

## Trends in U.S. Jewish Education: National Jewish Population Study Findings

IN DISCUSSIONS OF THE FUTURE of Jewish life in the United States, frequent reference is made to Jewish education as a precondition for the Jewish community's survival. While information on the extent and types of Jewish education is provided for relatively brief time spans by current Jewish school enrollment statistics, the 1970 National Jewish Population Study data (NJPS; AJYB, 1973 [Vol. 74], pp. 264-66) make possible a systematic, long-term review of Jewish education trends in the United States. Such review must, in each instance, go beyond a simple counting of the number of students attending Jewish educational institutions. With changing birthrates, and consequent variations in the demographic character of the United States Jewish population, the potential number of children (as well as older youths and adults) who may avail themselves of Jewish education can vary significantly. Therefore, to assess qualitative changes over time, one must consider not only the total number, but also the proportion enrolled in all types of Jewish schools in a specified time period.

The findings presented here take this into account, and, for the first time, make possible the examination of appropriately adjusted relative enrollment levels in historical perspective. It further becomes feasible to compare the Jewish education patterns of adults—persons whose elementary and secondary Jewish education has been completed—with emerging profiles of Jewish schooling for younger people. Such an analysis gives an indication of parental Jewish background which, in turn, establishes the climate in the home for the education of Jewish children\* in the 1970s.

### *Exposure to Jewish Education Defined*

Based on responses of NJPS interviewees, "exposure" to Jewish education is defined here in terms of reported enrollment, either present or at any time in the past, in one or more of the following categories of Jewish education:

#### *One-day-a-week*

"Sunday School" or Saturday school

Sunday or Saturday school, augmented by mid-week meetings

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\*For simplicity in wording, the term "Jewish children" is used interchangeably with "children in Jewish households." The terms are not synonymous, however, as Jewish households may include non-Jews, as in intermarriage. Unless otherwise noted, reference is to persons in Jewish households.

*Weekday afternoon*

Weekday afternoon Hebrew school

*Heder*

Weekday afternoon community school

*Pre-school*

Jewish nursery school

Jewish kindergarten

*All-Day*

Jewish all-day elementary school

Jewish all-day junior high school

Jewish all-day high school

*All others*

Yiddish school (all types)

Weekday high-school level program

*Yeshivah* (in part equivalent to all-day school)

Theological seminary, or equivalent

Adult Jewish education

Private tutor

Any other Jewish education type

While exposure to any "Jewish education" is a generic concept, including possible enrollment (or participation), past or present, in one or more of the Jewish education categories specified, the detailed analysis reported here is confined to the most frequently mentioned Jewish education types. Analyses reflect Jewish education exposure of "persons residing in Jewish households," including the intermarried, if one or more of the resident adults identifies as "Jewish."

Clearly, Jewish enrollment figures *at any given time* do not reflect past enrollment or future enrollment of some children who will *eventually* have the benefit of a formal Jewish educational experience, though they are not enrolled now. Others may drop out, permanently or temporarily. Thus a youngster may attend a Jewish school one year, skip the next two or three years, and may again enroll the year thereafter, perhaps in preparation for bar-mitzvah. Or a pre-school child may not be enrolled in a Jewishly-oriented kindergarten or nursery school, but may later regularly attend Sunday school or weekday afternoon Hebrew school. Whatever these "ins and outs," the data suggest that, adult Jewish education notwithstanding, an ultimate plateau of exposure to Jewish education is reached in the middle or late teens. In view of these considerations, no matter what the proportion of momentary enrollment, *i.e.* the number and proportion of children in Jewish schools *in a given year*, it is interesting to establish what proportion of children, and others, receive *some* Jewish education. This overview of eventual exposure to Jewish education is, of course, a mere starting point for further inquiry into the quantity and quality of that education. Issues relating to the intensity of Jewish education (number of hours, number of years, content of curriculum, etc.) will be addressed in a subsequent

article. Such follow-up study, however, must be seen in the context of exposure to Jewish education, as defined here.

### SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

Briefly, the following are the major NJPS findings on Jewish education:

1. More than 80 per cent of Jewish males receive some Jewish education at some time in their lives. The indication is that this percentage has slightly increased in recent years. Among the 585,800 15-through-19-year-old young men in Jewish households (1970), about 493,000 are reported to have had some Jewish education.
2. The proportions of Jewish females ultimately exposed to Jewish education are consistently below those of males, recently falling in the 70 per cent range. Among the 516,200 15-through-19-year-old young women in Jewish households (1970), about 370,000 are reported to have had some Jewish education.
3. Between 40 and 60 per cent of Jewish children in the five-through-14-year age group are receiving Jewish education. The figures rise to above 60 per cent for males near bar-mitzvah age, but are rather low, about 40 per cent for females of corresponding age. Approximately 583,000 Jewish boys (of 980,000) and 404,600 Jewish girls (of 928,000), ages five through 14, are reported enrolled in a Jewish school (1970).
4. For Jewish girls, one-day-a-week school is the dominant pattern from age five on. However, for boys (though one-third in the five-through-nine-year age range report one-day-a-week Jewish education), weekday afternoon Hebrew school emerges as the dominant pattern beyond age ten. There is a fair amount of exposure to both weekday afternoon Hebrew school and one-day-a-week school, particularly for Jewish boys between ages ten through 19.
5. Between 13 and 18 per cent of Jewish boys and young men, ages ten through 29, have at one time or another been enrolled in a Jewish all-day school. Corresponding figures for girls and young women are much lower.
6. For children under five years of age, Jewish pre-school enrollment is reported at about 18 per cent.
7. Weekday afternoon Hebrew school continues to be the most frequently reported Jewish education experience for Jewish boys. However, on a relative basis, the proportion reporting enrollment in one-day-a-week schools has grown in recent years.
8. Some 80 per cent of Jewish boys—about 94,000 in a recent year (1970)—become bar-mitzvah. The proportion of Jewish girls becoming bat-mitzvah has increased from very small percentages to about one in four, to approximately 28,000 per year.
9. Girls are more likely to be confirmed than boys, though the difference in

proportion has narrowed. About one girl in five or six is confirmed.

10. Recent intermarriage trends—particularly when the wife is the non-Jewish partner—result in a substantial increase in the proportion of non-Jewish children in Jewish households, recently about one in five. This, together with the declining Jewish birthrates in the 1970s, may reduce the near-term future potential enrollment in Jewish schools.

## THE DATA

Upon detailed examination of the NJPS data, some salient facts emerge on several topics of major interest.

### *Exposure to Jewish Education*

More than one half of Jewish children, ages five through nine, are either currently enrolled, or have previously been enrolled, in a Jewish school (Table 1). For the very young, four years of age and younger, the corresponding figure is about 18 per cent. Many children in this age range have not been enrolled, but are likely to receive a Jewish education when they reach elementary-school age.

TABLE 1. EXPOSURE TO ANY JEWISH EDUCATION  
*Per Cent*

<i>Age</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>
0-4	18.7	18.2
5-9	54.8	58.6
10-14	87.3	74.6
15-19	84.1	71.7
20-24	87.1	69.8
25-29	87.0	52.8*
30-39	82.2	64.5
40-49	80.7	58.4
50-59	83.3	63.2
60-64	88.0	64.3
65-74	79.9	63.3
75 and over	89.1	54.8

Note: Total number of sample cases: unweighted 22,259; weighted to 36,824, in accordance with NJPS sample design.

\*A significant percentage of non-Jewish spouses in intermarriages are included in this category.

