “All in all, this isn’t about acquiring special knowledge but nurturing (positive) symbolic and emotional connections.”

This focus on nurturing emotional connection is especially characteristic of Israel education in lower schools, where the assumption is that students cannot handle more sophisticated discussions and where a strong bond of connection to Israel must be created as a foundation for all that comes afterward. At a Community school, the lower school head informed us that “Israel education is about finding symbols. Israel is a family. And we are part of that family. With younger students, you don’t complicate that. In middle and high school the approach is somewhat more nuanced.” And so in lower school education the key emphases are upon Israel as the Jewish homeland and the site of Biblical narratives. Israel is treated, moreover, as a great adventure and a fabulous place to visit.

Many schools complicate this picture in middle school classes and even more so in high school. “They don’t systematically learn about Israel until 8th grade,” one teacher reports. “That’s why many of the students haven’t heard about Herzl until then.” In preparation for Israel trips, far more comprehensive

information is conveyed to 8th graders, and the wars that have punctuated Israel’s history become a feature of many classes on Israel. It is mainly in high school, though, that the history of Israel is studied with some chronological rigor and some of the tougher issues of war and peace, internal Jewish religious arrangements and social conflicts are addressed.

A field-report from a Community day school captures these developmental considerations:

There are only two teachers responsible for Israel education in the school. The teacher for younger students focuses on harnessing a love of Israel, and the teacher of the older students focuses on getting into some of the more complicated issues. Both find that students who have a familial connection to the land of Israel are more engaged than those without.

The teacher of the younger students strives to create a happy picture of Israel and tries to skirt around the scary things. When the children ask questions about things like bombs and rockets being shot at Israel, she might answer, “Yes, but they miss.” She focuses student projects on “safe” topics such as geography and literacy about Israel.

The middle school teacher approaches his teaching differently. He feels that teaching adolescent children opens up a can of worms for those who just want to be contrarian or challenging for the sake of being argumentative, especially as they approach more “gray area” issues. These are the students who might say “it has no meaning for me” because it is Israel, or “it is a distant land” or “I think about my Judaism differently.” He feels that the Israel trip usually dispels this type of cynicism. As part of the curriculum, he has the students complete a study of a settlement town in which they are required to explore the reasons it was built and think critically about whether or not the town was a success.

The Task for Teachers

In a later section, we explore more fully how teachers conceive of Israel education. Here, we specifically consider the goals that teachers articulate, and the relationship between these goals and the broader mission of schools, our primary interest in this section.

For teachers, the purposes of Israel education are consistent and unambiguous, and they are closely aligned with the institutions that employ them. In their responses to a survey about how they conduct Israel education, teachers indicate that above all they want their students to feel love and pride for Israel, to perceive Israel as both home and homeland and to associate the place with religious and spiritual values. Among the ten outcomes that teachers were most interested in achieving, none is directed toward explicitly cognitive learning or concerned with cultivating an understanding of contemporary or historical events (FIGURE 1). In short, what we observed firsthand in a small sample of schools was born out by our survey of teachers in 95 schools.

We reached the same conclusion when applying the analytical technique of factor analysis to a search for patterns among more than 30 items concerned with teachers' goals (See FIGURE 2). First and foremost, teachers aim to cultivate love and pride in Israel; other goals, although not insignificant, seem to be secondary by comparison.

Teachers' Goals in Their Own Words

When asked to "share a story of an event, experience or maybe something that you did that changed, in the most dramatic fashion, the way your students think and/or feel about Israel," teachers provided vivid insight into their primary motivations.

More than a dozen respondents pointed to those moments when their students came to experience pride in Israel, although what they identified as a source of pride was radically different depending on the ideological context in which they teach. For some, it was Israel's technological prowess (one teacher claimed that Israel had invented the cell phone); for one, it was that Israel was the "only country to have more trees at the end of the 20th century than at the beginning" and for yet another, it was because "this is the first time since the *Mishnah* that the center of Torah study is Israel." Teachers take great pride in their ability to elicit a strong emotional response from their students, even if they have very different ideas about what evokes such a response.

To be sure, some teachers specifically pursue outcomes beyond the affective and aim to stimulate critical thinking, or at least

Figure 1
Teachers' Top Ten Goals: "Students Will..." (frequencies)

■ Not at all-Very little ■ Not much-Somewhat ■ A lot-Very much

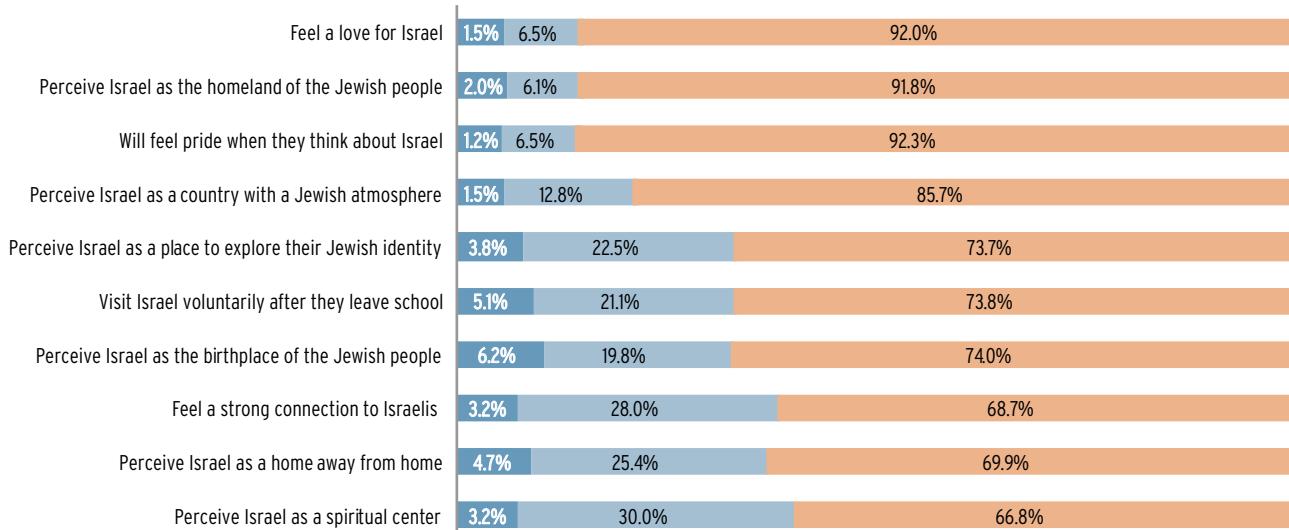
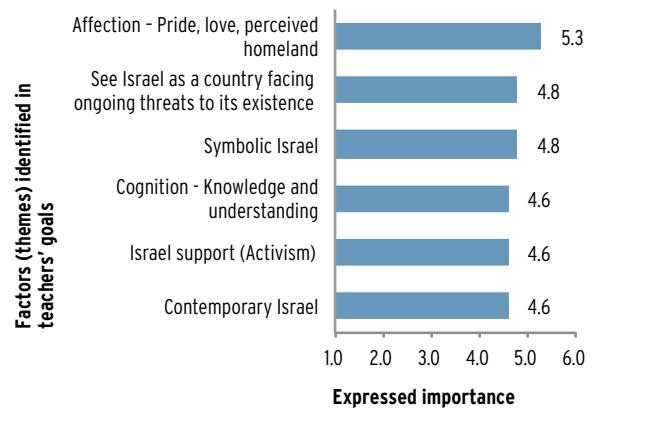


Figure 2
Teachers' Goals (factor analysis)⁶



they seek to provide their students with pause for thought. As one respondent from a Centrist Orthodox high school put it:

My students generally seem to feel an almost instinctive and automatic emotional connection to Israel (something that is energetically fostered by the school). My job may be to root that connection in knowledge and information.

Another teacher, from a Modern Orthodox high school, wrote about aspiring to “open students’ eyes to the complicated reality of the facts on the ground.” Indicating a more complex set of purposes, another respondent from a Community high school reflected on what she saw as a signal achievement:

The students now understand the experience of the Palestinians and how many generations of people have grown up in these conditions, knowing only their lives in the West Bank or Gaza and not much else. The students seem to have a greater understanding of the humanity and emotion tied to the conflict.

Though we note these exceptions, the weight of responses stressed the love of Israel teachers aim to impart, while strikingly few teachers defined their goals as exposing their students to challenging features of contemporary Israel, or even helping students grasp complicated aspects of Israel. As we will see below, the aspirations of teachers mirror what we found about

⁶ For most questions, as with this example, teachers were asked to respond within a six-point scale (ranging, for example, from “Not at all important” to “Extremely important”). Translated to a numerical equivalent, the highest possible score is 6, and the lowest possible score is 1.

how the students conceive of Israel, as a place of great importance to Jews but somehow suspended in time, and certainly disconnected from many complex questions.

A final example drives home the general orientation of Israel educators. In her response, a high school teacher at a Community high school celebrated her deconstruction of the students’ mythic image of Israel:

I try to show the students movies, news items and stories of modern day Israel so that they can understand that this mythical place is very modern and up-to-date. One time I showed the students a PowerPoint of the inventions that have come out of Israel and they were floored. It is funny, they really believe that Israel is a desert and nothing more! I try to change this perception whenever I can.

Ironically, even as this teacher intends to deconstruct myths, she fails to mention introducing students to Israel’s political situation or social challenges the country currently faces. In her effort to update her students outmoded conceptions, she nonetheless offers a highly selective introduction to contemporary Israel. In effect, she is engaged in the construction of a more contemporary myth.

What Do Parents Want?

Although we found that parents widely subscribe to the goals for Israel education that schools pursue, the work of schools does become especially complicated when parents of influence communicate different or divergent expectations. At one school we visited, board members expressed their deep disappointment with the Israel education offered, despite the fact that a year-long course is devoted to Israel in high school and students go on a trip to Israel. One board member flat out declared, “students don’t get Israel education here” and another pronounced the school’s Israel education “is terrible.” What irked them? “The students are unprepared to engage in advocacy after they graduate and attend colleges where Israel is contested.” From the perspective of some parents, then, the purpose of Israel education is to produce Israel advocates who will fan out across university campuses to make the case for Israel.

But many school administrators disagree sharply with such expectations. They contend that most students are not

capable of engaging in campus polemics and ought not to be pressured to play such a role. Moreover, day schools work hard to develop the critical thinking skills of their students. The latter will balk if they feel the school is suddenly reversing gear regarding Israel and expecting them to toe a particular party line. “It just won’t work for most teenagers,” school administrators argue.

Many day school parents prefer for Israel to be taught in a benign fashion. They want their children to develop warm feelings toward the Jewish State. A Modern Orthodox day school in the Midwest reports that 90 percent of its parents agreed in a survey that the school promotes “love of Israel.” And the parents want it that way. “If you cannot be in Israel for *Yom Ha’atzmaut*, you want to be here,” a parent reports. Parents take time off to be in the school on Israel Independence Day. At a different Modern Orthodox day school, nearly everyone interviewed agreed that it is about love and pride and a sense of ownership of Israel as a homeland that drives their Israel education efforts. And at a day school under Reform auspices, board leaders commented on the fact that they never heard any complaints about what’s been taught about Israel. “Parents complain about Hebrew, English, all sorts of things – but not Israel. It’s taught in a very beautiful way, so no one is offended,” the board members report.

Israel's Function as the "Glue" of School Community

This observation brings us to a central reality of contemporary Jewish day schools: Repeatedly we were told that Israel serves as “the glue” bonding the school community together, a reality completely at odds with the presumed divisiveness of Israel within other Jewish institutions in North America. This is what we heard at a Community day school: “Our kids come from all over the place, but Israel is an area where everyone can agree. Some believe that prayer should be in the school; some not. But everyone agrees that Israel has a place in our school. It’s a place where you’ll always be accepted no matter what.” The issue is especially acute in non-Orthodox schools that tend to attract a broad range of families, including Schechter schools under Conservative auspices. Families differ in their religious practices, in their concern about the role of prayer

in the school, in their understanding of just how much of the school day ought to be devoted to Jewish studies classes. The common denominator for such schools is Israel. This is not to say that parents hold monolithic views on Israel’s policies. But they all can agree that nurturing positive views of Israel ought to be central to the school’s mission. Like the teachers, they seem to feel that a more critical approach can wait for when their children are older.

This underlying reality is central to any discussion about what Israel education ought to be about in day schools. In essence, Israel is a sancta. The more a school teaches about the complexities of contemporary Israel, the more that school undermines a precious consensus point. *The question, then, is not only what Israel education ought to be, but what it realistically can be.* For most parents, Israel education is about their lives as American Jews, their Jewish identity, the animating cause of their own Jewishness. Schools can try to upset this equilibrium, but they must understand that to do so brings its own hazards.

The Limited Expression of Alternative Goals

Precisely because of the broad consensus among parents to foster love for Israel and because of the consistency of intent communicated by teachers, more cognitively-oriented learning about Israel often founders on rocky shoals. At a Community day school on the West Coast, we were informed: “Israel is generally a consensus issue. Almost everyone agrees with this. Some teachers seem to express frustration about this reality because attempts to nuance discussion about Israel are not always welcomed warmly.” Usually, this reluctance to stir the hornet’s nest is understood as bowing to the demands of one political side or another. It may be more helpful in the day school context to see it as a realization by schools that Israel as a positive consensus point is the highest priority of most parents.

When we pressed school heads to comment on families that may hold more critical views of Israel, we were greeted with a shrug. Families, they suggested, know what the school emphasizes, and those that disagree choose not to enroll their children. Undoubtedly, a self-selection system is at work and, at present, day schools are content to work with that reality.

This is not to say that some students who hold more critical views of Israel do not feel alienated. In our conversations, we heard about cases of students who felt marginalized due to their more critical perspectives about Israel. Some complain that on Israel trips little time is devoted to the lives of Israel's Arab population; others want class time to be devoted to the Palestinian perspective; some resent class trips to AIPAC gatherings with no similar option for attending JStreet conferences. And even students who strongly agree with Israeli governmental policies voice concern that their school may be scanting evidence of more problematic policies.

Particularly in schools not under Orthodox auspices, teachers include more critical comments on Israel, especially when it comes to the treatment of non-Orthodox versions of Judaism in Israel. In Modern Orthodox high schools, it is also common for time to be devoted to the Palestinian perspective on what happened in 1948. Just as they have created space for open

inquiry regarding other matters once regarded as highly sensitive, many day schools now aim in their upper level grades to "expose students to the broadest range of views on all issues, and help them form their own opinion." Especially in upper schools, it has become more common for two sets of goals to coexist in tension: Schools strive to foster critical thinking while simultaneously maintaining their unwavering commitment to Israel. Both goals are prized by parents and therefore both must be honored if the schools are to hold together.

We note in this connection that our study found no conclusive evidence about the impact on students' thoughts and feelings when Israel is taught about more critically. To determine whether such an approach strengthens or weakens connections would require a closer study of how students view Israel before being exposed to critical views and after. This is a controversial educational and communal question that warrants further research.

Key Findings about the Purposes of Israel Education:

- The highest priority of schools and their teachers is to cultivate emotional states. Israel education is "work on the heart."
- When it comes to this priority on the affective, there is great consistency across schools and grade levels.
- In the higher grades, particularly at the high school level, teachers are more likely to focus on the more complex issues that engage the mind as well as the heart.
- There is a strong alignment between parents' goals and educators' intentions when it comes to teaching about Israel.
- Not only is Israel education rarely contested in day schools, Israel actually serves as glue holding school communities together.

WE
REFUSE
TO BE
ENEMIES

كفر كنا

WANTED:
BOMB - PROOF
BABY - BUGGIES.



It Won't End
Until We
Refuse
COURAGE TO REFUSE ✡
Stop the
Occupation
Now!



Sound-bites
from Israel on a
classroom wall in
a Community day school

decisions as Jews, in
dialogue with Jewish
and Western traditions.

Daniel Gordis

The present hovers between the
remembrance of tragedy past and the
desire for a more humane future.

James Carroll



A Free People in Our Land

Israeli Democracy and Pluralism

Democracy

Israel's Election System Is No Good

O

By Daniel Gordis

Illustration by Michael S. Rothman

Photo: AP

AP Wirephoto

Photo: AP

Where in the Middle East are daughters valued as much as sons?



Israel

Women

How Schools “Do” Israel Education

Israel in the Daily Routine of Schools

Across the Jewish day schools of North America, there are daily oral reminders of Israel. In nearly half the schools we surveyed, *Hatikva* is sung daily or with great regularity. Some schools go out of their way to refer to Israel during daily prayer. Thus in a New York area day school we visited, with a self-defined “religious Zionist” mission, every school day faculty and students alike recite the prayer for the safety of the Jewish state (*tefila li’shlom hamedina*) and also a prayer asking God to watch over Israel’s soldiers. In quite a few other schools, special prayers are uttered at times of crisis in Israel and celebratory prayers, such as the Hallel, are recited on occasions of thanksgiving, such as on *Yom Ha’Atzmaut* (Israel Independence Day) and *Yom Yerushalayim* (marking the unification of Jerusalem during the 1967 war). One may ask how much of this becomes background noise to students and how much they actually take in. But certainly schools that incorporate prayers of gratitude or supplication in regard to Israel aim to deliver a strong message about their commitments to Israel as a *religious phenomenon*.

In the schools we observed, visual cues about Israel are omnipresent, ranging from photographs of Israeli heroes and leaders, to maps of Israel, Hebrew aphorisms about Israel and, of course, Israeli flags – all of which may be found in many classrooms where Jewish studies are taught as well as in other public spaces. In some schools, special areas are set aside to commemorate Israel. One school, for example, has a large mural commemorating fallen Israeli soldiers who had been alumni of its Israeli twin school; another school has created an Israel courtyard at the center of the school structure complete with a large map of Israel made out of wood-chippings. Many schools have given over public space outside of classrooms for students to decorate walls with murals depicting aspects of life in Israel. In others, we observed bulletin boards with news about Israel posted. Later in this report, we explore the extent to which these visual cues are taken in by students or whether they fade into the background. Certainly, their

presence makes it possible for teachers to use these images at appropriate moments as ways to link what is being studied to the actuality of Israel.

In the Classroom and the Jewish Studies Curriculum

Overt references to Israel appear, of course, during actual class sessions too. In some day schools, it has become common for the entire year of Kindergarten or a different lower-school grade to be devoted to a figurative trip to Israel. As the school year begins, students are told excitedly to prepare to embark on a fabulous adventure. They are given a small satchel in which to carry souvenirs they will acquire and a passport that will include stamps from all the sites in Israel they will visit. Then, over the course of the year, they make their way across the country and learn about its landmarks, topography, holy sites and natural wonders. In some schools, lower school children will continue in this vein by learning Hebrew songs sung by their Israeli peers and eat the snacks preferred by Israeli schoolchildren. In one school we visited, they are taught the kinds of recess games preferred by Israeli children. And their teachers read to them from children’s books popular in Israeli schools.

