

S T U D Y

of

HEBREW SCHOOL

of the

HEBREW COMMUNITY CENTER

of

BANGOR, MAINE

1943

Jewish Welfare Board

220 Fifth Avenue

New York City

Bangor Hebrew
Community Center



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STUDY

of

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National Jewish Welfare Board

PARENT ORGANIZATION OF YMHA'S, YWHA'S AND JEWISH COMMUNITY CENTERS

220 FIFTH AVENUE

NEW YORK CITY



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I. FOREWORD

This study of the Hebrew School of the Community Center of Bangor, Maine, was undertaken at the request of the officers and directors of the Center and Talmud Torah.

The report is based on the observation of class sessions, conferences and personal interviews with the School Committee, staff members, officers and other lay leaders of the Center; and data secured through replies to a questionnaire, and reviews of reports and past issues of the Center periodical, the "Community News".

This survey was made by Dr. Mordecai Soltes, member of the executive staff of the Jewish Welfare Board.

LOUIS KRAFT
Executive Director

Mr. Kraft
Executive Director

II. BRIEF HISTORICAL SKETCH

The first Jewish families arrived in Bangor during the 1840's. Thereafter, the growth of the local Jewish population paralleled that of the waves of Jewish immigration to the United States. Jewish communal life concerned itself in the beginning with the acquisition and maintenance of a burial ground and house of worship.

The children received religious instruction from private teachers who visited their homes. In due course, a Talmud Torah was founded. Located on Carr Street, and conducted at first along the lines of European Talmud Torahs, it was subsequently modernized and transferred in 1920 to Hebrew Institute Hall, on State Street, where it remained for eighteen years.

The present structure on the corner of French and Somerset Streets was formerly a private school, and was acquired through the generosity of Nathan Liss. Renovated, equipped and dedicated in September 1938 as the Bangor Hebrew Community Center, it has housed the Hebrew School, the conduct of which has constituted the major element in its educational program.

III. FINDINGS

A. Enrollment

1. The total number of Jewish children in Bangor, between the ages of 6 and 14 is 108. Of these 83 or 76.8% receive some form of Jewish education, as follows:
 - a. Weekday School - 47
 - b. Sunday School (additional) - 16
 - c. Confirmation Class - 10
 - d. Private instruction by local Cantor - 10
2. The pupils in the Hebrew day school are divided into six classes: I-16, II-10, III-6, IV-4, V-8, VI-3. There are five classes in the Sunday School.
3. The proportion of boys and girls enrolled is approximately the same. The boys are drawn mainly from the 10-13 age group, while the girls come primarily from the 6-9 year olds.
4. While the proportion of children of Elementary School age receiving a Jewish education is far above the standard attained in comparable communities, the attendance at class sessions has not been above the average (80%).

B. Course of Study, Frequency and Length of Sessions

1. Pupils attend five times a week, each session lasting an hour. They are also expected to participate in the Junior Sabbath Services.

2. The subjects embraced in the curriculum are Hebrew (conversation, writing, grammar), with emphasis on the reading and interpretation of prayers; customs and ceremonies in the home and synagogue; Bible in the original with ability to render simple narrative passages into English.
3. Instruction in Jewish History, music, current events and contemporary Jewish problems and movements, is given on Sundays when holiday assemblies and celebrations are also conducted.
4. The course of study is generally geared to achieve the following primary objectives: The transmission of a knowledge of the Torah and the synagogue rituals, and preparation of pupils for maximum participation in public worship.

IV. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

A. Integration of Work of School with Program of Center

1. When a Religious School is conducted under the auspices of a Jewish Center, both enjoy reciprocal advantages. Their programs are enriched. A larger number of pupils is generally attracted and their stay in the Hebrew School is lengthened. The junior membership of the Center is strengthened, and new blood is fused into the governing board.
2. By absorbing pupils systematically in Center projects and activities intended for various age groups, the Jewish educational influence is extended beyond the classroom hours, Bar Mitzvah, confirmation, and graduation. This is particularly valuable to the adolescent youth who are overwhelmed with doubt and skepticism, and whose dominant outlook is one of a questioning attitude. They are aided in surmounting gracefully frustrations which generally accompany this period of stress and storm.
3. An immediate forward step would be to effect as high a degree as possible of correlation between the work of the Hebrew School classes and related cultural - recreational phases of the junior activities of the Center. This should not be difficult to attain because the leadership of the school and the Center is concentrated in one

person, thereby insuring a homogeneous approach, integrated professional direction, joint planning of all activities and sympathetic understanding of both major phases of the program.

B. Staff

1. Relieve Executive Director of Teaching Responsibility

The preoccupation of Dr. Levine with administrative responsibilities as Principal of the Weekday and Sunday Schools, and Executive Director of the Hebrew Community Center and the recently organized Jewish Federation, renders it difficult for him to function most effectively as instructor in the Hebrew School. It would be feasible to relieve him of classroom teaching.

This will make it possible for him to devote himself fully to planning and supervision, entailing regular visits to classes and group sessions, demonstration lessons and individual interviews with teachers and leaders, to correct shortcomings and provide for the professional growth and development of staff members.

2. Engage Teacher - Group Worker

In setting up the integrated program, persons should be engaged who are not only thoroughly

equipped to teach in a modern Hebrew School, but who also have a sympathetic appreciation of the significance of group work and are qualified on the basis of training and experience to conduct extra-curricular activities.

