



Partnership for Excellence  
In Jewish Education

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## **FIRST-OF-ITS-KIND STUDY SHOWS STUDENTS WHO ATTEND JEWISH DAY SCHOOLS ARE PREPARED TO THRIVE IN COLLEGE**

*Spurred by dramatic growth in Jewish day school enrollment, study provides national view  
of the educational and social readiness of day school students*

**BOSTON, May 15, 2007** — Gaining acceptance to and succeeding in college becomes a greater challenge for American high schoolers every year. This places a large burden on primary and secondary schools to adequately prepare students for the rigors of the college acceptance process and then life as a college student. According to findings released today by the Partnership for Excellence in Jewish Education (PEJE), Jewish day schools are meeting this challenge and preparing students to excel both academically and socially in college.

“This survey validates what we have long seen anecdotally across the country, which is that Jewish day schools are effectively preparing students for college, while ensuring they will carry a solid grounding in Judaism,” said Rabbi Joshua Elkin, executive director of PEJE. “For the first time, we have data to show that families who select a Jewish day school not only strengthen their children’s connection to Jewish life, but prepare them at the same level as other schools for college admission, college-level studies, and the college social environment.”

The study, commissioned by PEJE and conducted by the Cohen Center for Modern Jewish Studies at Brandeis University, recently surveyed 3,312 current Jewish undergraduates of varying educational and denominational backgrounds to examine the effects a Jewish day school education has on the college years. It was the first study of its kind to compare Jewish day school students to a peer group. The following are some of the survey’s key findings:

- **ACCEPTANCE TO FIRST-CHOICE COLLEGE:** The majority (67%) of all Jewish college students surveyed are attending their first-choice college. Students who attended Jewish high schools are gaining acceptance to their first choice at the same rate as alumni of public and private high schools.
- **ACADEMIC EXCELLENCE:** College GPAs of former Jewish day school students mirror those of students who attended public or private schools.

- **JUST SAYING NO:** Former Jewish day school students are more resistant to social pressures that lead to binge drinking and other risky behaviors than their public and private school peers.
- **BURSTING THE SOCIAL BUBBLE:** Jewish high school alumni develop diverse social networks that extend well beyond their day school connections. Only a small minority (11%) indicated that most of their friends continue to be those they met in high school.
- **SOCIALLY RESPONSIBLE:** Students who attended Jewish day school for at least six years are more likely to become involved in socially responsible activities, such as community volunteerism and advocacy, than their public and private school peers.
- **ASSUMING LEADERSHIP:** More than one-third (36%) of former Jewish day school students assume leadership positions in college, similar to proportions of private and public school alumni (40% and 39%, respectively).
- **STRONG ALUMNI CONNECTIONS:** Jewish high school alumni feel a greater connection to their former schools and classmates than students who attended public or private schools.
- **BROAD CAREER POSSIBILITIES:** Former Jewish day school students select major fields of study across a broad spectrum, and they intend to pursue graduate programs in proportions that are virtually indistinguishable from that of students who attended public or private schools.

“This study makes clear that [Jewish] day schools effectively prepare students for a wide range of universities – including the nation’s most select schools,” said Fern Chertok, senior research associate for the Cohen Center for Modern Jewish Studies at Brandeis University.

“Undergraduates with a history of day school are launched into trajectories of secular academic success and Jewish communal engagement.”

The study also found that Jewish day schools help students maintain or strengthen their ties to Judaism while in college, regardless of their denomination or the length of time they attended day school. Students with at least some history of day school attendance reported significantly more frequent participation in Jewish life on campus, as well as a greater knowledge and understanding of Israel. Additionally, over half of the students surveyed who attended day school have taken at least one Jewish studies course in college. These results confirm that former Jewish day school students are happy to be Jewish and make efforts to expand their knowledge of the religion in college.

“My Jewish day school experience taught me the value of having a personal relationship with my teacher, which is exponentially more important in college, particularly in a lecture class of 200 students,” said Hilary Brown, a graduate of the Weber School in Atlanta who is currently enrolled in the dual program with Columbia University and The Jewish Theological Seminary (JTS). “I was also equipped with a solid foundation for my Jewish identity, which meant that when I got to campus, I already knew what community I wanted to be a part of. As overwhelming as freshman orientation can be, it was a relief to arrive with an understanding of what was important to me.”

According to the most recent Jewish day school census (2003 – 2004), there are more than 750 Jewish day schools across the U.S., with more than 200,000 students. Jewish day schools provide students with general and Jewish education in an environment that fosters a positive

connection to Jewish values and traditions. Over the past five years, enrollment in Jewish day schools has increased by approximately 21,000 students (11 percent), with approximately 80 more schools open in 2003 – 2004 than in 1998 – 1999.

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### **Methodology**

These findings emerged from a study designed to determine the broad effects of a Jewish day school education and to explore how it shapes the academic and Jewish outcomes of students during their college years.

An online survey was created after conducting four focus groups comprised of 32 undergraduates. Three of the groups were conducted on college campuses during the academic year, while a fourth was held during summer break at a Jewish Community Center in a metropolitan area. The participants shared thoughts on their schooling and explained how it has affected their college experience.

Between November 2006-February 2007, a diverse group of 3,312 Jewish undergraduates completed an online survey for this study. Students represented 146 different colleges and universities in the United States. The majority (82%) of the sample was derived through college contact lists, ensuring that comparison group information was available not only from students who had attended day schools but also from peers who did not have day school experience and currently attend the same colleges and universities. The sample was balanced for gender, with females comprising just over half (57%), and it featured equal representation from all four undergraduate years.

### **About The Maurice and Marilyn Cohen Center for Modern Jewish Studies – Brandeis University**

The mission of the Cohen Center for Modern Jewish Studies is to conduct scholarly work that can enhance understanding of the Jewish community. The Center is a multi-disciplinary research institute and an integral part of Brandeis University's distinguished programs in Jewish studies and communal service. Research conducted at the Center focuses on studies of American Jewry and Jewish institutions and is widely disseminated.

### **About PEJE**

The Partnership for Excellence in Jewish Education (PEJE), founded in 1997 by Michael Steinhardt and Rabbi Yitz Greenberg, is a collaborative of visionary Jewish philanthropists who seek to create a vibrant and sustainable Jewish future through strengthening the Jewish day school movement in North America. In its first nine years, PEJE's model of making grants, providing expertise, and advocating for the day school movement reached more than 150 elementary, middle, and high schools and invested more than \$20 million in the field. PEJE has contributed to the opening of more than 60 new Jewish day schools.

Through a collaborative strategic planning process, PEJE's original vision and mission of creating a more active, committed, literate, and sustainable Jewish community through strengthening the day school movement and opening new day schools has been expanded to include a targeted goal of increasing enrollment in new and existing Jewish day schools.

PEJE's strategy to achieve this goal is based on the logic that the ability to attract more families to day schools is contingent upon the capacity of each school to sustain growth and all it entails: excellent quality of the educational product, sufficient financial resources, effective volunteer and professional management, and collaborative relationships within the community.

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