In other schools, classes focus far more on Israel as the birthplace of the Jewish people and its religion, as the land where the matriarchs and patriarchs trod. The Bible becomes a text to learn not only about the formative experiences of the Jewish people, but also about the geography of the land. Scenes of battle or other events described in the Bible are placed in their geographic context. In a related fashion, more traditionally oriented schools will teach about the special laws pertaining to those who live in the land of Israel (*mitzvot hateluyot ba’aretz*). We have also observed classes that offer a comparative perspective discussing a specific theme and go out of their way to include Israel in the mix. In a Schechter high school, for example, a course on comparative judicial systems contrasted the ways the Biblical, *Mishnaic*, contemporary American

and current Israeli court systems are structured. And then in middle school and/or in high school, students take a half-year or even year-long class that focuses exclusively on the history of modern Israel. These classes tend to be left for the higher grades because schools regard them as developmentally inappropriate for younger students who may not be able to grasp the abstract questions of historical chronology, politics and social conflict, let alone some of the difficult realities of war and historical rights and wrongs.

In the Hebrew Classroom

The most common setting for learning about Israel is to be found in none of these types of courses, but in language classes. And accordingly, responsibility for teaching about Israel in many day schools falls to the Hebrew language instructors, a goodly number of whom hail from Israel originally. The curricula in language classes often draws upon stories about Israel's history, news articles about Israel or short stories coming out of Israel. This is especially the case with the NETA curriculum employed in middle and high schools with a strong Hebraic orientation and somewhat less present in the TaL AM curriculum which serves students in younger grades. Occasionally, schools do extend Hebrew language learning beyond the classroom: A couple of schools require students to keep a journal in Hebrew during their school trip to Israel; other schools expect students to communicate in Hebrew with their peers in the schools with which they're twinned.

Field notes recorded by a member of our research team during a visit to a Community day school give texture to these general observations.

*Hebrew teachers do most of the teaching about Israel, but the images and ideas they use don't seem to have changed much since I was in high school. For example, in one 9th grade class, students had just completed projects about Herzl, Ben Gurion, etc. One teacher cited *Late Summer Blues* (a 1980s film) as an example of his teaching about Israel.*

Images of Israel are hung on the walls – the kind that come from the Ministry of Tourism in Israel. Student projects about Israel are displayed in teachers' rooms and in the hallways outside Hebrew teachers' classrooms. Israeli

flags hang in Jewish studies classes and one auditorium has an "Israel wall." The wall is a mural painted by students as part of an art elective – one wall is "Sephardic," one "Yidish" and one is "Israel."

I observed three 9th grade Jewish studies lessons during my visit all taught by Israelis. One is a top level Hebrew class where students read a piece by Etgar Keret and respond to comprehension questions; the other is a *Navi* (from the Prophetic books of the Bible) class using a workbook; the other is a lower level Hebrew class where students are conducting research for their next project on famous Israeli personalities. Though teachers speak in Hebrew, students mostly respond in English. A teacher of the lowest group (those preparing their Israel project) says: "I have the low groups this year, [eye roll], what can you do...but that's okay, because I focus on the love and connection even more."

These notes confirm that schools rely heavily on Israeli-born teachers, many of whom, we found in other school visits, use outdated materials to present aspects of Israeli life during the first few decades of statehood. The sophistication of what is taught – because so much of it takes place in the Hebrew classroom – also depends upon the language proficiency of students. As a consequence, teachers who work with students with a weaker language background are readily frustrated.

Across the Curriculum

Day schools vary greatly in their ability to draw upon general studies teachers to play a role in teaching about Israel. In one school we observed, all staff members – teachers of Judaica and general studies, as well as staff involved in recruitment and even building maintenance – are eligible to go on a highly subsidized trip to Israel. The trip is designed expressly to inform every adult working in the school about the nature of contemporary Israel so that they can incorporate Israel into their teaching and interactions with students. This has prompted a science teacher to replicate experiments Ilan Ramon, the Israeli astronaut, had planned to conduct on his ill-fated space voyage; a math teacher includes in her geometry class different shapes she observed while in Israel; and

an English teacher requires students to keep journals of their school trip to Israel as part of the official writing requirements in her course. This school is one of only a small minority that encourage general studies teaching staff to bring Israel into class discussions, especially when it comes to current events, world history and civics.

Extra-curricular Clubs

Our review of settings where students encounter Israel would be incomplete without reference to the extra-curricular clubs many day schools create with a thematic focus around Israel. A Schechter school we visited begins Israel Clubs in its 5th grade. The Israel educator at that school insists on speaking Hebrew with students and that they respond to her in Hebrew. In clubs like these, much attention is devoted to making the case for Israel and combatting critical media coverage. Some schools have clubs that focus on Israeli dancing or other forms of cultural expression for those students with a special interest in Israel. To be sure, only a small minority of day schools in our sample support such regular groups. This limits the scope and ambitiousness of what schools can do in the sphere of Israel education.

Israeli Personnel

Quite a few schools benefit from the presence of Israeli emissaries. These may be somewhat older *shlichim*, Israelis who commit themselves to working in North America for a period of three to five years. They may be joined by younger people involved in the *Shinshinim* program, a year of community service abroad following army service. Orthodox day schools may also enjoy the presence of religious Israeli girls who complete a year of their national service through a program called *Bnot Sherut*. These *shlichim* offer American day school students a very different perspective on Israel. Unlike Israeli-born teachers who may have been living in the U.S. for decades, the Israeli emissaries have a more up-to-date knowledge of Israeli life and culture. The *Shinshinim* and *B'not Sherut*, moreover, are far closer in age to students and therefore relate differently to them. Students in several schools we visited commented on the special relationships they have established with these Israeli youth who, as slightly older peers, have enriched their understanding of Israel and have helped them relate more concretely

to Israeli life. As to content, the Israeli emissaries expose American students to what they know best – the geography of Israel, modern Israeli Hebrew, and contemporary Israeli culture, including songs, dances, poetry and films. We saw no evidence that these educators challenge or critique locally-developed goals for education (perhaps because they are only employed on short-term contracts by schools), but there is little doubt that they do introduce aspects of Israel into schools that would otherwise be absent.

An Obstacle to Achieving Goals: A Dearth of Materials?

During our school visits, quite a few teachers complained about the dearth of good teaching materials. It is not at all clear that this is true, but teachers believe it to be the case, and, accordingly, many improvise their own curricula. This tends to lead in one of two directions: one is to a sharp focus on Israel advocacy. The standard text used in many day high schools is Alan Dershowitz's *The Case for Israel*, a polemical work that focuses sharply on the Israel-Arab conflict. The conflict between Israel and its neighbors, rather than other aspects of Israeli society, thus assumes a central role in Israel education for students in grades 8-12.

The other direction taken by teachers is a form of curricular improvisation that does not contribute to a clear set of purposes or focus. Describing the curriculum in a Modern Orthodox day school with a self-declared commitment to *Eretz Yisrael*, a site visitor noted:

The school also lacks a curriculum that outlines what it is the students in all grades will learn related to Israel, except for in the 8th grade. *Kodesh* teachers have their outline of what they are to teach and as Israeli holidays creep up there are decisions made regarding how to celebrate. However, it is only in the last six weeks of a course in the 8th grade that they begin to unravel the events of the last 100+ years in terms of modern Israeli history. But this is not their goal.

This school is not at all unique. At a Zionist Community day school, a member of our team observed:

Israel seems to appear throughout the Jewish studies curriculum and even in general studies classes on social studies and ethics, but without a clear scope and sequence.

Similar observations were made at a Community high school on the opposite coast of North America:

We're missing resources and materials that are up-to-date. Not just textbooks; we need websites, interactive learning, modern things students can actually read. Teachers who have been here forever who are resistant to change and not in tune with what's out there rely on the same old, same old, and it's good enough for them.

And in a Modern Orthodox school expressly founded to articulate religious Zionism, we learned that a curriculum on *Medinat Yisrael* was introduced over two decades after the school's founding. In most schools we visited, teachers improvised their own curricula about Israel and rarely coordinated with one another. The result was much repetition from year to year and little effort to develop a spiral curriculum that builds upon what students had learned in previous years. Students were acutely aware of this failing and brought it to the attention of our site visitors.

The highly subjective, if not idiosyncratic nature of Israel education is exacerbated by the paucity of educators whose task is to coordinate curricular and non-curricular activities about Israel. Fewer than one in four schools have anyone whose responsibilities are to serve as an Israel educator. The upshot is that teachers must manage on their own and often engage in duplicative efforts, rather than work with a measure of coordination and common purpose.

Israel at Peak Moments

Yom Ha'Atzmaut - Rituals That Draw the School Community Together

Beyond the daily routines involving Israel, schools also run special programming to highlight Israel on special occasions. The most common such program is a day of celebration on *Yom Ha'Atzmaut*, Israel Independence Day. In a good many Jewish day schools, intensive planning is invested to insure that this will be an enjoyable and educational experience, a centerpiece of the entire school year.

The following field notes capture the atmosphere on *Yom Ha'Atzmaut* at an Orthodox day school:

The school's website recently posted a video of the full day *Yom Ha'Atzmaut* celebration on their home page. The video starts with a large school wide *mifkad* and dancing that took place in the yard and continues through the sing-a-long.

As any visitor can see when they enter the building at this time of year, the walls are decorated with blue and white paper chains that cover the entire ceiling of the entry way. These were put up on *Yom Ha'Atzmaut* by the maintenance staff after the students had completed the project. There is a screen set up that runs Israeli songs with accompanying photos in the main lobby. Students and staff are dressed in blue and white.

I arrived and was able to participate in the 4th and 5th grade *Hallel* assembly. This was held in the afternoon. The students came into the *Bet Midrash* and sat on their respective sides of the *mechitzah*. The school's Head reviewed the day and all the activities they have done to celebrate. He informs the students that it is time to thank *Hashem* for giving us this gift. They say a *Hallel shalem* without any *brachot*.

Later in the day, a teacher gives a talk to the 7th and 8th graders about her upcoming plans to make *Aliyah*. It is opened to a question and answer period in which children explore how her life will be the same and different in Israel.

While the school in this account is unusual in exposing students to a discussion about *Aliyah*, a topic deemed too controversial in most day schools, for the most part, the activities described are common to many day schools of varying affiliations: the opportunity to engage in a prayer of thanksgiving; to sing Israeli songs and to dance; to feast on special snack treats; to decorate the building with Israeli flags; to encourage everyone to dress in blue and white; and to play games that tease out new facts about aspects of Israeli life.

Rituals that Draw the Wider Jewish Community Together

It is not uncommon for *Yom Ha'Atzmaut* activities to begin already the evening before and to involve students and their parents. At one school we visited, some 1200 people gather on the eve of the celebration and mark both *Yom Hazikaron*,

Israel's Memorial Day, which is commemorated the day before its Independence Day, and then the festivities of *Yom Ha'atzmaut*. In still others, day schools serve as the locus of celebration for the entire community, not only the parents and students. In Miami Beach, for example, it is a day school that organizes the local community celebration complete with fireworks. In smaller communities that may be able to support only one day school, that school assumes great responsibility for special occasion events, none more important than *Yom Ha'Atzmaut*. One Community school invested heavily in a program open to all Jews in the area and required nothing of participants other than a willingness to dance the *Hora*.

Rituals That Are Community-Specific

Some schools, mainly in Centrist and Modern Orthodox Sectors, also dedicate time to a celebration of *Yom Yerushalayim*, the day marking Jerusalem's reunification. The special events that schools devise to mark this day are rarely as elaborate as those seen on *Yom Ha'Atzmaut*, but they do provide an opportunity for schools committed to a religious Zionist orientation to inculcate their students in the distinctive values of their community, even while most of the students' own families probably do not mark the day in any special way beyond changes to their daily *tefilot*.

Here is how one K-12 school of an Orthodox orientation marked the day:

The high school students are being taken to an overnight at a camp two hours out of town for a program prepared by the student council. Cancelling regular classes so close to exam season is no small matter. The middle school students participate in a thoughtfully constructed *shacharit* service with video footage, narrative cards and subtitles introduced before *barachu* and then before *Hallel*, so as "to give special meaning" to the *tefila*. The Head of School speaks about the *Min Hametzar* passage of *Hallel* and how Israel was in a tight place, being strangled by blockades, just before the 1967 war, but eventually it ended up gaining more space than it ever had before. He compares this to the more universal notion of asking for something and getting much more in return than you could ever have imagined.

The *shacharit* is followed by a festive breakfast down in the school's sports hall. A talented young teacher, with a

beautiful voice, plays piano and sings, and after everyone has eaten, a great number of students participate in *rikudei am*, Israeli folk dances, led by more enthusiastic teachers.

It's difficult to discern if these activities produce a special resonance among the students. There's a kind of ritualistic atmosphere. This involves more than simply going through the motions, but it does not seem to be especially meaningful. The effect seems similar to that of coming to a school where everyone is in blue and white clothing. It is something with which most of the students cooperate, and it creates a special atmosphere, but it's not clear what the consequences are.⁷

Meanwhile, over in the lower school at the start of the day, there is a lot of excitement and commotion. There's special music playing as students arrive in the building. Everyone is told it's *Yom Yerushalayim*. The informal education team is down in the lobby greeting all arrivals. The kids participate in a series of fun activities that break up their day. I saw the grade 1 students make an edible *Kotel* (1 Graham Cracker, icing, Captain Crunch bricks, marshmallow messages, sour strips for the grass growing in the cracks). All this was then followed by a communal recital of the relevant *brachot*. Each class gets to do one special activity such as this during the day, and then there is a school wide scavenger hunt.

Connecting with Special Moments in Israel

Schools also hold special assemblies to mark significant news developments. In recent years, the release of Gilad Shalit was such an occasion. Day schools around the country devoted time to the circumstances surrounding Shalit's kidnapping, incarceration and eventual release in a lopsided trade of over 1000 Palestinian prisoners for one Israeli soldier. Some schools invited the father of Shalit to speak. Others made much of the value system implicit in the deal that was struck to win Shalit's release: What did the lopsided trade say about Israel's commitments to its captured soldiers? What are the responsibilities toward families of terrorist victims versus to the families of captured soldiers? How are such painful decisions taken? And what are the values that should take priority in weighing the options?

⁷ Below we will report on the impact of these rituals on the aggregate of students.

The Gaza incursion of October 2012 provided another opportunity for special assemblies. Over half the schools in our sample held special programs of solidarity with Israel and over one-third participated in a community-wide event in support of Israel. More generally, when important news breaks in Israel, many American day schools take the time to keep their students informed through newsletters, public announcements and school assemblies.

Rituals Marking the Student Trip to Israel

As we report in the next section, a great many schools take their students on educational trips to Israel. A small number of schools have devised rituals around these trips, and thereby involve the wider community in the experience. In one instance, a Community day school transforms a Friday afternoon *Oneg Shabbat* into an elaborate send-off for the participating 8th grade class. This school, and others we observed, entrust the travelling students with messages to be posted at the *Kotel* on behalf of fellow students and with bringing *tzedakah* to Israel on behalf of the school community. In a number of schools, while the trip is in process, each day in assembly or *tefila* the group's location is tracked. These activities draw the entire community into the excitement of this excursion and whet the appetite of younger students for when it will be their turn to travel.

School Trips to Israel

How the Israel Trip Has Become Normalized

Over the last 20 years, day schools across North America have undertaken a remarkable commitment to providing organized student trips to Israel. The financial investment involved speaks volumes for the commitment of schools and of day school families to the central place of Israel in their respective value systems. About two-thirds of the schools that participated in the study provide such a trip for between ten days and three months.⁸ Most schools offer financial assistance to make

⁸ Orthodox day schools are less likely than others to send student trips, perhaps because they assume that students travel there with their families. Among the 37 Orthodox schools in our 95 school sample, nearly half sponsored school trips; whereas of those 57 Orthodox schools responding to our 168 school survey, only one-third organized such trips for their students.

it affordable for every student who wishes to go on the trip. Invariably the design of these programs is left up to specialist providers in Israel, where about half a dozen companies operate in a highly competitive market. The trips they design are exciting and intense. Program highlights include climbing Masada, sleeping in a Bedouin tent, rafting on the Jordan River and spending Shabbat in Jerusalem. It is no wonder that the programs consistently receive rave reviews from participants and their parents.

The Disconnect Between Israel Trips and School Curricula

Given the heavy investment many day schools make in Israel trips, it is all the more remarkable how little those trips are connected to what is taught before or after. Observing school tours, one would scarcely know that the participants had received many years of Jewish education; indeed, except for the greater emphasis on chaperoning students, most day school trips to Israel look very much like Birthright Israel trips, but participants in the latter are presumed to have virtually no prior Jewish education. There is, in other words, little indication in the content of such programs and in the educational emphases chosen by those who guide them that they come at the end of many years of day school education. They exist uncoupled from what came before or what might come after. For example, we were surprised to learn during our visits to schools that the educators who design and deliver classroom-based curricula about Israel often have little input into the content of the programs in Israel; in fact, in a few cases, the educators themselves have never been on the school's trip. By the same token, on the small number of trips that we observed, there was only a limited sense that the tour guides had a special sense of the educational or ideological orientation of the schools with which they had been contracted to work. There is limited communication in either direction.

Missed Opportunities

Typically, the programming and organization of these trips constitutes a catalogue of missed opportunities: missing the chance to connect student learning before the trip with what they experience during the time in Israel; missing opportunities to structure the content of programs so as to explore issues that

are at the heart of the distinctive educational missions of particular schools; and missing the chance, after returning to North America, to build on what was experienced in Israel. And yet, while for most schools these experiences remain underutilized as educational opportunities both for the participating students and for school communities, we found that this is not always the case. There are exceptions to this general rule that can provide instructive examples to the broader network of day schools.

Creative Scheduling

Some schools, for example, pay very careful attention to *when* trips are scheduled, bringing forward the experience to the start of middle school or high school so as to then have an opportunity to use subsequent years – in school – to build on what has been experienced. In the most extreme instance, one school bookends the high school years with two trips to Israel: a two-week trip at the start of 9th grade and then a three-month program at the end of 12th grade (and in between, students remain in contact with and also host their counterparts at an Israeli twin school). Less radically, other schools schedule the trip before the final semester of the last year of school (whether middle school or high school) so that returnees will have an opportunity to share with the wider school community what they have experienced and so that they themselves can return to the classroom inspired and informed by their experiences.

Creative Content

Some schools are highly proactive in designing the content of the trip, connecting program components to aspects of the curriculum that precedes it. In these instances, the program in Israel seamlessly takes up themes that were launched back home, or, in one instance that we observed, draws a tight connection with Hebrew language learning. In a small number of cases, schools recruit their own hand-picked tour guides who are sensitive to their particular ideological and educational orientations. Ironically, some of these educators are not licensed tour guides, but they certainly know and understand the needs of those with whom they work. One school even employs one such educator on year-round retainer to provide other resources and inputs beyond the trip, such as hosting school families that visit Israel over Passover or the summer.

Finally, as mentioned above, we found schools that did an exceptionally energetic job of turning the trip into a peak experience not just for the participating students but for the whole school community. By building elaborate rituals around the departure and return, and by tracking the trip's progress, they involve the broader student and parent body in the excitement of what is being undertaken. They turn the trip into a truly catalytic educational experience for the whole school community.