For Jewish males above customary religious-school age, a remarkably consistent pattern emerges: over-all, more than 80 per cent have had some Jewish education at some time in their lives. The differences among the various age groups, especially

at the adult level, are minor; the percentage of exposure to Jewish education for Jewish men age 20 and up varies from 80 to 89 per cent. A Jewish education exposure figure of 87 per cent for boys in the ten-through-14-year age bracket, with further Jewish education still probable for some in the immediate pre-bar-mitzvah years and before confirmation, suggests that Jewish boys of the early 1970s may eventually exceed their older counterparts in the percentage of exposure to Jewish education by a small margin. This does not, however, speak to the issue of the intensity of Jewish education received.

While differences in Jewish education exposure between boys and girls to age nine are small, they become important at age ten and beyond. In every subsequent age category, the proportion of males who have had some Jewish education is found to exceed that of females. This follows an earlier tradition that emphasizes more extensive Jewish learning for the Jewish male and less Jewish education for the female.

Among women, age 20 and older, typically somewhere above 60 per cent have had some exposure to Jewish education, while for men the corresponding figure generally exceeds 80 per cent. Among the several 20-plus age brackets for women, the percentages of exposure to Jewish education vary within a range of about 53 to nearly 70.

For girls, including those who typically are in the midst of their Jewish education (ages ten through 14) and those who have recently completed it (ages 15 through 19), the proportions of exposure to Jewish education rise above the 70 per cent level, approaching 75 per cent. This upswing suggests that, as a result of recent changes both in Jewish community culture and educational techniques, a somewhat greater segment of younger Jewish women are being reached by Jewish schooling than in the past. On the basis of these findings—analogueous to the finding for boys ten through 14 years of age—we may predict that an increasingly high *proportion* of young Jewish women, exceeding the comparable proportion of their parents' generation, will ultimately receive the benefit of some Jewish primary- or secondary-school experience. However, intermarriage may act as a countervailing force, depressing the proportion of Jewish school exposure as the children of intermarriages (particularly where the wife is non-Jewish) reach school age.

### *Jewish Education Patterns of Jewish Youth*

By highlighting data in subsequent tables, we can focus particularly on the patterns of Jewish education reported for Jewish young people up to and including the age of 19 (Table 2). For each age category within this range, separate reports of findings for males and females make it possible to identify the predominant types of Jewish education exposure.

For children up to the age of four, Jewish pre-school education (kindergarten and/or nursery school conducted under Jewish auspices) is the most frequently reported education type, though scattered enrollment is found for the other educa-

tion categories. Present or past enrollment in one-day-a-week schools is most frequently reported for children in the five-through-nine-year age category, with little difference between the sexes. Percentages for weekday afternoon Hebrew school enrollment in this age group are lower, about one-half of the one-day-a-week percentages.

TABLE 2. PATTERNS OF JEWISH EDUCATION: REPORTED ENROLLMENT, PAST OR PRESENT, (EXPOSURE) BY SPECIFIED EDUCATION TYPES  
*Per Cent*

<i>Type of Education</i>	<i>Male Age</i>				<i>Female Age</i>			
	<i>0-4</i>	<i>5-9</i>	<i>10-14</i>	<i>15-19</i>	<i>0-4</i>	<i>5-9</i>	<i>10-14</i>	<i>15-19</i>
Pre-school	16.1*	13.7	10.2	5.6	16.7*	12.7	7.9	4.0
One-day-a-week	2.2	33.9*	56.3	52.2	7.9	34.1*	45.2*	50.2*
Weekday afternoon Hebrew	1.0	17.9	60.5*	61.3*	1.8	18.4	38.5	32.9
Jewish all-day	<u>1.9</u>	<u>6.5</u>	<u>13.1</u>	<u>11.1</u>	<u>2.5</u>	<u>8.1</u>	<u>7.2</u>	<u>9.1</u>
Index:								
Exposure to more than one Jewish education type <sup>a</sup>	(21.2)	(72.0)	(140.1)	(130.2)	(28.9)	(73.3)	(98.8)	(96.2)
Exposure to any Jewish education	18.7	54.8	87.3	84.1	18.2	58.6	74.6	71.7

\*Relatively most frequently reported type of education within particular age/sex category.

