

Seven Reasons to Send Your Kid to Jewish Day School

by Iliana Glovinsky July 27, 2017

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“Let’s send the kids to the public school,” my husband said when our children were little.

For a young couple like us just starting out, the idea of getting our children a quality, free education in a public school was incredibly appealing. A private school would require us to severely tighten our belts. But on the other hand, I wanted our kids to develop a Jewish identity. My husband and I came from a secular background; we went to the synagogue only on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, didn’t keep Shabbat and we were unaware of how little we knew and

understood about Judaism. It was clear that we could not achieve that goal at home. And yet, while concerned about instilling a Jewish identity, I also wanted my children to have the best education possible.

So I embarked in a conscious and thorough evaluation of our options. As a result, I decided to send our children to a Jewish day school. These were the reasons:

1. Values. Jewish day schools actively teach Torah values such as kindness, respect, moral choices and ethical behavior. The school became my partner in instilling values that I believe in and I sincerely believe it made raising my children much easier. I also learned to appreciate the advantages of prayer. My kids found comfort, strength, and hope through the practice of praying. This was recently corroborated by a Harvard University study showing that prayer helps develop a more optimistic outlook on life.

2. Community. I found that the Jewish day schools in San Diego seek to develop a strong sense of community among their students, parents and teachers. My children have built long-lasting friendships; bonds have been formed between us and other parents. The teachers at the school have hosted our children, their kids have befriended ours.

3. Excellent education. There is the misconception that by dividing the day between secular and Jewish studies, secular education suffers. Far from being a hindrance, the double curriculum enhances students’ skills and academic confidence. A recent meta-analysis of 90 studies on the effects of different types of schools concluded that “students in religious schools enjoy a significant academic advantage over their counterparts in traditional public schools and charter schools.” Even when controlling for socioeconomic status, private religious schools were associated with the highest levels of academic achievement. Every Jewish day school in San Diego has a proven track record of success. Students make it into the most prestigious universities including Harvard, Stanford, Yale, Princeton, Columbia, University of Pennsylvania, UCLA, and Berkeley, to name just a few.

4. Individualized attention. Jewish day schools offer the opportunity to cater to the individual needs of the students and develop personal relationships between the children and school staff.

The small student-to-teacher ratio allows the teachers to get to know each child, understand their needs and motivation. This helps the child acquire a strong academic foundation and a positive attitude toward learning.

5. A love for Israel. In June of this year, the Times of Israel published an ominous article with the headline: “Devastating survey shows huge loss of Israel support among Jewish college students.” Comparing surveys taken in 2016 with surveys in 2010, it was found that Jewish college students stating that they lean toward supporting Israel has dropped by 27 percentage points.

Jewish day schools do a great job of fostering love and support for Israel. Children in Jewish day schools learn modern Hebrew, the history and contemporary issues in Israel, and they engage in experiential activities that help them learn and appreciate Israel’s rich culture.

6. Jewish continuity. According to the recent Pew report, the rate of intermarriage among Jewish people (excluding Orthodox Jews) is a disheartening 71 percent. For me, having Jewish grandchildren has always been an important value. Jewish day schools engage the children in a comprehensive Jewish education. They do not simply learn about Judaism, but they also actively experience it. As a result, Jewish day school students tend to stay involved and marry Jewish spouses.

Moises Eilemberg, a board member of a San Diego Jewish day school, wrote that “the sustained immersion, roots, identity and social bonds created by a full, multi-year Jewish day school experience are far and away the most powerful determinant of how Jewishly involved kids stay through their teens and in college, whether they date and marry Jewish, whether they become members of a synagogue, and the strength of their attachment to Israel.” He cites several studies to support this assertion.

7. Well rounded students. Jewish day schools do a good job of educating well rounded students who have a love of learning, who are connected, who take responsibility in their communities and support Jewish institutions, who have experienced spiritual growth and who are ready for the challenges posed by the world. The focus is on the whole child; his or her intellectual abilities, potential, emotional well-being, family and environment.

There’s a study from Brandeis University about what happens to children from Jewish day schools once they get to college.

“The sense of community or belonging that students experience in the school setting has been shown to contribute to greater social and coping skills, academic self-confidence, altruistic or pro-social behavior, and academic performance.” And it also shows these children are perfectly able to socialize with people of diverse backgrounds.

I can happily report that 20 years after we made the decision to send our kids to a Jewish day school, they grew up to become well-rounded, successful, and compassionate individuals who can comfortably answer the question “Why am I Jewish?” and who are committed to pass that legacy on to the next generation: our Jewish grandchildren. Perhaps it’s time for more of us to seriously consider the gift of sending our children to a Jewish day school.