What Trips Deliver

Thanks to support from the Jewish Agency for Israel (JAFI), members of our research team were able to survey for a second time more than 200 8th grade students from 13 of the schools that participated in our larger study. This follow-up study, conducted after students had returned from their school trip to Israel, used a pre-post experimental design, which made it possible to explore in a limited fashion the extent to which time in Israel induced changes in students' thoughts and feelings.⁹

Published separately, this supplementary study confirmed how powerful even ten-day or two-week Israel experiences can be, at least in the short-term (during the immediate aftermath of the trips). The pre-post research design revealed changes in the *structure* of the participants' conceptions, the *intensity* of their conceptions and in the *coherence* of their conceptions. Generally, these short trips to Israel crystallized the way in which the participants – in the early stages of adolescence – thought about Israel and the world. The trips helped certain ideas fall into place.

At the same time, the JAFI study confirmed that in many schools there is a disconnect between the content of the Israel trip and what students learn about Israel in school. Thus, those elements of students' thinking about Israel that were most strongly influenced by their time in Israel related to themes and dimensions concerned with what it is like for people to

⁹ We share findings from this study acknowledging the permission and support of The Unit for Educational Experiences in Israel and the Unit for Strategy, Planning and Content at the Jewish Agency for Israel. For more information see the full report: *First Encounters with Israel: A Picture Coming into Focus – A Pre/Post Study of 8th Grade Trips to Israel*. Rosov Consulting (2013) Jerusalem: Jewish Agency for Israel.

live in the country. These personal themes are quite different from those most heavily addressed by day schools during the regular course of the year – such as Israel's place in Jewish history and religious life.

Finally, this second study revealed that not all students respond in the same way to an Israel experience. Those who were interested in Jewish matters before the trip were more engaged by the intellectual and historical ideas they

encountered. Those more detached from Jewish life and Jewish concerns were more likely to return with a greater sense of Israel as a fun place to spend time and with a greater sense of connection with those who live there. Some, however, returned to America with a weaker sense of identification with other Jews and with supporters of Israel, an anomaly that suggests the usefulness of studying the response to this experience from a larger sample of students.

Key Findings about How Schools "Do" Israel Education:

- There is a strong ritualized quality to the way that Israel is introduced in day schools; it is both routinized and also at the heart of peak moments in the school year.
- Day schools typically invest a good deal of time and resources in connecting students to Israel. On regular school days, Israel can be found in the classroom and through visual and aural cues. On special occasions specific to the Israeli calendar, most day schools run assemblies, as they do when marking dramatic developments in Israel.
- Israel is everywhere in schools, but the most common site where teaching about Israel occurs is in the Hebrew language classroom where students encounter the country in a second language.
- Despite the ubiquity of Israel in day schools, most lack a common curriculum or a special Israel education coordinator.
- Trips to Israel have become normalized as an educational practice. In the best instances, these trips serve as synthesizing and focal points for learning. Often, however, uncoupled from the school curriculum, they frequently involve missed opportunities for really deep learning.

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Creating sacred space: the seven species of the Land of Israel above the entrance at a Modern Orthodox day school

Who Teaches About Israel?¹⁰

On a daily basis, teachers are the prime purveyors of Israel education to day school students. We therefore took the measure of how teachers think about Israel education: What are their learning goals? What are they aiming to communicate about Israel and toward what ends? And what is their perception of what their students internalize?

Personal information provided by survey respondents conveys a useful picture of who is engaged in educating about Israel in day schools.

- Two-thirds of those who responded were women.
- Slightly more than 10 percent of the respondents were under the age of 30, half were between 30 and 50 years old and a third were over the age of 50.
- There were relatively few novice teachers in the sample: 15 percent had taught for five years or less; two-thirds had taught for more than five years and for less than 30.
- Almost two-thirds of respondents were born in North America; more than a quarter were born in Israel and more than 80 percent had family there.
- More than 90 percent reported that they had visited Israel at least once, and three-quarters claimed to have spent more than three months there, most frequently to study or to be with family.
- Just less than a fifth of respondents taught only Hebrew; a similar number taught Hebrew as well as another subject. Two-thirds identified themselves as teaching Jewish studies. Just 15 percent taught general studies.
- 80 percent reported some form of teacher certification, and 20 percent were ordained rabbis.

How Successful Do Teachers Think They Are?

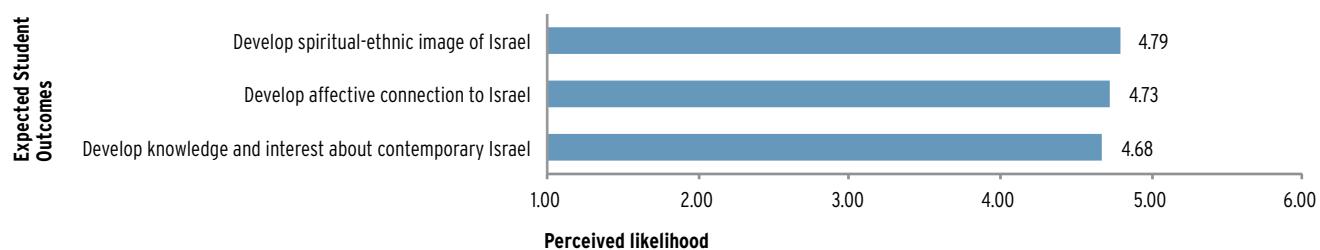
Our survey asked teachers to assess how well they are able to achieve their goals as Israel educators. First, we asked respondents to estimate how students would respond to a list of “images of Israel.” Strikingly, the teachers had a good sense of the valence of these images for their students: that is, their responses conveyed an accurate estimation of what their students were likely to think of as negative and what they would see as positive. It is noteworthy, however, that the teachers thought their students would conceive of Israel more positively than they actually do.

When we asked teachers about what kinds of outcomes they saw themselves as able to achieve, there was also alignment – in this instance between the goals that teachers prioritized and the outcomes they felt most able to fulfill. Thus, the two outcomes they felt most able to realize were: “to encourage students to feel pride when they think about Israel” and “to nurture a love of Israel among students,” two outcomes high on their list of goals. The two outcomes they felt least able to achieve – “to make students familiar with contemporary Israeli culture” and “to teach students about the Arab-Israeli conflict” – not coincidentally had been among their least important objectives.

Overall, there was only a slight variation in the range of responses from teachers about what they thought they were achieving. This suggests that teachers generally have a high sense of self-efficacy. Applying the technique of factor analysis to this question, we found that the teachers express more or less the same level of confidence in their ability to cultivate cognitive outcomes as in their ability to cultivate affective

¹⁰ Our discussion of teachers is based on the responses of 345 teachers who were identified by their school leadership as teaching about Israel. This sample differs from the much larger population that participated in the most recent major study of day school teachers [Ben Avie, M. & Kress, J. (2007) *Educators in Jewish Schools Study*. New York: Jewish Education Services of North America]. Disproportionately fewer women responded to our survey, most probably because the survey was addressed to middle and high school educators where male teachers are concentrated. The respondents are more highly credentialed, in all likelihood for the same reason. In terms of age and experience, our sample is generally younger and less seasoned than the population that typically teaches in day schools. Finally, our sample includes double the proportion of those born in Israel than in previous studies.

Figure 3
What Teachers Think They Are Able to Achieve When Teaching About Israel (factor analysis)



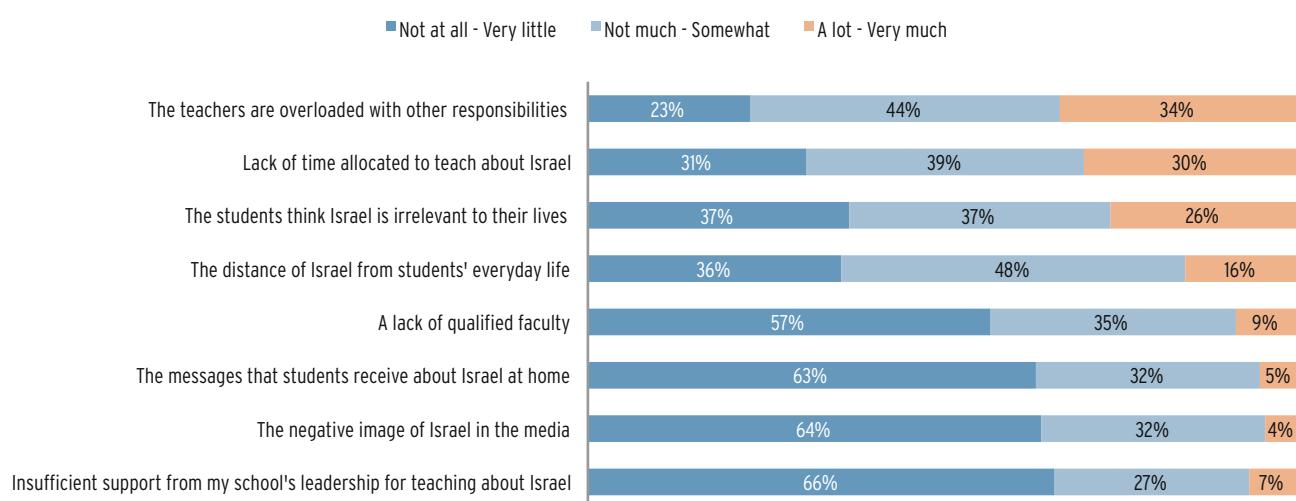
outcomes or to deepen students' appreciation of the historical and theological importance of Israel. Teachers seem to think that they're able to do a good job (see Figure 3).

What Makes Teachers' Work Difficult?

Another data point reinforces the impression of teachers' high sense of self-efficacy. We asked respondents to identify those things that hampered achieving their goals as Israel educators. As seen in Figure 4, what they report as most complicating their work are technical matters (for example, "teachers are overloaded with other responsibilities" and "lack of time allocated to teach about Israel"). Other major challenges are related to matters beyond their control ("the students think

Israel is irrelevant to their lives" and "the distance of Israel from students' everyday life"). Strikingly, when we analyze teachers' responses in relation to different background variables, one of the few factors where there were no significant variations between different subgroups of teachers was a factor concerned with challenges to being effective due to professional weaknesses. Regardless of their age, experience and commitments, teachers see themselves as being impeded least by their own professional deficiencies and most by the institutional and cultural circumstances in which they do their work, a finding consistent with studies of how other professionals evaluate themselves.

Figure 4
Teachers' Perceptions of Challenges to Their Work (frequencies)



Teaching from Their Own Example

Our respondents' answers are consistent, then, with other studies of teachers' sense of self-efficacy. Like most professionals, teachers tend to attribute their failures to extrinsic factors, rather than to intrinsic ones. But, in this case, there may be another important phenomenon at work. In their responses to the open-ended question about an instance when they transformed their students' thinking about Israel, there was a very strong tendency to identify such a moment with having shared with their students a transformative *personal experience* of Israel from their own lives. (In fact, so strong was this tendency that we first thought that the respondents had misread the question and concluded that we had asked about a transformative experience in their *own* lives rather than in the lives of their students.) What teachers convey with great consistency is that for many of them the most powerful form of Israel education is centered on their ability to inspire students based on their own life experiences and the model they provide for students. By implication, teachers thought that what was transformative for them would be transformative for their students too. Thus, in teachers' accounts of what was most transformative, more than 20 percent of the responses include variations on the word "sharing" – i.e., they believe Israel education is best done by sharing something of themselves with their students.

The following responses demonstrate how this assumption plays out across all day school sectors.

From a teacher in a Community day school: "One story that mattered a lot to them was about the intolerance I experienced at the *Kotel* in an egalitarian service – and how Robinson's Arch has been a place to restore my connection to the area."

From a teacher in a Conservative day school: "I have been to Israel five times in my life so far – the first time right before my Bat Mitzvah in June, 1967. I share a lot of the things I experienced as a way to relate to middle school students who are now the same age I was at the time."

From a teacher in a Modern Orthodox day school: "I shared a personal story with my class when I once lost my wallet while riding my bike and a lady called me and told me she had found my wallet. I told my students that there are many good-hearted people in Israel and it's nice to know

that there are people that are good in their nature and like to help others."

From a teacher in a Centrist Orthodox day school: "I shared a personal story of when I was studying in yeshiva in Israel, about *Yom Yerushalayim*. We went to the top of Ben Yehuda and marched into the old city, through the Arab quarter, through the shuk, to the *Kotel* and danced for a while. It was amazing."

We are tempted to ask about this last quotation, "amazing for whom?" That, however, would miss a more profound point. Teachers indicate through their survey responses and through these comments that Israel education rests heavily on their own personal experience and example, and on drawing students into their own universe of values, whatever distinctive coloration those values might take. This reflects an impressive commitment to wanting their students to appreciate – love – Israel as they do. The problem is that this commitment often leaves little room for students to discover for themselves what Israel means, and to ask meaningful questions about it for which there may not be ready-made answers.

Two Distinct Groups of Day School Teachers

Until now we have emphasized commonalities among teachers regardless of where they teach and who they are. These commonalities include a remarkably high level of consensus about what makes their work difficult – organizational challenges in schools rather than their own shortcomings – and widespread agreement about the goals of Israel education: the cultivation of the affective dispositions of connection, allegiance and attachment. In this next section we explore some important variations in how teachers of different backgrounds responded to 17 different "factors" or themes identified by our survey analysis.

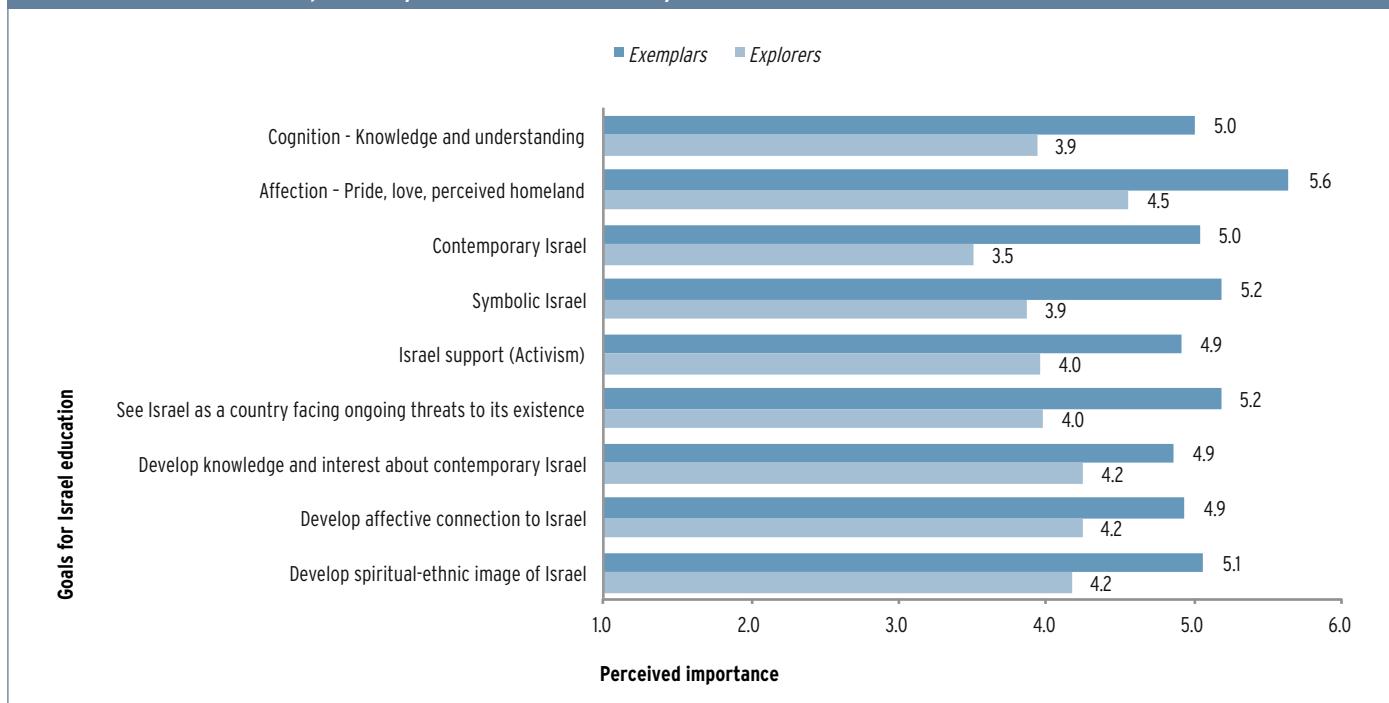
The analytical technique of cluster analysis (explained in the methodological appendix) makes visible a sharp contrast between what appears to be a vocal majority of teachers, on the one hand, and a not inconsequential minority on the other. The demographic and professional differences between these two groups are summarized in Table 1.

One group we characterize as *Exemplars*. The teachers in this

Table 1
Significant Differences Between Teacher Clusters

	Cluster 1: <i>Exemplars</i> (69 percent of sample)	Cluster 2: <i>Explorers</i> (31 percent of sample)
Female	69 percent	52 percent
Age	Under 30: 9 percent	Under 30: 20 percent
	30-49: 48 percent	30-49: 58 percent
	50+: 43 percent	50+: 22 percent
Born in Israel	34 percent	17 percent
Personal affiliation	Orthodox 50 percent	Orthodox 53 percent
	Conservative 22 percent	Conservative 21 percent
	Reform/Just Jewish 23 percent	Reform/Just Jewish 16 percent
Grade level	Middle school 50 percent	Middle school 28 percent
	High school 50 percent	High school 72 percent
Subject area	Only Hebrew 22 percent	Only Hebrew 10 percent
	Jewish studies (including Hebrew) 66 percent	Jewish studies (including Hebrew) 71 percent
	General studies 12 percent	General studies 19 percent

Figure 5
Teachers' Goals Compared by Cluster (factor analysis)



group are more inclined to teach by drawing on their own example. The second group we call *Explorers*. These teachers are more inclined to prompt students to figure out things for themselves. The *Exemplar* group is made up of more women, and it includes a high proportion of those who were born in Israel, who teach Hebrew and who teach in middle school rather than high school. As seen in Figure 5, the purposes, beliefs and expectations of this group diverge in consistent ways from those of their colleagues. *Exemplars* tend to have grander goals for Israel education, whether in terms of cognitive, affective or behavioral outcomes. They are also much more confident about achieving their goals, and more inclined to think that students hold a positive view of Israel. Members of this group hold stronger views about what it means to be Jewish, whether religious, ethnic or ethical. Interestingly, the two groups do not differ in terms of their own personal Jewish affiliations, and – as will be seen below – they are located in consistent proportions across the day school sectors.

Contrasting Approaches to Teaching about Israel

What the differences between these groups look like in practice is seen vividly when comparing how teachers from each group reflect on examples of success in their teaching. This comparison does not reveal Jewish values or educational philosophies that are sharply or consistently different from one another. However, thematic coding of the statements does show that the *Exemplars* are more likely to celebrate teaching through modeling or personal example – they're more inclined to preach when they teach. By contrast, the *Explorers* are more likely to cite examples of students learning through their own inquiry or study.

Here are statements written by members of the *Exemplar* group. *Although far from one-dimensional*, they convey a certainty of purpose and a frequent tendency to teach through modeling:

When I related to my students my experience visiting an Israeli-Arab who had visited and spoken in our school, my students were very interested in learning more about the interrelationships between the two. My lesson on coexistence demonstrated to the students that there are occasions and events which bring each group together with the other. I think my students appreciate the importance for Israelis

and for the future of the country to gain a better knowledge of the interactions that occur and for the necessity to pursue even more opportunities to accomplish this goal.