<sup>a</sup>"Exposure" as defined, may occur for two or more Jewish education types, viz. person may have, or have had, both one-day-a-week and weekday afternoon Hebrew school. Only most frequently-reported Jewish education types included in this analysis.

The pattern changes considerably for the ten-through-14-year age category. For boys, in this age period of bar-mitzvah preparation, there is nearly 61 per cent exposure to weekday afternoon Hebrew school, making this education type the most prevalent. Further, for the one-day-a-week schools, an only slightly lower past-or-present-enrollment figure appears, at nearly 56 per cent. This indicates a fairly high level of multiple enrollment, with some children having attended, at one or another

time, both one-day-a-week and weekday afternoon Hebrew school.

For girls in the ten-through-14-year category, one-day-a-week school is the most prevalent, 45 per cent as compared to 39 per cent for weekday afternoon Hebrew school. Both figures, however, are below those shown for boys of corresponding age.

For those in the 15-through-19-year bracket—the age range which, with the rather infrequent exception of adult Jewish education, marks the conclusion of formal Jewish education—the patterns established at ages ten through 14 generally persist. For males, weekday afternoon Hebrew school continues to predominate (61 per cent), followed by one-day-a-week enrollment (52 per cent). For females, the one-day-a-week school remains the most frequently reported (50 per cent), followed by weekday afternoon Hebrew school (33 per cent).

Enrollment in Jewish all-day school, though on recent upswing for boys ages ten through 14, reaches only a modest proportion of the total Jewish child population. For males between the ages of ten through 19, it ranges from about 11 to 13 per cent of the total, while for females of corresponding age it varies narrowly, from 7 to 9 per cent. Counting *yeshivot*, the figures increase by a moderate margin.

Table 3 shows the historical trend in exposure to the specific major Jewish education types, Jewish pre-school, one-day-a-week school, weekday afternoon Hebrew school, and Jewish all-day school. For males, weekday afternoon Hebrew school has been, and continues to be, the dominant education type. However, the relative percentage gap between it and exposure to one-day-a-week school has been closing. This indicates that the one-day-a-week school and its variants representing a relatively modern American Jewish education style—one not prevalent in the education of the foreign-born or in the early stages of United States Jewish education—now reaches a higher proportion of the Jewish child population than in former times.

For females exposure to one-day-a-week school consistently exceeds that to weekday afternoon Hebrew school, except for those above age 75.

As for the Jewish all-day school, the historical analysis reveals that of males who have completed their Jewish education, those between ages ten through 29, and age 75 and over are the Jewish population groups most likely to have had some exposure to this Jewish education type, within a range of about 11 to 18 per cent.

For females, corresponding percentages range from just below 3 per cent to a high of slightly above 9 per cent. The latter is reported for the 15-through-19 age category, suggesting a rise in intensive Jewish commitment by one particular small segment of the Jewish female youth population.

Reviewing the pattern of Jewish education trends as a whole, one may conclude that for males the *relative* predominance of the afternoon Hebrew school is declining, with a proportional rise in enrollment in other (and sometimes several) types of Jewish educational institutions, particularly in the one-day-a-week school. For Jewish females, the one-day-a-week school has been, and continues to be, the principal Jewish education experience.

Intensive Jewish all-day school education never has reached more than about one

TABLE 3. EXPOSURE TO SPECIFIC MAJOR JEWISH EDUCATION TYPES  
(Per Cent)

