

Why I Send My Kids to Jewish Day School

A crisis is happening throughout our country. It is a story I hear time and again from colleagues in Jewish Day Schools throughout North America. Families are forgoing Jewish Day Schools in order to “save money” by sending their children to public schools (*it is important to note here that charter schools and magnet schools are free public schools*). It is not that these families do not see value in Jewish Day Schools, in Jewish education, or desire a lack of involvement in the Jewish community, rather it is about the cost and not seeing the return on investment as being a strong enough push to keep their children in Jewish Day Schools.

Education is not simply found in textbooks, because if that were true, there would not be much of a difference from school to school. Education is not simply found in the “written curriculum” that a school shares with its parents (both current and perspective), it is also found in the community of peers (students and parents). Education can be found in a teacher’s ability to connect with a student. Abraham Joshua Heschel famously said “what we need is not more textbooks, but textpeople” [paraphrased]. This is part of the “hidden curriculum”. It is what you feel when you walk into a building, when you meet the teachers, the staff and the administration.



One of the books which impacted me greatly this summer is “[The Short and Tragic Life of Robert Peace](#)”. While I do not want to give away the essence of the book and the many messages that it invokes, I do want to focus on Robert Peace’s mother, Jackie. Jackie realized when Rob was young that she wanted an education for her son that would impact the rest of his life. Living in the poor inner city of Newark, New Jersey, in the 1990s, Jackie knew that Rob needed to go to St. Benedict’s, a private school and not the local public school. Jackie, barely scraping by month to month as a cafeteria worker in a hospital, was able to pay \$100 a month for Rob to receive a private school education. There were no vacations. Dinner consisted of a can of beans and some soup. They lived with her parents. She sacrificed to provide the best education possible for her son.

I have often referred to the ROI (Return on Investment) or the TVM (Tuition Validating Moments). It is those times when our children come home from school and blow us away with what they learned. It is those moments when their character values (a hidden curriculum gem in our school) shine through and they show compassion and caring to those around them. It is those times when they are taking a bath or shower and singing a song that they learned in class.

On July 27, in the San Diego Jewish Journal, an article by Iliana Glovinsky, illustrated why it is essential to send our children to Jewish Day Schools. The article titled, [“Seven Reasons to Send Your Kid to Jewish Day School”](#) explained the author and her husband’s decision to “tighten (their) belts” in order to instill a Jewish identity in her children. The seven reasons that she cites are; values, community, excellent education, individualized attention, a love for Israel, Jewish continuity, and well-rounded students.



I want to focus on three of Iliana’s seven reasons, excellent education, individualized attention and well-rounded students, as I believe that when separating the “Jewish” from the “School”, these three reasons remain essential. They are at the heart of what we offer at Solomon Schechter Day School of Las Vegas.

How do Jewish Day Schools differentiate themselves from public schools when it comes to excellent education, individualized attention and well-rounded students? Iliana paints the picture:

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.”

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.

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.

Just like Rob's mother, Jackie, just like Iliana Glovinsky, WE make sacrifices in order to ensure that OUR child(ren) receives the best of the written curriculum and the best of the hidden curriculum. It is not free. If it was, we would not value it in the same way.

At Schechter, we are extremely generous in our scholarships. We do this because we value our community, it is why we brought in a *Kehilla* tuition incentive program for those who work full-time for Jewish institutions in Las Vegas, it is why we raise hundreds of thousands of dollars each year to cover our financial aid, both at our gala and throughout the year. But we cannot do it, unless we convince those in our community to see its value. Please help us spread the word, help us raise the funds, help us be the textpeople that influence the next generation of Jewish leaders.