My class is currently working on the project “The neighborhoods of Jerusalem” to commemorate *Yom Yerushalayim* which this year falls on May 7. Each pair of students is assigned a neighborhood to research about and make the presentation in class. One of the students told me that I made “a mistake assigning them Ein-Karem as all she can find is St. John and Christians who live there.” I told the class about Jerusalem’s uniqueness as the city of the three religions, Judaism, Islam and Christianity and also that Israel is for peaceful coexistence between the people of different religious confessions. Many students never heard about neighborhoods with mixed populations. On a personal note, as a *Yerushalmi*, I encouraged the student to continue the research and teach the class that Jews and Christians live in Ein-Karem as good neighbors.

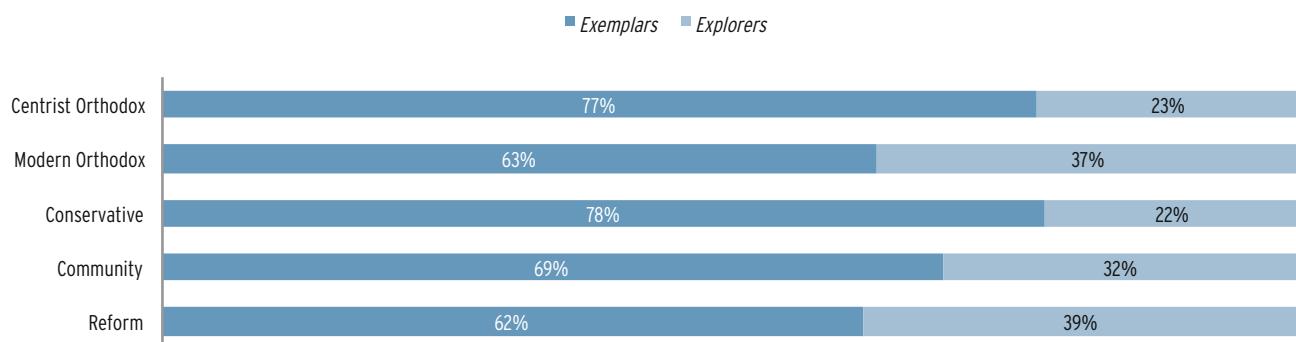
After Hurricane Sandy, I spoke with my students about Hashem giving us obvious reasons to live in Israel. What more can Hashem do to us to prove to us that he wants us out? He has kicked us out of our homes and shuls. Why are we rebuilding here? Why are people not going right now to Israel? What do we need Hashem to do to us to prove this more?!

The following statements provided by members of the *Explorer* group are also far from uniform, but they do indicate a greater readiness to allow students opportunities to delve into questions by themselves:

We read articles about controversial events in Israel and then Skyped with my daughters in Israel to talk about how those issues play out in their lives. There was open conversation as they saw the issues of women on buses in religious neighborhood or women at the *Kotel* from observant women in Israel's perspective and heard that not all “Orthodox” Israelis are the same.

We are learning *Shmuel Bet, Perek Hey* right now. Students were doing a project on Jerusalem's place in Jewish history/identity through the ages. Someone said that being anti-Israel wasn't the same thing as being anti-Semitic. I shared some current examples of Israel being held to a higher

Figure 6
Percentages of *Exemplars* and *Explorers* Employed in Different Denominational Sectors



standard than other nations, and it seemed to have a real impact on some of the students.

The students conduct a mock parliamentary debate using Zionist figures from 1830 to 1948 to argue about how they would structure the state and resolve issues such as the conflict with the Palestinians. They then answer these questions in small groups to find out some of the challenges of modern Israel and celebrate its successes.

In class, we did an in-depth read of *Megillat Atzmaut*. For many students, it was the first time they realized that Israel had been founded with both Jewish and democratic principles at its heart. We compared it to the American Declaration of Independence and looked at the different reasons for founding and the purpose of the existences of the different countries. This helped them understand modern Israel in relatable terms and built for them the idea that Israel is a modern country with modern challenges.

In Every School Sector There Are Substantially Different Groups of Teachers

As seen in Figure 6, these two groups of teachers can be found in similar proportions among all of the school sectors we surveyed. They are not concentrated by denomination, as might have been assumed. Instead, their relative presence has more to do with grade level, what subject they teach and whether or not they were born in Israel.

In whichever school they're enrolled, students encounter both kinds of teachers, given the fairly even distribution of *Exemplars* and *Explorers* across sectors. This leads us to wonder what students make of the fact that teachers in some classes are more inclined to encourage them to arrive at their own understandings of Israel while in other classes the teachers strongly advise them what to think. The sense we derive from school visits is that the voices of *Exemplars* frequently drown out the *Explorers*, and that this shapes students' perception of how "their schools want them to think about Israel." This leads us to wonder how alert school administrators are to this phenomenon, and, if they are, how this awareness informs staffing decisions.

As we have seen, it is not that one group of teachers is more or less critical of Israel than the other. The contrast is more subtle: *Exemplar* teachers have much grander goals and are more confident about fulfilling them; *Explorer* teachers are more circumspect. But circumspection is not synonymous with criticism. In the recommendation section of this report,

we discuss how through awareness of the differences between teachers, schools can harness the respective strengths of each group and also avoid the trap of assuming that all who want to teach about Israel are cut from the same cloth.

For the moment, we emphasize that the intensely personal quality of Israel education poses a challenge and also creates an opportunity. On the one hand, this kind of personal approach to Israel may result in miscommunication between

students and teachers. Teachers might think they're inspiring and informing their students because they're teaching about something that's personally important to them. They might in fact be encouraging their students to tune out. On the other hand, the personal importance of the topic to teachers means that many come to classroom fired by passion and eager to inspire their students. Such passion can be the starting point for great teaching.

Key Findings about Who Teaches about Israel:

- Teachers have a high sense of self-efficacy: they think they're doing a good job when teaching about Israel.
- Teachers feel that the greatest challenges to their success derive from institutional and cultural circumstances, not from their own limitations.
- The majority of teachers – more than two-thirds of those we surveyed – believe that Israel education is best done by sharing something of themselves with their students, and they're quite certain about the outcomes they're aiming to produce. We characterize these teachers as *Exemplars*.
- An important minority of teachers are *Explorers*. These teachers tend to be more circumspect about their goals. They believe that students should learn about Israel through their own inquiry and study.
- Teachers from each of these groups are found across day school sectors.



From Shoah to
Tekumah - A master
narrative of modern
Jewish history in a
stairwell at a Modern
Orthodox school

What Students Take Away from Their Educational Experiences in School

Most of our discussion up to this point has focused on so-called inputs – what schools try to achieve and what teachers understand their enterprise to be when it comes to Israel education. Ultimately, our project’s most important questions are concerned with students: What do they take away from the Israel education they are exposed to? And how do they perceive Israel? These are questions that have rarely been considered in previous research.

A Profile of Day School Students

Students who attend Jewish day school constitute in the aggregate an anomalous sub-group. They are not typical of their peers in their Jewish knowledge, commitments and feelings about being Jewish. They also tend to be recipients of the best education and socialization the Jewish community can provide. To take but a few examples:

- Four-fifths of day school students in our sample have spent at least one season in a summer camp with a Jewish orientation.
- Though Jewish youth movements of the various religious movements such as NFTY, USY, NCSY and pluralistic ones such as the B’nai Brith Youth Organization (BBYO) attract in the vicinity of 10-15 percent of Jewish teens, over one-third of our student sample have participated in Jewish youth groups.
- Only seven percent of our student sample have intermarried parents at a time when the overall intermarriage rate has reached 58 percent.
- Thirty-nine percent of our student sample claim that at least one parent takes an active role in Jewish communal life.
- Over one-third of our 12th grade students state their intention to spend their gap year between high school and college at a program in Israel. Among the Orthodox students, this percentage rises to over 60 percent as compared with only 11 percent of the non-Orthodox.

- More than 60 percent of students in our sample have relatives in Israel, a proportion that, we expect, far exceeds what is typical in the American Jewish community.

It is no exaggeration to suggest that these day school students differ significantly in their profile from the rest of their Jewish peers – and they tend to be among the most engaged of young Jews. The purpose of stating this at the outset is to highlight the anomalous nature of the population we studied and to caution against generalizing from this cohort of Jewish teenagers. Equally important, we highlight this group because many of its members will play a leading role in Jewish life when they come of age – all the more reason to understand how they think, the ways in which they construct their Jewish identities and the strengths and limitations of their commitments as Jews. At the same time, as will become apparent below, this is far from a uniform or undifferentiated population; indeed, uncovering their diversity is one of our most important findings, and has important practical ramifications. After providing a general portrait of the aggregate of students who participated in this research, we will explore some of the differences between sub-groups enrolled in schools. As will be seen, these differences are linked to denomination, age, gender, geographic location and family profile, and have direct implications for the policies and practices of Israel education in these settings.

Seeing Israel as Timeless or Symbolic¹¹

While Israel is an integral component of students’ Jewish identity, what Israel actually means to them is more ambiguous: For example, while students express a strong connection to Israel, the students’ expression of Jewish identity does not include much room for *contemporary* Israel. This does not

¹¹ Our characterization of students’ conception of Israel as symbolic draws on Kopelowitz’s (2005) distinction between Israel education that has a symbolic or social intent. He writes: “Symbolic engagement uses the link to Israel as a means to...create a sense of ‘Jewish transcendence’ in that the students in the school will feel that they are part of the larger Jewish People. In contrast, social engagement goes beyond the symbolic level and encourages students to form an ongoing relationship and commitment to Israelis and Israel” (*op cit.* p.1).

come as a surprise given both the mythologized image of Israel we found in schools and the limited importance that teachers attributed to the goal of connecting their students with contemporary Israel. As we indicated above, we found numerous examples of teachers cultivating a mythic image of Israel.

Thus, when students were asked to respond to a set of 19 different images of Israel, positive images of contemporary Israel (for example, a home away from home, a place with close friends and/or family, or a place to be safe from anti-Semitism) possessed only moderate positive resonance for the students. Instead, four of the five images to which they responded most positively have an almost timeless quality: Israel as the Jewish homeland, a place with a Jewish atmosphere, a place to explore their Jewish identity and a place for the exploration of spirituality (Figure 7). None of these images has much to do with the specific circumstances of life in contemporary Israel. These items, in fact, could have been selected even before the establishment of Israel as a Jewish state. It is as if the past 65 years of history in that land had never transpired.

Further probing of the students' responses sheds more light on their perceptions of Israel. Factor analysis reveals that

first and foremost students conceive of Israel as a center for spirituality, a place to explore Jewish identity and a place with a Jewish atmosphere. Secondarily, it is a place with resonance as the homeland of the Jewish people, the birthplace of the Jewish people and as a home away from home. These positive associations are not grounded in Israel's day-to-day preoccupations with internal tensions and external threats. Again, these associations with Israel have a timeless quality; they are not rooted in contemporary circumstances.

These findings are in line with student responses to questions about how self-confident they felt discussing certain types of issues (Figure 8). Among the items students felt diffident talking about were current Israeli events, daily life in Israel and the status of the various religious movements in Israel. Of all the possible items, the one they felt most diffident discussing is contemporary Israeli culture (such as films, music and books) and daily life in Israel, although they are more confident discussing the Arab-Israel conflict. The topics students felt most confident discussing are also worth noting in this connection. Uppermost among them were matters concerning American culture at large – films, music and books – as well as cyber-bullying. Indicative of the curricular emphases

Figure 7
Percentage Distribution of Students' Responses to the Question:
"To what extent would you describe Israel as...?"

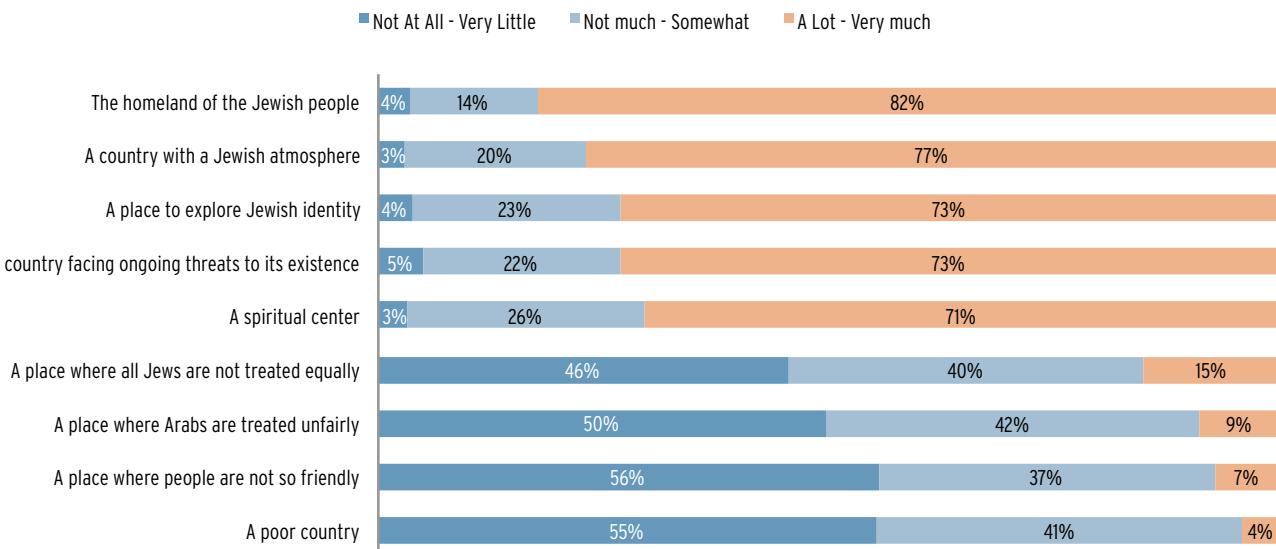
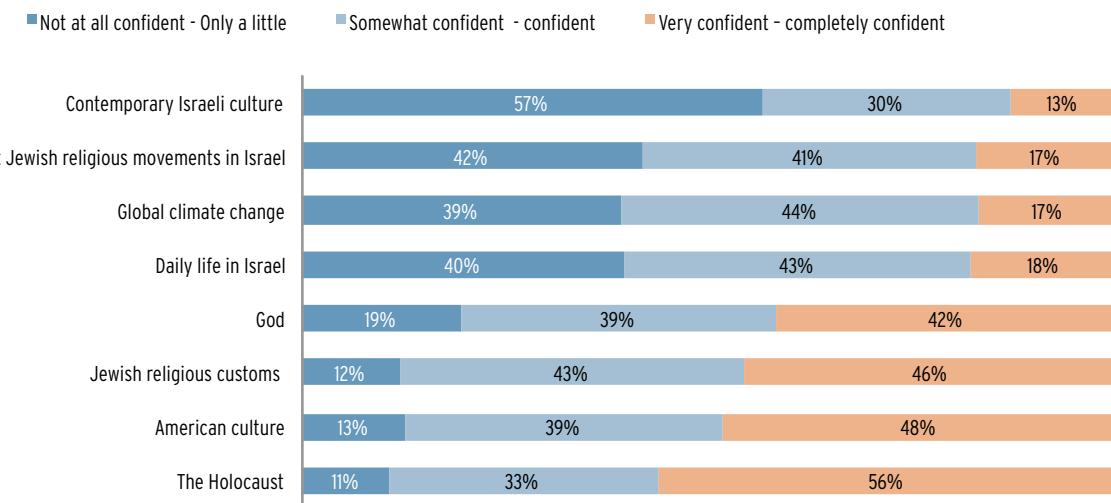


Figure 8

Percentage Distribution of Students' Responses to the Question:
"How confident are you in your knowledge to talk about these things?"



in schools, of all the topics listed, the Holocaust was ranked highest by the aggregate of students as the topic they felt most confident discussing.

The Connection between Israel and the Jewish People

The connection of students to Israel is anchored in their identification with the Jewish people as a whole. When offering their responses to a battery of statements, the students' attitudes towards Israel were highly congruent with their attitudes toward Jewish peoplehood – including Jews around the world as well as in their own community. Evidently, whether they felt a weak or strong connection to Israelis or Jews in general, or to Israel or their local Jewish community, they saw these categories as indistinguishable from one another.

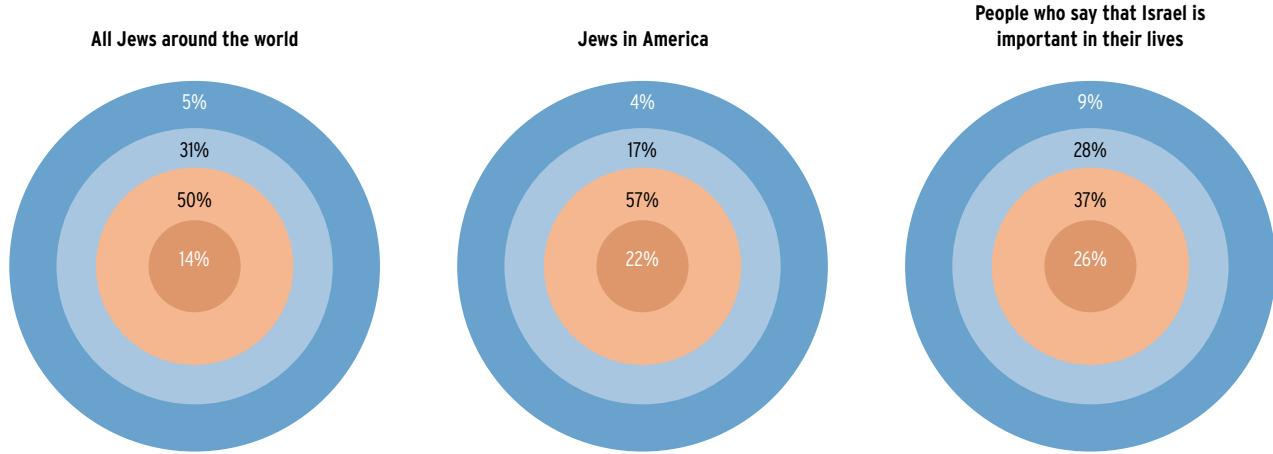
This phenomenon is consistent with one of the most telling dimensions of the survey, where we asked students to situate themselves graphically within the Jewish universe (Figure 9). The majority of respondents (64 percent) saw themselves either at the center or inner circle of Jews around the world. Seventy-nine percent said the same in situating themselves among Jews in America. When it comes to situating themselves in relation

to those "who say that Israel is important in their lives," fewer students but still the majority, 61 percent, placed themselves in the center or inner circles.

Several conclusions flow from this overall set of answers. To begin with, day school students overwhelmingly see themselves at the center of American Jewish life, and only minorities regard themselves as marginal. (It is hard to imagine other cohorts of young students identifying so strongly with the Jewish community.) Second, it is noteworthy that over one-third of respondents do not place themselves in the inner two circles when it comes both to Jews around the world or to people who think Israel is important in their lives. Clearly, some day school students are not so touched by their experiences of Israel education or by a sense of connection to Jews beyond North America. And third, we will need to explain the gap between the ways students picture themselves among those who think Israel is important in their lives and the strong connections to the Jewish people they report in other parts of the survey questionnaire.

We begin our explanation of what we referred to as a gap in their self-categorization by probing whether there is a correlation between students' conceptions of what it means to be

Figure 9
Identifying with Different Groups of People



Jewish (whether social, religious or ethical) and the images of Israel that most resonate for them. We found that the more universalistic the respondents' worldview, the less likely they are to have a clear and consistent image of Israel. To elaborate: We found a moderate correlation between social and religious conceptions of Jewishness, on the one hand, and particular images of Israel, on the other, especially the image of Israel as home and homeland. There was a much weaker correlation between a universal or ethical conception of Jewishness and any specific image of Israel.