Age	Pre-School*		One-Day-a-Week School		Weekday Afternoon Hebrew School		All-Day School	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
0-4	16.1	16.7	2.2	7.9	1.0	1.8	1.9	2.5
5-9	13.7	12.7	33.9	34.1	17.9	18.4	6.5	8.1
10-14	10.2	7.9	56.3	45.2	60.5	38.5	13.1	7.2
15-19	5.6	4.0	52.2	50.2	61.3	32.9	11.1	9.1
20-24	5.5	4.7	43.3	43.1	49.0	24.2	17.7	7.7
25-29	1.4	3.4	43.3	29.9	63.1	25.5	18.0	5.2
30-39	1.4	1.3	28.3	37.6	64.1	27.0	7.3	5.2
40-49	1.2	0.8	21.4	34.4	61.4	21.0	6.8	7.4
50-59	0.9	0.8	17.5	28.2	55.8	22.6	6.4	5.0
60-64	0.6	0.7	15.4	32.7	65.3	32.2	7.1	4.5
65-74	0.9	0.3	12.1	20.6	56.2	19.1	8.6	2.8
75 and over	1.0	1.1	8.7	14.5	59.9	20.0	11.9	4.1

\*Trends for Jewish pre-school education are not separately interpreted. It is possible that recency of this experience leads to a higher proportion of reporting, while, when considered in retrospect, it may be subsumed under more salient categories like one-day-a-week school, weekday afternoon Hebrew school, etc. Also, recent emphasis on Jewish childhood education may be reflected in the results.

in five or six Jewish males, and much smaller proportions of Jewish females. In view of past trends and recent patterns, it seems unlikely that exposure to Jewish all-day schools will increase by more than a modest number of percentage points, if at all, in the near future.

### *Current Enrollment in Jewish Schools*

Jewish education in the United States is characterized by a certain amount of "coming and going," with young people participating in one kind of Jewish education program in one period of their school years and in some other kind (or none at all) in another. Therefore, eventual exposure to Jewish education frequently represents enrollment by any one individual in more than one type of Jewish educational institution, and is not fully reflected in school enrollment in any given year. Table 4 focuses specifically on the proportions of Jewish youth below the age of 19, whom NJPS reported as currently participating in *one or more* formal Jewish education programs.

For Jewish boys, with bar-mitzvah preparation no doubt influential, the largest current enrollment proportion falls within the ten-through-14-year age bracket, with more than 64 per cent in a Jewish school. The corresponding proportion for

boys in the five-through-nine-year group is 53 per cent. For Jewish girls, the point of maximum enrollment—above 46 per cent—is attained, perhaps surprisingly, in the younger, five-through-nine-year group, while the proportion in the ten-through-14 category declines to 42 per cent. It appears that neither bat-mitzvah nor confirmation has sufficient impact to counter an early “dropout” trend among Jewish girls.

TABLE 4. CURRENT ENROLLMENT IN JEWISH SCHOOLS  
*Per Cent*

<i>Age</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>Total</i>
0-4	18.1	17.5	17.8
5-9	52.5	46.3	47.7
10-14	64.1	41.7	53.0
15-19	15.3	13.1	14.2

Without exception, Jewish boys are more likely to be enrolled in a Jewish school than Jewish girls. The difference is greatest in the ten-through-14-year bracket, likely because of the emphasis on pre-bar-mitzvah education. Differences are less distinct for the youngest and oldest groups considered in Table 4. The enrollment drop-off beyond bar-mitzvah age, in the 15-through-19-year age bracket, is precipitous: for males the enrollment percentage drops from about 64 to just above 15, while for females the drop is from nearly 42 to about 13.

### *Bar-Mitzvah, Bat-Mitzvah, and Confirmation*

The NJPS data (Table 5) indicate that typically between 75 and 80 per cent of all Jewish males become bar-mitzvah, with the lowest proportion (75 per cent) reported for the 15-through-19-year group and the relatively highest (over 87 per cent) for the 75-and-over age group.

A rather different picture emerges for females. Bat-mitzvah as a ritual observance, adopted as a result of American Jewish community efforts seeking the equalization of Jewish education for boys and girls, emerges as a fairly prevalent phenomenon of the last two decades. More particularly, a noteworthy upswing in bat-mitzvah celebration, 26 per cent, appears among the 15-through-19-year-olds, with a considerably lower figure, nearly 11 per cent, found for those between ages 20 through 24. In no instance, however, does the frequency of bat-mitzvah approach anywhere near that of the bar-mitzvah.