Conversely, it is taken for granted that club leaders and persons carrying on other aspects of Center work should be imbued with an affirmative Jewish point of view and possess a Jewish educational background, so as to be in a position to cooperate actively in the furtherance of the objectives of the Hebrew School, and incorporate Jewish motifs and materials in the programs of the clubs and special interest groups.

3. Regular Staff Meetings

Periodic staff conferences are to be continued. Provision will thereby be made for joint planning and execution, opportunities for exchange of views and experiences and the consideration of problems of common interest. It would also be desirable to invite, from time to time, educational authorities to discuss with the personnel specific questions which may arise, or special needs which may be revealed.

4. Institute for Teachers and Group Workers

The instructors in the Sunday School and group leaders, come in personal contact with the children and are in a strategic position to influence them directly in the moulding of their characters and outlook. They are manifestly in need of training to meet the high requirements of their position. It is, therefore, recommended that a special institute for Sunday School teachers, club leaders and directors of special interest groups be arranged

during a holiday vacation period or over a week-end. This project may be undertaken jointly with the Jewish Community Center of Portland and other interested Agencies. In view of the difficulty experienced in recruiting instructors for the Sunday School and properly equipped club leaders, such an alertness course should prove of immediate value.

C. Parent-Teachers Association

It would also be advisable to establish a Parents' Association to effect a better understanding of educational issues and problems and to engender a spirit of cooperation between the parents of pupils and junior members, teachers and group workers.

Regular meetings may be arranged with talks by recognized leaders in this field who would discuss questions of special interest to parents. The P.T.A. may also be utilized for the purpose of stimulating a larger enrollment in the Religious Schools, improving the attendance, beautifying the Junior Sabbath Services and broadening the scope of the special activity groups.

This organization may also serve as a vehicle for making it possible for parents to be more articulate in school affairs, inculcating a sympathetic appreciation

of school objectives and methods, leading ultimately to the heightening of morale and the resultant improvement of the situation.

D. Enrichment of Curriculum and Course of Study

1. Enriching elements should be added to the present basic curriculum so that the courses of study may be of direct and vital interest to the pupils, thereby enhancing the attainment of the major aims of the school.
2. The average attendance of fifteen at the Junior Religious Services is comparatively low, though the latter lasts only one hour. The situation could be considerably improved if the young people are afforded opportunities to exercise leadership in the planning and conduct of their Sabbath Services. Features should also be included that are intended especially for children, so that the Sabbath morning gathering may not be merely a curtailed version of the adult traditional Service.
3. To avoid having the Keren Ami project degenerate into a mere philanthropic undertaking or collection agency, its educational possibilities should be capitalized to the utmost, combining opportunities for rendering communal service on the children's level with the incidental acquisition of Jewish knowledge and the

inculcation of Jewish ideals.

4. The practice in the past of having a boy who attains Bar Mitzvah not only chant the weekly prophetic portion (Haftorah) at the Sabbath morning Services, but also act as Reader, is commendable.

To further encourage the pupils to acquire fluency and accuracy in Hebrew reading, a special group may be organized with an attractive name whose function it would be to motivate the acquisition of this essential skill by means of play.

This would serve to supplement the classroom instruction, so that it may not consist principally of drilling in the mechanics of reading. It is particularly important in the case of beginners who are more receptive to the impressionistic, inspirational approach, not to dampen the ardor of their initial contacts with the Jewish School by an over-emphasis of dull drill. Story telling, singing, arts and crafts, and other pleasant experiences should be interspersed to help to convey to them some idea of the beauty and attractiveness of Jewish living.

5. The Center has an excellent collection of Jewish books and periodicals in its library. It is particularly rich in standard works of Jewish reference and volumes dealing with the contemporary Jewish scene. It would be desirable that the work of the Religious School, clubs and special activity groups be coordinated more effectively with the services offered by the library. The latter could be converted into an important adjunct in vitalizing the subjects taught in

the classrooms, as well as the Jewish cultural and activity projects included in the other phases of the educational program of the Center. This presupposes the availability of a librarian, at least for part time, that would be competent to guide the children in the wider utilization of the library facilities and resources.

6. It would be desirable to place further emphasis upon the role of the Jew in American history, as well as contemporary Jewish movements and institutional life. By pursuing such a course, a deeper sense of belonging to the Jewish people would be implanted in the children and youth. It would also tend to equip them for intelligent and active participation in the diversified tasks confronting the living, pulsating American Jewish Community.

E. Broaden Scope of Survey

The scope of the present survey was necessarily circumscribed. It is recommended that a larger study be undertaken in the course of the year, which would concern itself with the various aspects of the activities of the Center, since the Hebrew School constitutes an integral part of the composite community picture, including the newly established Federation. Obviously, the best time for such a comprehensive analysis and evaluation would be when the Center program is in full swing.

The implementation of the recommendations for correlating the Hebrew School work with related Center activities will necessarily represent an adaptation of the ideal set-up under optimum conditions, to the requirements of the local situation. A realistic approach will give careful consideration to the wishes of the parents, community traditions and similar factors. The evolution of a plan most desirable for Bangor Jewry will not be achieved speedily, but will involve experimentation over a period of months or years.

By embarking upon the progressive course recommended as an outgrowth of this inquiry, the Bangor Center Hebrew School will be contributing its commensurate share towards the development of an American system of Jewish education, deeply rooted in Jewish tradition, and in consonance with modern pedagogic principles and standards.