Factor analysis also surfaced the strong association of Israel and Jewish peoplehood in the minds of students. The analysis identified attitudes toward Jews around the world, toward different types of Jews in North America and even feeling part of the local Jewish community as connected with the students' views of Israel as the Jewish homeland, a place they feel pride about and also a sense of responsibility toward. (See Appendix C, factor B1).

These patterns suggest again that Israel education might be more compelling and interesting to students when framed as an aspect of the Jewish people's collective existence and culture. When it is framed as something else, something more universal, or simply as a discrete political issue, it does not resonate as much. Conversely, we suggest, if young people

do not have a strong connection to the Jewish people and its culture, then their relationship to Israel might lack substance.

Differences Between Students

Thus far, our discussion has looked at the day school respondents in the aggregate, as a single undifferentiated population. Upon closer inspection, it becomes evident that within this population, students differ considerably in their views based upon a variety of circumstances.

Age and Grade Level

To begin with, the age of students has an effect, as does their year of study. Overall, as compared to 8th graders, the attitudes and commitments of 12th grade students are more strongly oriented around a Jewish center of gravity, expressed in terms of peoplehood more than religion or spirituality. To a small extent, 12th grade students seem more parochial than do their younger day school peers. They certainly seem both more comfortable identifying with other Jews and more confident talking about Jewish matters.

How might we account for these differences? The four-year age gap may be the most important explanatory factor. Students have taken more courses and had many more

experiences in the company of other Jews by the time they reach the end of their high school careers. They have matured, and these developmental advances, coupled with learning experiences, may explain the discrepancies. It may account, in particular, for the crystallization of their views of Israel, whether positive or critical.

But there is also another possibility that we will explore more fully below when examining variations across school denominations: The cohort of 12th graders looks different than that of the 8th graders because the older students are far more heavily weighted to Orthodoxy. Non-Orthodox students in lower and middle school drop out of day school attendance at much higher rates than their Orthodox peers. And those students who do continue in day schools through high school seem to be drawn from more engaged Jewish homes, whether Orthodox, Conservative or Reform.

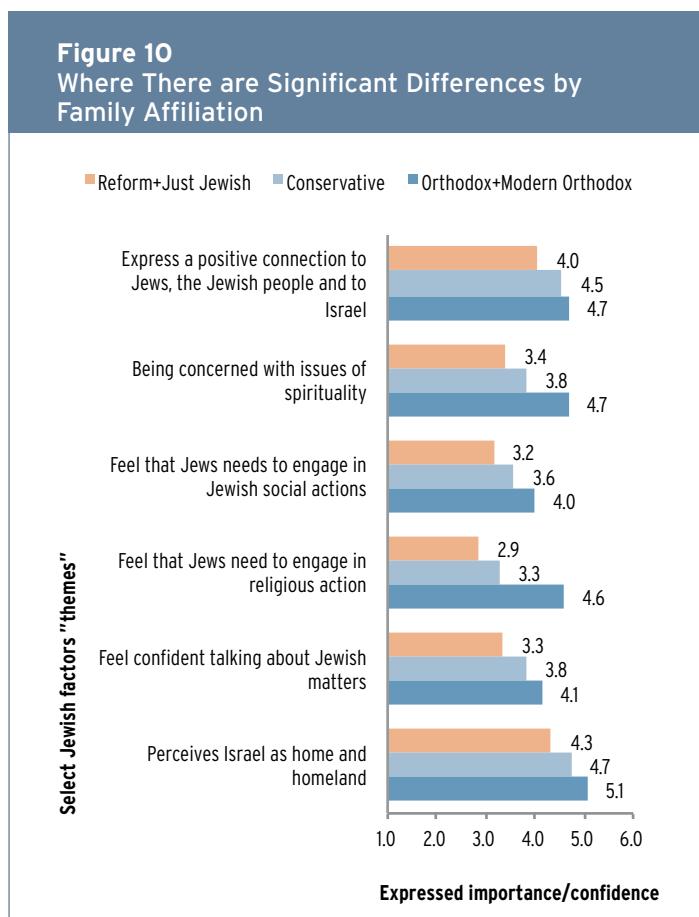
Gender

In addition to grade level, the gender of students makes a profound difference to their responses. Virtually across the board, female students are more enthusiastic than their male peers about all manner of Jewish items, whether ethnic, religious or communal. Girls are more likely to see themselves as insiders to Jewish life. At the same time, they're also more interested in universal concerns that might improve the world. And they're more concerned with making successes of themselves in life. Girls only register lower levels of confidence than boys concerning their ability to converse about current events in the U.S. or the history of Zionism and Israel.¹²

Family Affiliation

Not surprisingly, the religious affiliations of their families play a large role in shaping students' views. When it comes to their attitudes toward Jewish concerns, the students follow the expected gradient. Orthodox students exceed Conservative students in their engagement with religious and peoplehood matters, and the latter register significantly more positively on these items than those who identify as Reform/Just Jewish on most measures¹³ (See Figure 10).

In a few instances, there are also significant differences between those who identify as Conservative and all other students. For example, Conservative students are significantly more likely to spend time thinking about issues related to *tikkun olam* and to express greater confidence in talking about topics connected to Israel. Those who identify as Reform or Just Jewish exceed all others only in their admiration for celebrities and in their view of Israel as a problematic place.



¹² The greater enthusiasm and interest we found among girls, alongside their lower expressed self-confidence, is in line with extensive research. See, for example: Beyer, S. & Bowden, E.M. (1997). "Gender Differences in Self-perception: Convergent Evidence from Three Measures of Accuracy and Bias." *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin* 23(2): 157-172; Lundeberg, M.A., Fox, P.F. & Puncochar, J. (1994). "Highly Confident but Wrong: Gender Differences and Similarities in Confidence Judgments." *Journal of Educational Psychology* 86(1): 114-121; Stern, P.C., Dietz, T. & Kalof, L. (1993). "Value Orientations, Gender, and Environmental Concern." *Environment and Behavior* 25(3): 322-348.

¹³ Preparatory analysis found that there were not significant differences between those who identify as Modern Orthodox or as Orthodox, or between those who identify as Reform or as Just Jewish. For this reason we have created two analytic units from out of these four types of self-definition.

The most striking differences between students of different denominations emerged in relation to the question that asked respondents to situate themselves within the Jewish universe. As seen above in Figure 9, the great majority of the sample situates itself at the center of Jewish life. But when the students' responses are compared in relation to their family denomination, a different picture emerges (see Figure 11). Considerably higher percentages of Orthodox students feel that they are insiders to American Jewry, Israel and world Jewry than do other types of students; for example, 33 percent of Orthodox students identify as insiders among Jews in America. The Orthodox are followed by Conservative students, who, in turn, are followed by those who identify as Reform or Just Jewish, only 10 percent of whom identify as insiders among Jews in America.

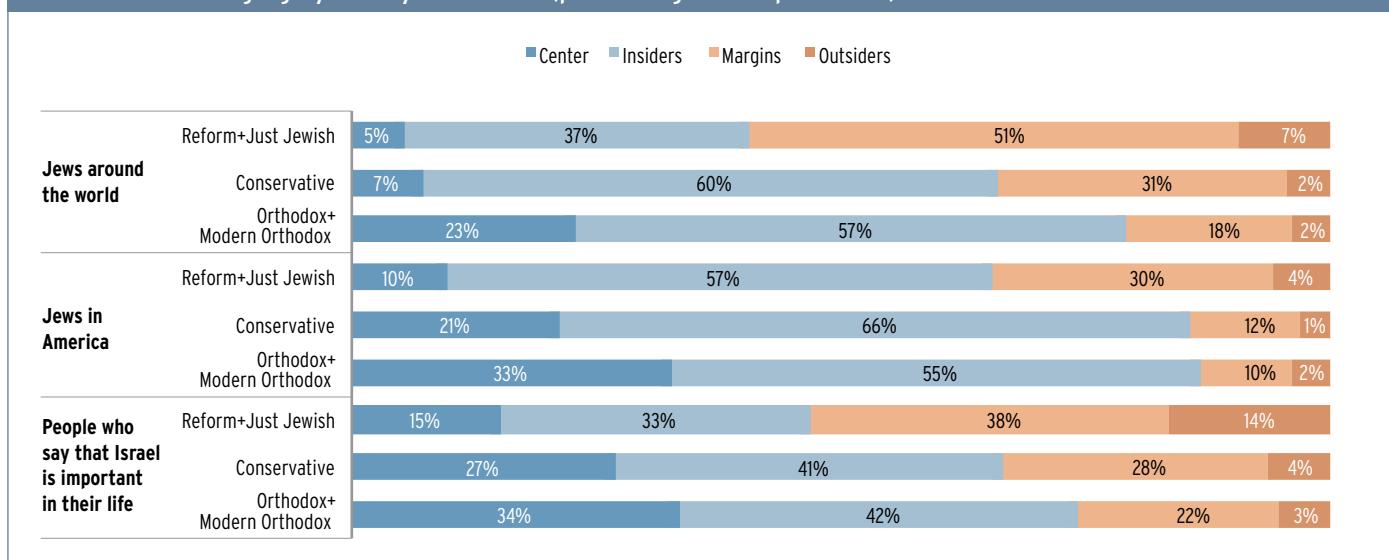
Almost 60 percent of respondents who identify as Reform or Just Jewish place themselves on the margins of world Jewry, indicating that an important student sub-population does not feel highly connected to the Jewish community. The 50 percent who feel marginal to those who care about Israel surely are part of this larger phenomenon. That almost 20 percent of students from Orthodox families see themselves as marginal in relation to the Jewish world and almost 25 percent in relation to Israel is striking too.

What are we to make of these patterns? They seem to indicate the greater centrality of Jewish concerns and values in the Orthodox community, both in homes and schools, while among Conservative Jews there seems to be a stronger interest in matters related to Israel and *tikkun olam*. They also suggest that Reform Jews and those who do not identify with a particular denomination are less inclined to connect to Israel as a positive value. Alternatively, these data may tell us less about families than about other institutions, the communities with which families affiliate and the schools their children attend.

Region

Differences between students in relation to geographic location are both subtle and ambiguous. In general, students from schools in the New York tri-state area are more positively engaged in Jewish matters than students from other parts of North America. Living in the New York area is associated with some of the same kinds of effects we have seen among older students, girls and the Orthodox. Greater Jewish engagement seems to be associated with residing in a region where Jews are more of a visible presence due to population density. But unlike the other contextual factors we have reviewed, the impact of geography is less clear-cut. Outside the New York area, the differences between students from different regions are less

Figure 11¹⁴
Sense of Belonging by Family Affiliation (percentage of respondents)



¹⁴ For purposes of brevity, data gathered as different rings in a circle (as in Figure 9) are presented here in a bar-graph.

evident or consistent than we expected, and may indicate that broad geographic regions are less of an influence than are local communities. Thus while students from the West Coast express a greater sense of distance from American Jewish life than do those from elsewhere, there is evidence of important differences between students in the Bay Area and those in Los Angeles.

School Affiliation

Still one more variable that makes a difference in the way students think and feel is the denominational affiliation of the schools they attend, as distinct from the religious affiliation of their families. Even though each school sector includes a great variety of students with a range of personal affiliations (a range that is especially wide in Conservative and Community schools), there are consistent differences between the responses of students from different kinds of schools.

Consistently, students attending Centrist and Modern Orthodox schools are more positively engaged with Jewish matters than students in all other kinds of schools. They are more connected to Israel and have a more particularistic conception of Judaism.

Students in Centrist Orthodox schools are significantly less likely than their peers in other schools to view Israel as a safe place. This finding, we suggest, reflects a distinctive cultural feature of Orthodox schools where students are repeatedly called to pray for their brothers and sisters in Israel in times of crisis or simply as a matter of course, and where students are encouraged to engage in acts of piety that will contribute to Israel's well-being. It appears that the good intentions expressed by such values result in students perceiving Israel as a dangerous and endangered place.

At the other end of the denominational spectrum, there are a small number of instances where students in day schools under Reform auspices respond in significantly different ways from those in all other schools. Their responses are almost a mirror image of those in Centrist Orthodox schools, and express a strong universalistic streak that colors their world-view in general, and also their commitment to and conception of Israel.

Students from Community or Conservative schools do not generally differ from those in all other schools. With respect to religious matters, they express themselves in line with students in Reform day schools. In matters that are concerned with

aspects of Jewish peoplehood, they more closely resemble those in Orthodox schools. It is as if they fall precisely in the middle between the poles of particularism and universalism.

These broad orientations are underscored when students were asked to situate themselves in the Jewish world. Students in Orthodox schools are significantly more likely to locate themselves at or near the center; students from Reform day schools are significantly more likely to locate themselves on the margins; and students in Community and Conservative schools fall somewhere in the middle. This general pattern appears consistently, and can be seen especially clearly with regards to the question asking students how much they identify with those for whom Israel is an important part of their lives (Figure 12, where the concentric circles are represented as a bar graph).

Distinct Student Types

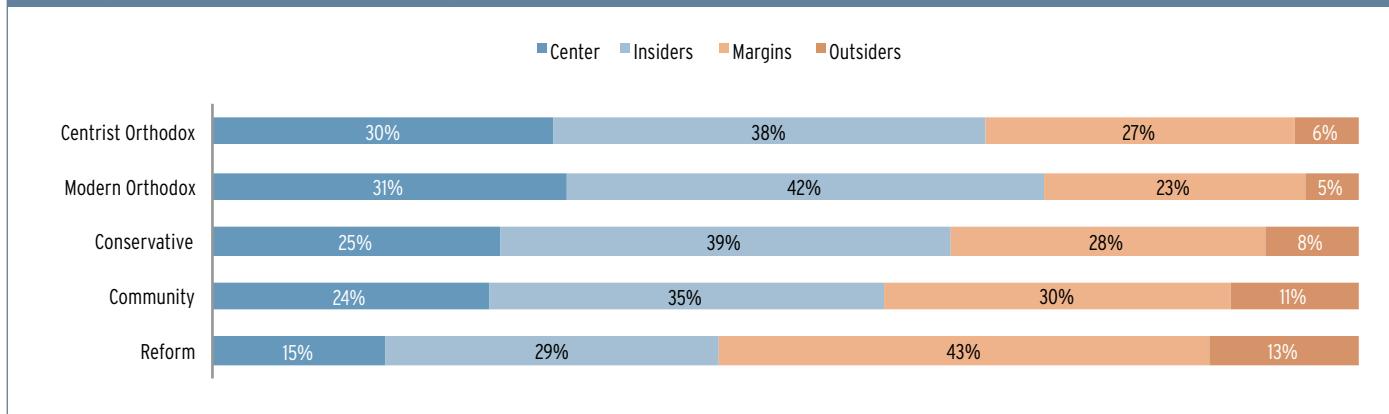
Engaged and Detached 8th Grade Students

We already have shown important differences between 8th and 12th graders. Now, employing the technique of cluster analysis (explained in the methodological appendix) to look more closely at 8th grade students, we have found two sharply different types of responses among students at this age.¹⁵ As shown in Table 2, the family profiles of those in Cluster 1 (whom we characterize as "engaged") reflect a much higher level of Jewish and communal engagement than do those of Cluster 2 (whom we characterize as "detached").

A comparison of responses by these two populations to the main survey themes (or factors) is highly instructive. When it comes to universal, American cultural issues, the two groups of students differ little. For example, they are equally confident in talking about American and general issues, and they share the same concern for personal achievement and improving the world. When it comes to generally uncontroversial Jewish matters, such as believing that Jews should engage in ethical or social actions, or viewing Israel as a "Jewish identity place,"

¹⁵ The analysis was based on student responses within six factors where attitudes about Israel were a prominent theme (The six factors used for this analysis are those identified in Appendix C as A1, B1, E2, F11, G1, G2).

Figure 12
“People who say that Israel is important in their lives”



engaged students respond more positively than do detached students, but not significantly so. However, with regard to more particularistic Jewish matters, engaged students significantly exceed detached students in the intensity of their commitments (See Figure 13).

When asked to situate themselves in the Jewish world, the two student groups exhibit some clear-cut differences (as seen in

Figure 14). Two-thirds of the detached students place themselves on the margins or as outsiders in relation both to those who see Israel as an important part of their lives and in relation to Jews around the world. These students evidently feel quite distant from Israel and the Jewish people, despite their being in day schools. This differs dramatically from the more highly affiliated engaged students where only a third think of themselves in these terms.

Table 2
Significant Differences between Engaged and Detached 8th Grade Students

	Cluster 1: Engaged (61 percent of sample)	Cluster 2: Detached (39 percent of sample)
Female	51 percent	49 percent
Youth group members	39 percent	26 percent
Attended a Jewish summer camp	86 percent	74 percent
A non-Jewish parent	4 percent	10 percent
Denomination	Orthodox 49 percent	Orthodox 26 percent
	Conservative 29 percent	Conservative 29 percent
	Reform/Just Jewish 20 percent	Reform/Just Jewish 38 percent
Two or more visits to Israel	42 percent	26 percent
Relatives in Israel	78 percent	61 percent
Either parent plays a leadership role in the community	45 percent	26 percent
Parents participate in community events	85 percent	65 percent
Attend synagogue at least once a week	51 percent	31 percent

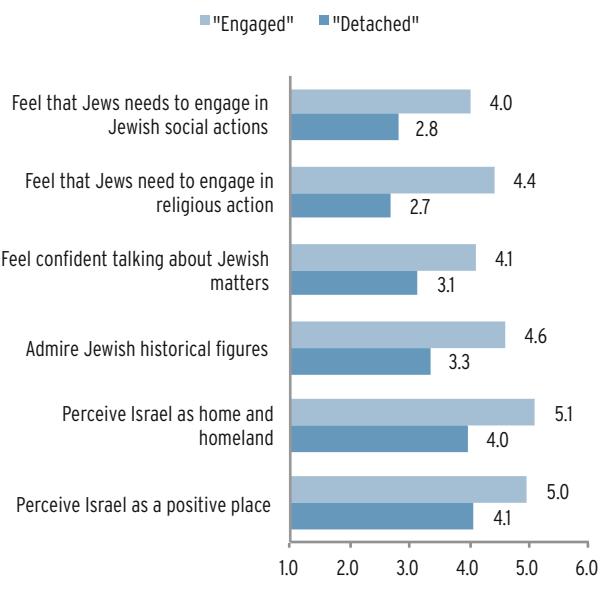
Cluster analysis makes dramatically clear something that should be self-evident about day school students, but often is ignored: They are not an unvariegated mass. Different groups of day school students hold very different views of the world, and they come from very different backgrounds. Thus, a sizable minority of day school students expresses a great deal of distance from Judaism, Israel and the Jewish people. What is perhaps even more striking is that, as seen in Figure 15, students from *each* of these groups are found in schools of *all* of the denominational sectors we have been studying, albeit in different proportions.