The situation is quite different for confirmation (Table 6), with the proportion of female celebrants consistently exceeding that of their male counterparts. Here again, however, efforts to achieve relatively equal Jewish education for the sexes reduces the difference. While in the 15-through-19-year groups, for example, 18 per cent of young women and roughly 15 per cent of young men report confirmation, the percentages for women and men in the 40-through-49-year group, respectively, are

20 and about 7. In terms of the long-term trend, at least below age 65, about one Jewish girl in five is confirmed.

TABLE 5. BAR MITZVAH AND BAT MITZVAH  
*Per Cent*

<i>Age</i>	<i>Males: Bar-Mitzvah</i>			<i>Females: Bat-Mitzvah</i>		
	<i>Only</i>	<i>Plus Con- firmation</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>Only</i>	<i>Plus Con- firmation</i>	<i>Total</i>
15-19	64.2	10.8	75.0	20.4	5.6	26.0
20-24	71.7	10.1	81.8	7.6	3.1	10.7
25-29	67.9	14.6	82.5	5.3	2.2	7.5
30-39	75.0	6.9	81.9	4.1	3.6	7.7
40-49	73.9	4.5	78.4	2.5	7.1	9.6
50-59	75.8	3.3	79.1	2.9	0.5	3.4
60-64	71.5	1.9	73.4	1.9	0.8	2.7
65-74	72.5	1.4	73.9	3.0	0.6	3.6
75, up	85.0	2.4	87.4	2.1	0.8	2.9

*Note:* Figures at low percentage levels, particularly below 3.0 per cent, may in part represent data processing error.

TABLE 6. CONFIRMATION (WHETHER OR NOT ALSO  
BAR/BAT-MITZVAH)  
*Per Cent*

<i>Age</i>	<i>Males</i>	<i>Females</i>
15-19	14.9	18.2
20-24	14.1	18.3
25-29	16.4	17.3
30-39	9.0	24.5
40-49	6.7	20.0
50-59	6.6	19.2
60-64	3.3	21.0
65-74	4.1	9.4
75, up	3.9	5.7

### *Intermarriage and the Jewish Education Potential*

Aside from the decline in birthrates, particularly in the early 1970s, intermarriage (AJYB, 1973 [Vol. 74], pp. 292-306; see Tables 1a and 4), especially when the wife is the non-Jewish partner, is likely to have a significant impact on the future of Jewish education in the United States (Table 7). The trend has been toward a decline in the number of children of intermarried couples who are reported to be "Jewish."

TABLE 7. RELIGIOUS IDENTIFICATION OF CHILDREN IN  
JEWISH HOUSEHOLDS\*  
*Per Cent*

<i>Religion</i>	<i>Age</i>		
	<i>0-4</i>	<i>5-9</i>	<i>All age groups</i>
Non-Jewish	21.1	6.1	6.1
Don't know; no answer	1.8	0.5	0.2
Total of probably non-Jewish	<u>22.9</u>	<u>6.6</u>	<u>6.3</u>
Jewish	<u>77.1</u>	<u>93.4</u>	<u>93.7</u>
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0

\*A Jewish household is one in which at least one adult identifies as Jewish (AJYB, 1974-75 [Vol. 75], pp. 297-98).

More than 20 per cent of the children in the birth-through-four-year age bracket, typically offspring of such intermarried couples, are regarded by adult respondents of their constituent household as "non-Jewish," a very large increase as compared to the five-through-nine-year age bracket (6 per cent). Overwhelmingly, this "non-Jewish" segment of the infant and pre-school population in Jewish households is defined as not ever having been Jewish and as being non-Jewish now. If the Jewish birthrate remains low and if the rate of intermarriage continues to rise, or hold at high levels, potential Jewish school enrollment may be expected to decline below corresponding levels of the 1950s and early 1960s.

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