Three Distinct Types of 12th Grade Students

Applying the same analytical techniques to the 12th grade student sample, we found *three* clusters of students: the hyper-engaged; the engaged; and the detached. Again, these groups differ in their degree of community engagement, and in the variety of their own Jewish experiences, but in this instance they differ less dramatically in their families' denominational affiliation. The differences and similarities between the responses of these three groups are as striking as were those for the 8th grade students, not only in regard to Israel but also in their broader outlook as Jews:

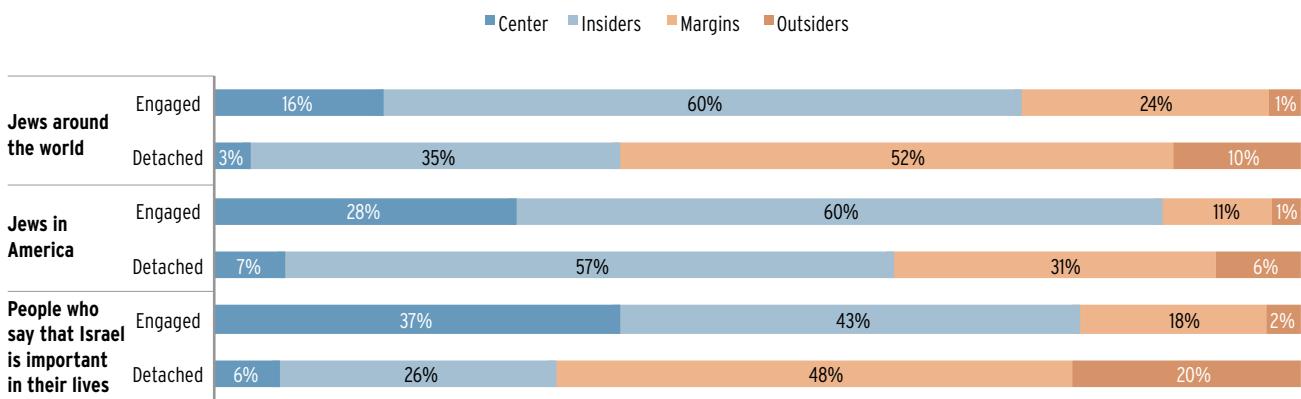
- The hyper-engaged, just over 30 percent of the sample, seems to consist of student-leaders: They exhibit the attitudes and commitments of activists, and seem passionate

Figure 13
Significant Differences in the Outlook of 8th Grade Students



about all manner of issues, with Jewish matters prominent among them. Their responses are higher than anything we have found when posing variations on these questions over the years. For example, more than 90 percent of hyper-engaged students see themselves in the center two circles when thinking about Jews in America and around the world; and more than 85 percent do so in relation

Figure 14
How Engaged and Detached 8th Grade Students Classify Their Sense of Belonging



to those for whom Israel is important. This constitutes not just an extraordinarily high level of identification; it expresses a deep involvement and activism.

- Those we characterize as engaged – just under 50 percent of the sample – seem to represent an average Jewish high school student: one who is relatively motivated, generally interested in Jewish matters and quite well connected to Israel.
- The detached – 20 percent of the sample – are turned off mainly to religion, but not to all aspects of Jewishness. In statistical terms, the responses of these students to all of the Jewish religious or spiritual factors in the survey are significantly lower than those of hyper-engaged or engaged students. Furthermore, 60 percent of these students place themselves in the outer two circles in relation to Jews around the world and more than 70 percent in relation to those for whom Israel is important. These detached students are disinterested in much of the Jewish content to which they are exposed in school. And yet, they are not completely alienated: Almost 65 percent of them place themselves in the center two circles when thinking about their connection to Jews in America.

To repeat a point we have already advanced: This analysis highlights just how different are the profiles and orientations of subpopulations of day school students, even among those who remain in the system at 12th grade. Students from each of these groups are found in day schools of all stripes (as shown in Figure 16), although it is interesting to note that in the Conservative and Community schools there are more “detached” but also more “hyper-engaged” students compared to Centrist and Modern Orthodox schools.

This, surely, is a challenge for educators, but it also may be seen as an opportunity. There are highly engaged, emergent Jewish leaders in all day schools, and there are also notable numbers of detached or under-engaged students.

Comparing Teachers With Students

Comparing the perceptions of students and teacher yields some arresting differences. Of special note are the ways the two groups understand the actual influence of institutions outside

Figure 15
Percentages of Engaged and Detached
8th Grade Students Enrolled in Different
Denominational Sectors

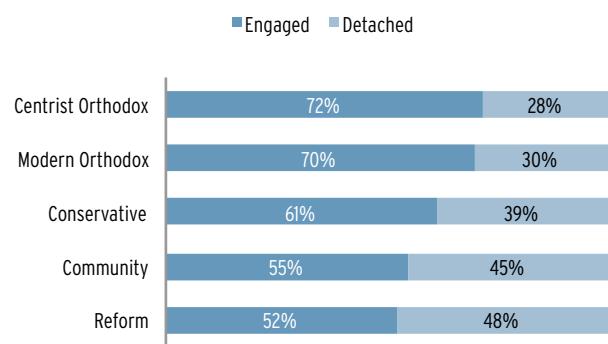
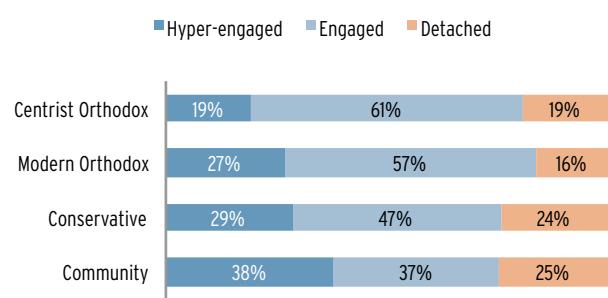


Figure 16
Percentages of 12th Graders in Each of Three
Clusters (By Denominational Sector)



the school and also the impact of the school itself upon the relationship of students with Israel. Consistently, teachers attributed greater influence to institutions outside school, such as families, synagogues and summer camps, than did the students themselves. It seems that the students resisted the notion that their ideas and feelings could be influenced so readily by others.

In large part, students and teachers concurred on what was likely to be of greatest influence. They agreed that the students' general experiences in school and in classes were among the forces most likely to influence students' *knowledge*, and that students' families and general experiences in school were most likely to shape students' *feelings*.

Teachers attributed greater influence to camps and youth groups than did students. We assume that they were thinking about the *potential* impact of these experiences, while the

students assessed their impact in terms of whether they had actually been affected by them. By contrast, students attributed greater influence to their families than did the teachers.

Students and teachers agreed that synagogues and the media had the least influence on students' knowledge and feelings. Strikingly, the teachers indicated that critical images of Israel in the media did not hamper their work in Israel education.

We also asked both students and teachers to identify to what extent Israel or things connected to Israel show up in the school. Teachers and students were in substantial agreement about the relative order of items, concurring that Israel showed up most often in Hebrew classes, Jewish studies classes and school assemblies. However, they differed over the ranking of these three experiences.

The differences between students and teachers are subtle but may be significant:

- While teachers thought that Israel was most likely to show up in Hebrew classes, students did not: Students ranked Hebrew behind both Jewish studies and school assemblies. As we saw in the teacher survey data, Hebrew teachers have a different sense of how much students learn about Israel in Hebrew lessons. For many students, however, it seems learning Hebrew is widely perceived as more of a technical exercise in language acquisition than an experience rooted in Israel education.
- Although teachers and students both identified general studies classes among the least likely places where Israel would show up in school, teachers thought it less likely than did the students. This is the only instance where students assigned an item a higher score than did the teachers, and suggests that educators may be underestimating the extent to which the goals of Israel education might be advanced within the framework of general studies classes.

Key Findings about What Students Take Away from Their School Experiences:

- Day school students generally share a concern for Israel and an interest in it, although they tend to conceive of Israel as an abstract and essentially symbolic entity; their perceptions are largely disconnected from contemporary Israeli life.
- When it comes to Israel and other aspects of Jewish life, students are variegated. Hyper-engaged, engaged and detached students think about Israel and the Jewish world very differently.
- There are observable differences between students' attitudes that correlate to their age, gender, personal denomination, school denomination and to a lesser extent location.
- Students' connection to Israel seems to be anchored in a connection to the Jewish people.



"Focal point" or
"missed opportunity?"
Community day school
students pray at a
discrete distance from
the Kotel plaza

What Determines How Students Think and Feel About Israel?

Having explored some of the important differences between students' thoughts and feelings about Israel, we turn to the ultimate questions of our research: What are the forces and institutions that have shaped students' thoughts and feelings? How much influence can be attributed to the families from which students come? What has been the particular impact of schools? And what identifiable school activities and acts have shaped student outcomes?

Powerful and Particular Family Effects

Applying the technique of regression analysis to our data so as to explore the underlying relationships between variables in the students' background and the outcomes identified, we have found a strong connection between students' families and what students themselves think and feel. This, of course, is completely in-line with decades of social science research into the relative influence of family life on the development of Jewish identity. In our case, the family's denominational allegiance is especially notable as a predictor of students' attitudes, especially when children from Orthodox families are compared with students from families that identify as Reform or Just Jewish.

Our analysis reveals particular aspects of family life that are predictors of the students' perceptions. For example, if parents participate in Jewish community events, if they donate money to Israel and if they play a leadership role in a synagogue or other Jewish organization, these behaviors predict more positive attitudes to Israel, as well as a greater emotional connection with Israel, among their children. This is the case even when parents' communal participation and leadership are not limited to organizations and events concerned with the Jewish state. Simply put, the students' emotional bonds to Israel seem strongly connected to having seen their parents participate and play leadership roles in the Jewish community, whether or not their parents' participation and leadership is directly concerned with Israel.

This finding, we speculate, is in line with a phenomenon we observed in relation to the structure of the students' commitments: Students' connection to Israel is strongly associated with (even anchored in) a connection to the Jewish people in general. Here too parental activity on behalf of the Jewish people is associated with their children developing positive commitments to Israel. By modeling engagement with the broader Jewish community, the most proximate manifestation of the Jewish people, parents sow the seeds of a positive relationship to Israel too.

Strikingly, regression analysis reveals also that the "family effect" is equivalent to, and actually more powerful than, the effects predicted by students having visited Israel. Both variables are connected to strong positive emotional commitments to Israel, but it seems that such commitments are more prominently connected to family characteristics than they are to spending time in the country. We can say that family provides the bedrock on which a commitment to Israel is formed.

The Discernable Impact of Communities

The effects of where students live are complex, and not completely uniform: For example, West Coast students are more likely to see Israel in critical terms, but at the same time they do not have a less positive image of Israel than do students in others areas. Students from New York City are most likely to have a positive image of Israel, but they are also more likely to have a critical image of it. Evidently, as these examples show, tending to think of Israel in positive terms – for example, as the Jewish home or homeland – does not contradict seeing it in less than flattering terms – for example, as a place where Arabs are treated unfairly, or as a place dominated by Orthodox Jews.

Community and family background intersect in interesting ways. While, generally, under-engaged students are much less emotionally concerned with Israel than engaged students (an outstanding example of the family effect), this effect seems

to be mitigated among those who live in New York and East Coast communities, particularly in relation to the value they place on their connection to the Jewish people. Being raised in communities with dense Jewish populations seems to ameliorate the consequences of being raised in a less engaged Jewish family.

How Schools Make a Difference

Because of the prominence of the family effect, it is quite difficult to predict the relationships between school characteristics and the outcomes of Israel education. This does not mean schools have no impact on how their students think and feel about Israel, but rather that the impact is most visible in outcomes not touched by the family.

There are a number of instances where the particular effects of schools on student attitudes are clear-cut. For example, whatever the students' background (whether they are identified as engaged or under-engaged), the school's denomination is correlated with particular kinds of outcomes. Students in non-Orthodox day schools express greater confidence in what they know about Israel and are more interested in its history. Orthodox schools, meanwhile, seem to nurture a generally more positive emotional orientation to all aspects of Jewish life, including to Israel, among students of all backgrounds. At the same time, and less expected, the more religiously Orthodox the school, the more likely are students to perceive Israel as vulnerable or endangered. This phenomenon is evident among Orthodox day school students across age-levels, gender and region. Based upon qualitative data we have collected, we hypothesize that this image of Israel as being under threat results from messages that schools are delivering by dwelling on the challenges that Israel faces (whether terrorist attacks, drought or the Iranian threat) and what is portrayed as the daily need to pray for "our brethren" there. In this instance, good intentions do not seem to have their fully desired effect. A similar dynamic may be at work in Community day schools and schools under Reform auspices. We have found that students in those schools, especially ones that organize trips to Israel, express critical views of Israel at least before they go on such programs. It may be that in trying to offer students a more nuanced picture of Israel, their

teachers are in fact communicating developmentally inappropriate messages about how Israel treats its Arab and religious minorities. Again, we doubt that the outcomes exhibited are what those schools desire.

Some actions taken by schools are associated with identifiable differences between students. In our inventory-survey of school-leaders, we asked them to indicate whether or not their school engaged in special Israel-related activities during the course of the conflict between Israel and the Palestinians in Gaza that occurred shortly before we fielded our survey. These activities included: holding a special assembly; participating in a community gathering; inserting special articles in their newsletter and running a special program. We found significantly more critical attitudes (such as thinking of Israel as a poor country or as one that discriminates against different sectors of Israel society) among students in schools that reported not engaging in any special efforts at that time compared with those schools that programmed even a single special activity. We found a similar pattern in terms of critical images of Israel when comparing schools that employ an individual to coordinate Israel education and those that do not. In both of these respects, schools' actions seem to have an important remedial effect on students, reducing their inclination to see Israel in a critical light.

Where Schools Make the Most Difference

While it does not appear that schools can elicit the kinds of positive emotional commitments that derive from students' homes, schools play a different kind of role in students' lives.

Our research provides evidence that schools can have a particularly influential impact on the 20-40 percent of students we identified as detached and who are less likely to have acquired a commitment to Israel at home. Thus, when schools employ an educator specifically responsible for coordinating Israel education (and who presumably contributes to the intensification and coherence of the school's program), under-engaged students are more affected than their engaged peers, especially when it comes to their emotional attachments and positive interest in Israel. Even more dramatically, when schools draw attention to current events in Israel through programs and activities (in fact, as long as they engage in any such activities

rather than refrain from them altogether), they have a positive effect on students from less engaged family backgrounds.

This confirms that schools play two important roles: first, a remedial role when it comes to students' attitudes and commitments to Israel. They can undo or temper negative views of Israel among all of their students. Additionally, although they do not seem to alter the general orientation or level of interest among students who come from homes that have a

strong commitment to Israel, they do foster positive attitudes towards Israel among a substantial minority of students who are less likely to acquire such attitudes at home and reinforce those from more engaged homes. If the family establishes the ground for commitments, schools fertilize the soil in which those commitments can flourish. And when families do not nurture those commitments, schools can step forward to play a foundational role in their students' lives.

Key Findings about What Shapes the Outlook of Students:

- It is a well-established fact that schools alone do not shape the outlook of students. Other variables tend to be as important, if not even more important. And none is more determinative than the family. The denominational identification of the family is determinative of levels of Jewish engagement in general, and specifically of Israel engagement.
- Whether parents model engagement with Jewish communal life, even when not necessarily with support for Israel, students are more likely to feel strongly engaged too.
- Community is also an important determinant. If students live in a community with a dense Jewish population, they are more likely to feel at the center of Jewish life.
- Schools can and do have an impact. This is especially the case when they model concern for Israel by running special programs to mark important moments in contemporary Israeli life.
- The students most likely to be influenced by schools are those who come from less engaged families. Schools can do a good deal to heighten the emotional connections such students feel toward Israel and to reinforce the engagement of students from more engaged Jewish homes.

כִּנְתָּן סִינְגָּרִין



"Israel in the corner"-
Commonplace
images in day school
classroom: faces,
places and words

Key Findings and Their Policy Implications

We now present in summary form some of the major findings of our research project and their implications. Though not exhaustive, this listing is designed to suggest potential policy directions that flow from our research.

Concerning Schools

The Perilously Uneven Field of Israel Education

Findings: There are great variations from school to school in the educational sophistication with which Israel is taught, in how much attention is devoted to Israel, and in how well integrated Israel is in the course of study and non-curricular programming. We doubt there is such extreme variation in the disciplines of general studies.

Much of this variation stems, we suspect, from the range of ideological positions espoused by schools. Quite a few day schools prioritize Israel in their mission statements and act accordingly. Others, even among the sample of schools that were willing to participate in the study, are less committed to programming about Israel; a significant minority (almost a quarter of our sample) do not reference Israel in their mission statements. Parent expectations play a role; but the commitment of lay and professional leadership can and does make a great difference.

Recommendations: A national effort to help schools clarify their goals with respect to Israel education might in turn help push them toward strengthening their programs. This was the premise behind the BASIS initiative in Bay Area day schools between 2008 and 2012.¹⁶ Creating a positive dynamic of this sort was difficult work to accomplish, especially if schools were reluctant participants, but a focused effort to establish goals and translate these goals into practice did move the dial in a number of the participating institutions.

¹⁶ See a case study of this initiative and its implications at http://avichai.org/knowledge_base/engineering-enduring-change-basis-case-study-2012.

A Field Without Agreed Standards or Benchmarks

Findings: Most, but not all, schools we visited lack curricular coherence when it comes to educating about Israel. Schools generally lack a school-wide plan for when and how different aspects of Israel will be taught. They rely heavily on a few teachers who have a zeal for the subject. And they do not coordinate even those teachers to insure that lessons are not duplicated from year to year.

Recommendations: Where much effort has gone into a Standards and Benchmarks project on Tanakh, and considerable investment has been made in coherent Hebrew language curricula, such as TaL AM and NETA, and many schools are now adapting material such as Gemara Berura as a tool for systematic Talmud study, no similar cohesive curriculum exists for Israel education. Nor are there field-wide curricular expectations. Here is a potential investment for funders. The challenge is not to generate entirely new materials, but to bring together material that is scattered and not easily accessible to teachers and to ground such educational material within a clear and consistent set of curricular expectations.

Israel As More Than Glue

Findings: This report has argued that Israel serves as a “glue” binding together disparate school populations. It serves as a consensus point in many day schools, making day schools – we have suggested – somewhat anomalous institutions in the Jewish communal landscape. As such, Israel serves the purposes of day schools and their families, and is not only an altruistic interest. Small numbers of exceptional schools strive to go beyond using Israel as a commonality to bind the school community together; they nurture in their students a sense of responsibility to strengthen their own bonds with real Israelis and to see themselves as future contributors to the life of the Jewish people in the diaspora and in Israel.

Recommendations: Given the strong focus on Israel as a bonding element within the school community, many

schools worry that something quite valuable may be lost if Israel education involves inviting more diverse perspectives. But in fact, beyond the affective there are other aspects of Israel that appeal to parents. For example, many parents thrill at the thought that their children will be able to converse in Hebrew and find their way around Israel. Hebrew language programs might capitalize on these parental aspirations. At the high school level, parents express a strong desire that their children acquire familiarity with Israel's recent history and insight into the nature of contemporary Israeli society. This interest constitutes an educational opportunity, and starting point from which to develop a coherent curricular approach that might strengthen the role of Israel as a glue, rather than weaken its binding powers.

Making the Most of School Trips to Israel

Findings: In recent years, most school communities have accepted that students should have an opportunity to participate in a school trip to Israel. And yet, these trips tend to serve as the reward at the end of the school year or at the end of a day school career. Generally, they are not well utilized as educational opportunities.

Recommendations: All schools could benefit from scheduling trips before the final semester of students' final year in school, even if it might mean missing out on *Yom Ha'atzmaut* in Israel. While we expect that most middle schools will balk at scheduling a trip in 6th grade – before the onset of the *bar/bat mitzvah* season – as one school does, it will be worthwhile to explore more educative options than currently prevail. In curricular terms, there is a great need to connect the content of trips with what students previously learned in school and what they will learn upon their return. A sustained initiative that includes far more sophisticated coordination with Israeli trip providers could go a long way toward addressing these issues.

The Power of the Personal – In Schools

Findings: Repeatedly we learned from students and from school administrators how meaningful for students are the relationships they develop with young Israelis – *shinshinim* and *b'not sherut* – as well as with teacher-*shlichim*. We saw also in the teacher survey how teachers generally feel out of their depth when it comes to teaching about contemporary Israel.

Bringing more young Israelis into schools may help both capitalize on an opportunity and solve a problem suggested by different strands of our study.

Recommendations: No one can deny that schools pay a price when they utilize Israeli emissaries: It costs schools money to bring and support them, and inevitably these visitors must go through a process of training. Some *shlichim* only become effective after having spent a full year in the U.S. and learned how things are done here. From what we have seen and heard, these investments are worth the price. The encounter with Israeli near-peers adds a dimension greatly valued by students. *Shlichim* give voice and life to an Israel that may seem distant to school-age children, especially those who have not gone on family trips. Moreover, the enthusiasm of young people who teach Israeli popular culture to American students is infectious and leaves an impression.

Concerning Teachers

Understanding and Utilizing the Existence of Different Teacher Populations

Findings: Two distinct populations of teachers engage in Israel education in day schools. Those we characterized as *Exemplars* appear currently to overshadow the *Explorers*: There are more of them; they're more experienced; and they are probably more vocal. *Exemplars* make an important contribution to the vitality of Israel education in schools, especially in the Hebrew language classroom where many seem to be located. But *Explorers* make a vitally important contribution to the thoughtful engagement of students.

Recommendations: Although it is delicate work, schools should explore how to encourage interaction and collaboration between these two distinct populations. The easier path is to encourage each group to play to its own strengths, but that will result in an uneven set of experiences for students. In school cultures that support peer-to-peer mentoring, it will be worth embracing the challenges involved in supporting collaboration between those who approach Israel education with different expectations and goals. It might result both in a broadening of the goals of Israel education, and broader effectiveness in achieving those goals.

Teachers Tend to Teach Through the Prism of Their Own Experiences

Findings: Teaching about Israel is intensely personal. Many teachers, especially those we identified as *Exemplars*, see their task as teaching through their own example and serving as role models to their students. What they teach often draws on their experiences in Israel. Their teaching expresses important aspects of how they think of themselves as Jews.

The intensely personal quality of this work poses a challenge and also creates an opportunity. On the one hand, this kind of personal approach to Israel may result in miscommunication between students and teachers. Teachers might think they're inspiring and informing their students because they're teaching about something that's personally important to them. They might in fact be encouraging their students to tune out. On the other hand, the personal importance of the topic to teachers means that many come to the classroom fired by passion and eager to inspire their students. Such passion can be the starting point for great teaching.

Recommendations: A first task of professional development should be to engage with these challenges and opportunities. Professional development should push teachers to confront differences between the ways in which they and their students think and feel about Israel. Reflection on such matters can be a valuable stimulus to a pedagogy that starts much closer to where the students are located emotionally and cognitively. Teachers also might become more self-aware of how they use a mode of teaching about Israel that is unreflective, while in other classes they are more dispassionate and more focused on inquiry.

Commonalities Across Denominations

Findings: One of the most surprising findings of our analysis of the teacher survey data was how evenly distributed *Exemplars* and *Explorers* are across the different day school networks. Between two-thirds and three-quarters of the teachers in all of the sectors we studied were identified as *Exemplars*. Although they differ by denomination, these teachers share common goals. Likewise, we also found that teachers' perceptions about the forces arrayed against them are surprisingly constant across denominational sectors. Regardless of their school's affiliation, teachers in this field share common frustrations.

Recommendations: The commonalities we have identified suggest that there is great potential for professional development across denominational lines. Teachers might start their work from dissimilar ideological starting points, but it seems their goals and their challenges are still quite similar. It therefore is not necessary to create separate training programs for teachers from different sectors. If schools join together when they access resources for teacher learning, they can achieve important economies of scale and at the same time extend the possibilities for cross-institutional collaboration. It also may be fitting that Israel – the greatest project of the entire Jewish people in recent centuries – serves as a bridge for schools that otherwise may not cooperate.

Reaching Beyond the Affective

Findings: The great majority of teachers prioritize affective outcomes above all others, no matter whether they are *Exemplars* or *Explorers*.

Recommendations: Of course, nurturing positive attitudes towards Israel is important, but – we suggest – schools should cultivate other goals, especially those focused more on cognitive outcomes. In fact, as institutions for formal education, schools are better suited to developing their students' cognitive abilities. This certainly is borne out by our analysis of what students derive from schools. In most day schools, Jewish studies and Jewish education are geared towards the cultivation of commitments and beliefs. In these terms, Jewish education is an inherently counter-cultural activity. The general studies classroom, by contrast, is mainly oriented to different values, to critical thinking and to asking tough questions. These are facts of day school life that are hard to change. In these circumstances, any effort to develop outcomes for Israel education that go beyond the affective should begin by examining how Israel can be taught more fully through opportunities within the general studies curriculum. Our site visits revealed small numbers of often isolated teachers engaged in this work in science, history and literature departments, and in the general studies sections of elementary schools. An initiative to connect high functioning educators in these fields will yield rich results for schools, and can build on already existing instances of good educational practice.

Concerning Students

Know Who Your Students Really Are

Findings: The circumstances of family background and other personal traits translate into differences in the way students relate to Israel (and also to the Jewish religion). Our analysis has found two quite distinct student types among 8th graders and three distinct types among 12th graders. These differences translate, in turn, into starkly contrasting responses among students to what schools provide. This is true within schools of every affiliation.

Recommendations: Schools must factor in these differences if they aspire to reach all their students – and they must recognize that one size does not fit all. When schools invest in faculty to coordinate Israel education, and when they provide experiences that connect with current events in Israel, they can make a discernible difference to the attitudes of the large minority of their students who come from less engaged Jewish homes.

Foundations and central agencies might play a role in stimulating pedagogic reflection on ways to address the various student types in order to maximize the impact of a day school education upon *all* students, and not only in the area of Israel education. For starters, foundations might provide schools with the means to map their student bodies, so they can develop a more refined understanding of the challenges they confront – i.e. what are the percentages of their students who fall into each of the clusters we have identified? And which students are more likely to be indifferent to the school’s messages?

Parent Involvement in the Community

Makes a Difference

Findings: Parent role-modeling makes a great difference in shaping the extent and quality of children’s commitment to Jewish life. This truism also holds for engagement with Israel. The things students see their parents actually *do* make an impression. Those students who see their parents participate in Jewish community activities, whether or not these activities are related to Israel, are far more likely to feel strongly connected to Israel.

Recommendations: The strong influence of parent role-modeling does not imply that schools cannot make a difference in their students’ relationship to Israel: On the contrary, schools can strengthen Israel education by creating opportunities to involve parents in activities related to Israel or the Jewish community. We do not mean that schools must create family education events. The point is that schools should provide parents with occasions for modeling involvement in Jewish communal life, for example through volunteer work in or associated with the school.

The Lesson of Unintended Consequences

Findings: The messages schools deliver implicitly or explicitly about Israel are taken to heart by students. Orthodox students, especially in the Centrist Orthodox sector, far more than other students, tend to see Israel as vulnerable. Based upon qualitative data we have collected, we hypothesize that this results from the messages their schools are delivering by dwelling on terrorist attacks and the need to pray for Israeli victims. A similar dynamic may be at work in Community day schools and schools under Reform auspices. We have found that students in those schools, especially ones that organize trips to Israel, express critical views of Israel at least before they go on such programs. It may be that in trying to offer students a more nuanced picture of Israel, their teachers are in fact communicating developmentally inappropriate messages about how Israel treats its Arab and Jewish religious minorities.

Recommendations: Educators need to reflect on the unintended consequences of well-intentioned emphases. The point is not to censor or to keep students ignorant, but to provide them with a nuanced and age-appropriate understanding of Israel and the challenges it faces.

To Israel Through the Jewish People

Findings: Israel education is not a world unto itself. Students view Israel through the prism of their self-understanding and their relationship to the Jewish people. The more Israel is taught in isolation, the less likely it is to resonate. And conversely, the more it is taught as part of a much larger set of Jewish aspirations and far larger Jewish enterprise, the greater the likelihood students will relate positively to Israel.

Recommendations: Schools should explore how to ground Israel education in a broader investment in Jewish peoplehood education, and in developing ties with Jews around the world. Time spent learning about Jews in other communities and connecting with them will not ultimately be at the expense of the goals of Israel education, which in part are designed to build connections with and a sense of responsibility for Jews wherever they are found. Our findings suggest that such study will catalyze the growth of connections with Israel, provided, as we suggest below, neither the Jewish people nor Israel is treated as an abstract or mythical concept.

Foundations and central agencies can lead this curricular reorientation through grants aimed at stimulating curriculum development and programs that connect North American day school students with Jewish peers from around the world and across America. These bodies can prompt schools to ground what they teach about Israel in the value of *Klal Yisrael*.

Get Real about Israel

Findings: Critical thinking about Israel, we found, is not incompatible with positive engagement with Israel. In schools that offer different, more critical perspectives on the history and development of modern Israel, especially on the upper school level, students scored no lower in their sense of

connection to Israel. Students can be aware of the challenges facing the Jewish State and still be committed to Israel's well-being and importance in their own lives. And yet, overall, we have found that students express a lack of confidence in their grasp of contemporary Israel and the challenges it faces, aside from the conflict with Arabs. Most students are simply not aware of the complexities of Israeli day-to-day life. From our survey data, we cannot know definitively the source of this lack of confidence, but we may speculate that it is based on what students absorb in their schools. Schools tend to pay a good deal of attention to the Holocaust and Israeli-Arab conflict, and lavish far less attention on contemporary Israeli life.

Recommendations: We encourage schools to introduce more contemporary foci into the Israel education they offer, something that generally seems to be lacking at this time. Of course, it is difficult to implement such a reorientation. It would require schools to hire personnel who have the kinds of insiders' knowledge to teach about contemporary Israel. But beyond that, it would require an orientation to Israel that is not only about a symbolic and religious center but an actual country with its own set of challenges and strengths. Such a rethinking may be constrained by the reality that neither parents nor educators necessarily see the purpose of Israel education as being about Israel, so much as it is about strengthening American Jewish life.

Appendix A

Methodological Statement

This project was conceived as a multi-pronged effort to learn about Israel education in Jewish day schools by studying schools, teachers and students. Research methods included the use of both quantitative and qualitative data. Here we report on the decisions made in designing our research. We also provide more detail than is available in the body of the report about the methodologies we employed.

Constructing the Research Sample

We built a research sample for this study with the goal of teasing apart the role played by a variety of background variables that may shape the relationship of students to Israel and Jewish life. We expected that factors such as family, community and regional culture interact with the practices of schools to shape the emergent Jewish identities of these young people.

Concerned ultimately with the influence of day schools on young adult Jews, we endeavored to recruit a sufficiently varied sample of schools. We wanted to study a diverse student population both in terms of independent variables, such as family Jewish engagement and density of Jewish community, and also in terms of dependent variables, that is, the different forms and intensity of Israel education which students encounter.

In building the sample of schools, we took as our starting point the breakdown by affiliation and region of the roughly 800 schools categorized by Marvin Schick in his most recent *A Census of Jewish Day Schools in the United States, 2008-2009*.¹⁷ In addition, we also included Canadian day schools among our target group, selected from what is estimated to be a further 60 schools. We did not attempt to gain access to Haredi or Hasidic schools since the schools in this sector do not engage in the kinds of educational practices conventionally recognized

as Israel education.¹⁸ The teachers and students who participated in our survey therefore represent those sectors of the day school spectrum that run from the Centrist Orthodox to Reform. They come from sectors in which 38 percent of day school students are enrolled (the remainder are enrolled in Hasidic and Haredi schools).

We approached the task of identifying schools for inclusion in the study first by surveying administrators at the roughly 286 schools not affiliated with Haredi sectors. Our survey of administrators was designed to provide an inventory of school characteristics: (i) in relation to Israel education, for example, whether schools run an Israel trip and whether they schedule courses that specifically teach about Israel; (ii) in terms of general organizational characteristics such as the number of students enrolled and the grade levels that schools serve; and (iii) in relation to community characteristics such as how many other (competing) day schools there are in their locales.

The inventory yielded responses from 154 schools from among which we identified a purposive sample of 100 schools to participate in the study. We employed a stratified purposive sampling strategy.¹⁹ Using this approach, we divided schools into “strata” – in relation to religious denomination, something that we expected to be a key differentiating feature of schools. Then we selected a variety of “cases” within each stratum to represent the additional relevant variables (grade level, geographic location and size) in which we were most interested. We developed a list of ranked invitees within each stratum that best matched our intention to construct a diverse sample. If a

¹⁷ http://avichai.org/knowledge_base/a-census-of-jewish-day-schools-in-the-united-states-2008-09-2009/

¹⁸ We do note, however, that the relationship of students in Haredi and Hasidic schools to Israel is often quite strong, and that these groups travel to Israel at high rates. Studying what these schools do, how they treat Israel and how they seem to inspire their students with a sense of connection to Israel would be a valuable contribution to our understanding of how different groups nurture connections to Israel. Such a project would be invaluable, though it is hard to imagine the more insular sectors of the yeshiva world cooperating with such a study.

¹⁹ Teddlie, C. & Yu, F. (2007). “Mixed Methods Sampling: A Typology of Examples.” *Journal of Mixed Methods* 1(1): 77-100.

more highly desired school declined to participate, we moved down our list, endeavoring to preserve a balance of variables that reflected the broader composition of the day school sector. In all, we recruited 95 schools.

The target population for our student survey was young people in 8th and 12th grades. These are the capstone years of middle and high school. We expected that a survey of students in these grades would therefore reveal most about the quality and impact of the day school experience.

When recruiting schools we had to turn away about a half-dozen institutions once we discovered that there were too few students in the relevant grades to enable a school-level analysis at these institutions; in this we set a minimum threshold of 15 students in a grade. We also turned away schools if we found that the relevant cohort of students had returned from an Israel experience within the previous three months. We were concerned that a recent class trip to Israel would result in a halo effect of especially warm feelings toward Israel. In most such instances, we turned schools away altogether. In a very small number of other instances, once we started to become concerned about limiting the sample size too greatly, we surveyed 7th and 11th grade students who had not yet gone on a recent class trip to Israel. Subsequently, because we found significant differences between the responses of students in 7th and 11th grade compared with our target sample of 8th and 12th grade, we excluded the younger students from our quantitative analysis.

In sum, our teachers and student samples do not purport to be representative. Haredi and Hasidic schools, the largest sectors of students, were off limits to us. Even gaining entre

to Centrist Orthodox schools proved a challenge. Conversely, our response rate from Community day schools' students and teachers exceeded that of other schools, and so respondents in that sector are over-represented. This report provides ample data comparing how teachers and students in different types of schools varied in their responses.

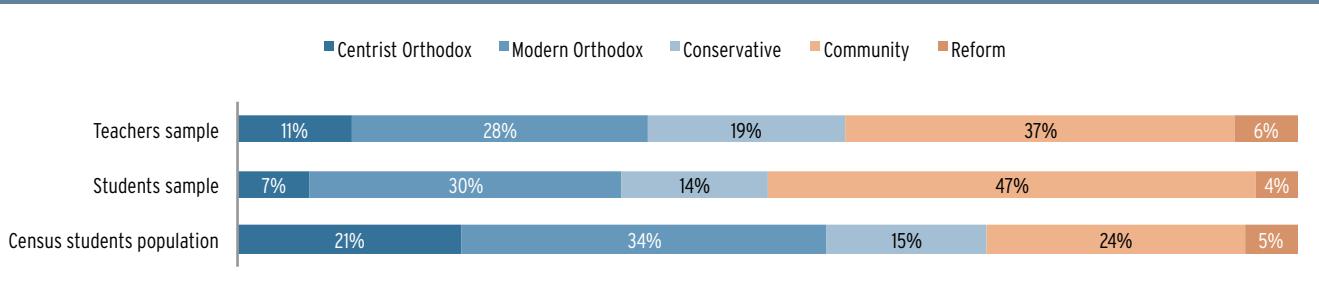
The precise mix of teachers and students in terms of where they are currently located can be seen in Figure 17. The overall population figure is based on Marvin Schick's most recent census of day school students (minus the Haredi and Hasidic populations).²⁰

The Surveys

Participating schools were asked to field an online survey to all students in the relevant grades during the course of school-time. By way of incentive, schools were offered an Amazon gift voucher worth the equivalent of \$10 for each completed student survey. The upshot of our efforts netted 4030 middle and upper school students, comprising 2340 8th graders, 1135 12th graders, 195 7th graders and 361 11th graders. In a small number of instances, we became aware that not all students in the relevant grades were surveyed. Further inquiry revealed that these students had not been selected out by their schools, but had simply not been included because of logistical constraints. In total, just over 80 percent of students who took the survey were included in the analysis. We excluded those who

²⁰ There is further information in Appendix C about the make-up of the student sample in terms of: gender; grade level; regional location; and denominational affiliation.

Figure 17
A Comparison of Our Teacher and Student Samples with the Entire Universe of Day Schools



took fewer than ten minutes to complete the survey, since this did not indicate a serious enough investment of effort in a task that took on average 36 minutes to complete.

Schools were also asked to distribute a different survey to teachers whose responsibilities included teaching about Israel. Teachers were able to complete the survey on their own time. In some cases, our request to include all those who teach about Israel in middle and high school grades was interpreted in a narrow fashion; just one or two individuals – a Hebrew teacher or a Jewish history teacher – completed the survey. In other instances, more than a dozen faculty completed the survey. These included those who teach the core subjects of Jewish studies, history, *Ivrit* or general studies, those whose classes are tangentially connected to Israel or who had accompanied students on a school Israel trip and even those who lead *tefila*. In some instances, Heads of School also responded, especially if they themselves taught classes.

Our analysis sought to uncover the respondents' underlying perceptions, connections between attitudes, the relationships between variables shaping students' outlooks and typologies of students and teachers. To get at these matters, we found it especially useful to employ factor analysis. Factor analysis is a statistical technique that can uncover relationship patterns underlying interacting attitudes. This kind of statistical procedure is used to analyze large numbers of variables by reducing the number of elements to be studied (for example, the multiple items in a question aimed at measuring the perceived image of Israel). It then promises to observe more clearly how these elements are interlinked. It makes it possible to detect the connections between the *dependent* variables (called factors), such as attitudes towards Israel or perceptions of the Jewish people and background ("independent") variables such as gender, community, school type or denomination.

We also found it especially helpful to conduct a cluster analysis of both student and teacher responses. This technique subdivides people into distinct groups based upon consistent differences in the ways they respond to common phenomena; in this instance, particular survey questions. In the student survey, we identified six "factors" as likely to provoke the sharpest differences between respondents, and therefore as most ripe for

cluster analysis (a so-called best fit model for cluster analysis). In the teacher survey, we found that cluster analysis of the teacher responses to a question about their educational goals pointed to clear and consistent differences in the ways that groups of respondents answered this question. This provided a strong basis for identifying distinct clusters of teachers.

Finally, we employed two more statistical procedures: Regression analysis was used in order to estimate the effect of some independent (explanatory) variables on the dependent variables. One-way ANOVA analysis was used in order to test the hypothesis of "interaction effect" – that some independent variables (such as the Israel education coordinator and other activities at school) have different effects on the attitudes of different clusters of students (as found in the cluster analysis).

Qualitative Analysis

To get a flavor of what Israel education is like in day schools, members of the research team visited a dozen schools to observe first-hand how Israel is taught, how schools celebrate Israel on special occasions such as *Yom Ha'Atzmaut* (Israel Independence Day), how schools portray Israel graphically in public displays and what school trips to Israel encompass. These site visits also provided an opportunity to talk with community members about their understanding of the place of Israel in their school. Interviewees included parents, volunteers and professional leaders, and community stakeholders.

The sites visited only included schools whose students completed the survey. The sites were selected so as to include a mix of denominations, geographic regions, size (ranging from those with fewer than 100 students to those with more than 750) and age range (including K-12 institutions, stand-alone high schools, and elementary schools). The selected sample was purposive in one special respect. We endeavored in large part to visit schools that had not previously been singled out as *Exemplars* in the field of Israel education. We were interested in observing how Israel education was enacted in essentially "archetypical" schools. It turns out that even in these nationally less well-known institutions we found a great deal of creativity and intensity, but also repeated instances of missed opportunities to have a strong educational impact.

In addition to visiting a sample of schools, the research team also conducted three day-long observations of school trips to Israel. These observations were not conceived as capturing all aspects of the Israel trips, but they did open a window on a key means by which schools introduce their students to Israel. We were especially interested in observing the degree of coherence and connection between what we observed on these trips and what we observed in schools.

Putting All of the Data Together

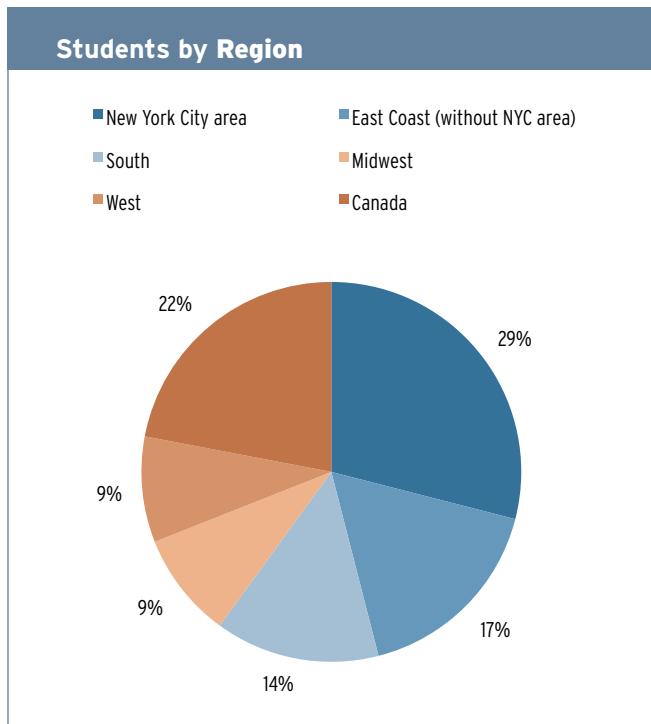
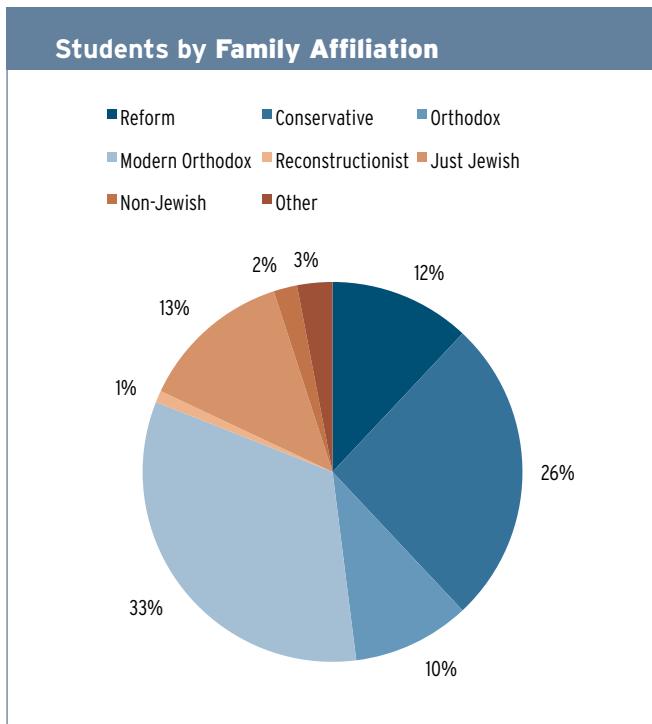
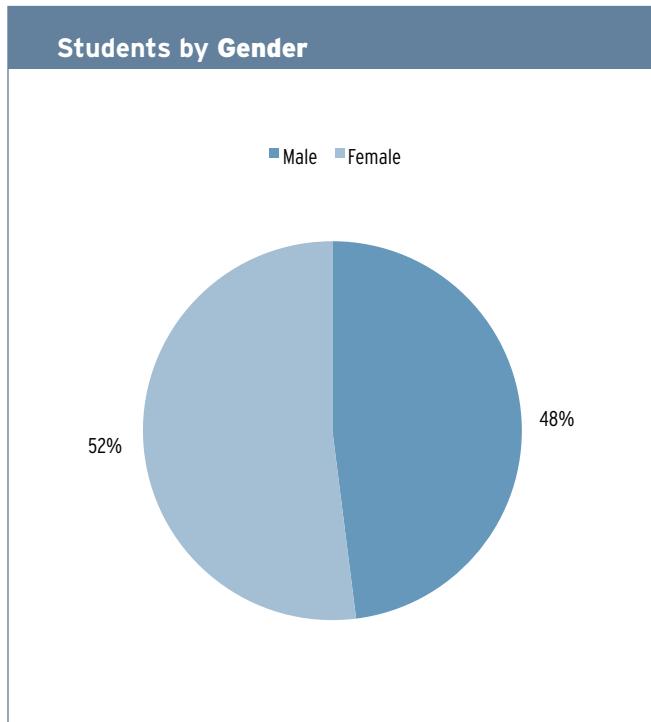
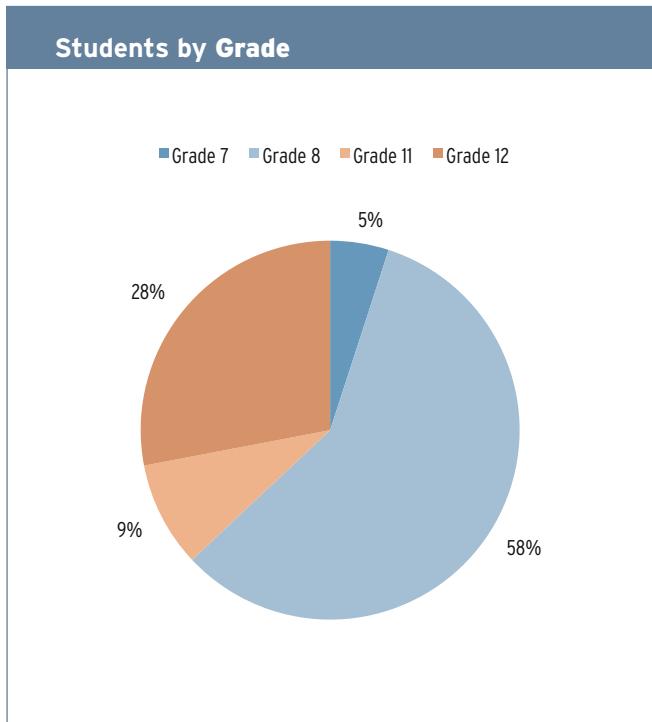
Taken together, the various component parts of our study constitute the largest, most encompassing attempt to gauge how day school students – and indeed any other population of Jewish students in North America – think about being Jewish. The sheer size of the student and teacher populations surveyed sets this study apart, as does the breadth of questions about students' views on spirituality, *Tikkun Olam*, religious observances, home-based rituals and ethics and a connection to the Jewish people in local communities, around the world and in

Israel. Even as it has focused primarily on the ways these students relate to Israel and on the goals and frustrations of their teachers, this study has also generated rich data on the broader outlook of those who spend a large part of their waking hours in Jewish day schools.

Though we lack the comparative data to know with certainty, we assume that schools with a stronger orientation to Israel education were more likely to agree to participate in this inquiry, and especially to host a site-visit. We do not know to what degree the schools we studied are typical of other non-Haredi day schools. Also, by definition, we cannot draw conclusions from our study about what might be the attitudes and beliefs of the great majority of young Jews who do not attend day schools. An assessment of this other larger population will have to wait for another study. In the meantime, our project has yielded a trove of data on how schools "do" Israel education; how teachers conceive of the task and its challenges; and how day school students of various stripes and backgrounds think about Israel, their Jewishness and being Americans or Canadians.

Appendix B

Make-Up of the Student Sample



Appendix C

Factors Identified Through Analysis of All of the Student Survey Items

Factor Analysis is a statistical technique that allows researchers to investigate concepts that are not easily measured directly by collapsing a large number of question-items into a few main factors. This technique uncovers the patterns underlying interacting attitudes among survey responses. It provides a more reliable measure than analyzing responses to individual question-items.

In this survey, items within each question were not organized as they appear below; they appeared in a randomized order and were not labeled. The groupings shown here – the “factors” – were identified through statistical analysis. The names for each factor reflect the research team’s interpretation of what was shared among the items identified as expressing some underlying common attitude.

A. To what extent do you spend time thinking about the following things?						
Never (1)	Rarely (2)	Occasionally (3)	Often (4)	Usually (5)	Always (6)	
A1 – Issues of Jewishness and spirituality, and attitudes towards Israel						
Whether there are differences between Jews and non-Jews						
What it means to be Jewish						
How the media, such as television and newspapers, describe Israel						
Whether Israel treats others fairly						
Whether to live in Israel one day						
Whether there is a God						
What is the meaning and purpose of my life						
A2 – Issues that improve the world						
What I can do to improve the environment						
How I can make a difference in the world						
Why some people suffer in the world						
How I can help people who are important to me and need help						
A3 – Issues concerned with personal and social success						
How to get better grades in school						
How to make more friends						
What I need to do in order to be more healthy						
How to improve my appearance						
How to feel better about myself						

B. Mark your position relating to the statement:

Strongly
Disagree (1)

Disagree
(2)

Somewhat
Disagree (3)

Somewhat
Agree (4)

Agree
(5)

Strongly
Agree (6)

B1 - "Jewish Peoplehood" – A positive connection to Jews around the world and in Israel

- I would like to know more about Jews in other countries
 I feel a part of my local Jewish community
 When I think about the Jewish People I feel pride
 I feel I have a strong connection to Jews wherever they are
 There are strong similarities between Jews in different places
 I feel close to other Jews in America
 I feel proud that people know that I'm Jewish
 I have a strong connection to people in Israel
 Israel is the homeland of all Jews
 When I think about Israel I feel pride
 I'm happy when I hear that somebody famous is Israeli
 If Israel were destroyed my life would be different
 I feel that Israel is my homeland
 I would like to get to know more Israelis
 When there is a crisis or war in Israel, I pay special attention
 I feel a responsibility to help Jews in need
 I would like to know more about Jewish views on environmentalism
 I respect people who observe Jewish law (*halacha*)

B2 - Spirituality - Expressions of a spiritual sensibility

- Jews, wherever they are, share a common destiny
 I believe that God listens to my prayers
 Observing *mitzvot* is a way to connect to God
 I feel that I am protected from above
 I believe in life after death
 There have been moments in my life when I have felt God's presence

B3 - Jewish identity distinct from the non-Jewish world

- I feel that the United States is my home
 It's important that my best friends are Jewish
 It's important for me to have non-Jewish friends
 It's important that Jews only date other Jews
 I care equally about the suffering of Jews and non-Jews
 If people love each other, religion should not make a difference when they marry
 When I think about making a difference in the world, I think first about helping Jews

B4 - Uncertainty about understanding contemporary Israel

- I don't really understand what is going on in Israel
 I need to learn more in order to understand what is going on in Israel

C. From your perspective, how important is it for Jews to do the following?

Not at All Important (1)	Not Very Important (2)	A Little Important (3)	Important (4)	Very Important (5)	Extremely Important (6)
C1 – Jewish social actions and collective behaviors					
Feel responsible for needy Jews around the world					
Keep family traditions at a seder					
Visit Israel					
Follow news about Israel					
Love Israel					
Go to a rally or community event to support Israel					
Live in Israel					
Speak Hebrew					
Have Israeli friends					
Volunteer for a Jewish organization					
Sing Jewish songs with friends					
C2 – Jewish religious actions					
Keep Jewish law (commandments)					
Rest on Shabbat					
Separate meat and dairy foods					
Believe in God					
Pray in a synagogue					
Believe in an afterlife					
C3 – Ethical and universally valued actions					
Have family meals					
Respect people who are different from them					
Protect the environment					
Protect students from bullying					
Avoid cheating on a test					
Avoid illegally downloading songs, films or TV shows					
Appreciate the beauty of nature					

E. Imagine you are with a group of friends who are having a conversation about the topics below. How confident are you in your knowledge to talk about these things?

Not at All Confident (1)	Only a Little (2)	Somewhat Confident (3)	Confident (4)	Very Confident (5)	Completely Confident (6)
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E1 - Topics connected to Jewishness

- The Holocaust
- Jewish religious customs
- The history of the Jewish people in the past 100 years
- The differences between Jewish religious movements (e.g. Conservative, Reform, Orthodox, etc.)
- Reasons for the emergence of Zionism
- The importance of Israel in the Tanakh
- God
- Jewish law (*halacha*)

E2 - Topics connected to Israel

- Jewish culture (such as food, films, music, books and poetry)
- Contemporary Israeli culture (such as films, music and books)
- Current events in Israel
- The Arab/Israeli conflict
- The status of different Jewish religious movements in Israel
- Daily life in Israel
- The geography of the Land of Israel

E3 - American/Canadian and general topics

- The history of the United States in the past 100 years
- Current events in the United States
- American culture (such as films, music and books)
- The equality of women in society
- Global climate change

F. How much do you admire each of the following people?

I don't know who this is (1)	Not at All (2)	Very Little (3)	Not Much (4)	Somewhat (5)	Very Much (6)
F11 Zionist / Israeli leaders	F22 Jewish historical leaders	F33 Famous historical & contemporary figures	F44 Celebrities & contemporary political figures	F55 Unknown figures	
Theodore Herzl	Rabbi Akiva	Hilary Clinton	Marc Zuckerberg	Idan Reichel	
Golda Meir	King David	Barack Obama	Natalie Portman	Ilan Ramon	
David Ben Gurion	Ruth (Bible)	J.K. Rowling	Bar Rafaeli	Amos Oz	
Yitzchak Rabin	Maimonides	George Washington	Steve Jobs	Henrietta Szold	
Hannah Senesh		Rosa Parks			
Binyamin Netanyahu		William Shakespeare			

G. To what extent would you describe Israel as?

Not at All (1)	Very Little (2)	Not Much (3)	Somewhat (4)	A Lot (5)	Very Much (6)
G1 - Home and Homeland (A place associated with positive images)					
The homeland of the Jewish people					
A home away from home					
A place with close friends and/or family					
A land promised by God					
A fun vacation destination					
The birthplace of the Jewish people					
G2 - A place associated with negative images					
A place full of ultra-Orthodox Jews					
A poor country					
A place where people are not so friendly					
A place where all Jews are not treated equally					
A place where Arabs are treated unfairly					
G3 - A Jewish identity place (An abstract /symbolic image)					
A spiritual center					
A country with a Jewish atmosphere					
G4 - A safe place					
A place to be safe from anti-Semitism					
A dangerous place					

Appendix D

The Research Team

Based in Jerusalem, **Alex Pomson** is Director of Research and Evaluation at Rosov Consulting. He trained in History at the University of Cambridge, and received his PhD in Religious Education from the University of London. He was founding Head of Jewish Studies at the King Solomon High School. Later, he served as Associate Professor of Jewish Teacher Education at York University, Toronto where he coordinated York's Jewish Teacher Education Programme, and upon making Aliyah with his family, he was also a Senior Researcher at the Melton Centre for Jewish Education at the Hebrew University. He is co-author of *Back to School: Jewish Day School as a Source of Meaning in the Lives of Adult Jews*, and co-editor of *Jewish Schools, Jewish Communities: a Reconsideration*, *The International Handbook of Jewish Education* and *Speaking in the Plural: Jewish Education and Pluralism*.

Jack Wertheimer is a Professor of American Jewish History at the Jewish Theological Seminary, where he served also as Provost for a decade. He writes on the religious, communal and educational spheres of American Jewish life, particularly in recent decades. As Director of the Center for Research and Policy at The AVI CHAI Foundation, he has overseen projects examining Jewish supplementary schools, young Jewish leaders and the nexus of the family, community and Jewish education. Most recently he oversaw a Case Study project on how Jewish day schools enact their Jewish missions. Among the books he has written or edited are *A People Divided: Judaism in Contemporary America*, *Learning and Community: Jewish Supplementary Schools in the 21st Century*, *The New Jewish Leaders: Reshaping the American Jewish Landscape*, and *Imagining the American Jewish Community*.

Hagit Hacohen Wolf is a social psychologist, trained in Psychology and Education at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. She received her PhD in Contemporary Jewry from Bar-Ilan University. Her academic work centers on research and evaluation, as well as teaching and mentoring in the field of collective/social identity. Her areas of focus are Jewish identity and renewal, Jewish education, and Jewish peoplehood, religiosity and spirituality, both in Israel and in the Diaspora. Hagit founded the Melton Centre's Research and Evaluation Unit and served as the Academic Director of the Senior Educators Program. Currently she serves as an academic advisor, consultant and evaluator of a wide variety of prominent Jewish educational projects, both formal and informal.

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She brought a keen eye for improving our analysis and a deep acumen in managing the logistics of the project. Eitan Cooper served as an able and good humored project manager from the first day to the last. In addition, other members of the Rosov Consulting team – Tali Berkovitch, Rafi Cashman and Frayda Gonshor Cohen – carried out richly informative qualitative research in the field.

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that we then expanded to the study of many more schools across North America. We salute the school's pioneering contribution to our work.

This project was made possible by the Heads and Judaics educators at 95 day schools. They saw to it that students and teachers completed online surveys, they provided us with data and a sampling of those schools welcomed our team to observe how Israel education works in practice. To those who cooperated so graciously with our project, our deep thanks. We conclude with the hope that this report will stimulate fresh thinking about ways to further strengthen Israel education in North American day schools.



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