

Brandeis University

Maurice and Marilyn Cohen Center for Modern Jewish Studies

ENGAGING JEWISH TEENS: A STUDY OF NEW YORK TEENS, PARENTS AND PRACTITIONERS

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Introduction

UJA-Federation of New York is reprising an idea dormant for the past decade. The idea, simply put, is that the community has an opportunity and obligation to engage teens in Jewish life in a way that is meaningful and powerful. To that end, the Experiments in Teen Engagement Task Force of UJA-Federation of New York (ETE Task Force) was created. In close collaboration with The Jewish Education Project, the ETE Task Force seeks new answers to the longstanding questions of who our teens are and how Judaism and the Jewish community can remain important to their lives through high school. The Cohen Center for Modern Jewish Studies at Brandeis University was funded by UJA-Federation of New York to carry out research to inform the ETE Task Force's planning.

Learning from History

In the 1990s a great deal of activity swirled around the teen issue. The JCC Association received a grant from DeWitt-Wallace Reader's Digest Fund to enhance teen services in Jewish community centers. Teen commissions were established in Staten Island, Boca Raton, South Palm Beach, Richmond, Pittsburgh, St. Louis, Dayton, and the Bay Area. These commissions conducted extensive planning projects and produced reports that summarized findings from community scans; teen focus groups; interviews with community leaders, parents, and youth professionals; and the like (e.g., Sales, 1995; 1996; Tobin & Streicker, 1995). In addition to these local reports, the project yielded

field-wide reports on personnel (Sales, 1994a), policy (Sales & Tobin, 1995), practice (Klarfeld & Sales, 1996), and the concerns and values of American Jewish youth (Sales, 1994b).

At the same time, the Boston Commission on Jewish Continuity sponsored a national conference on Jewish adolescence called *Al Pi Darko...In Their Own Way*. This was followed by JESNA's Task Force on Jewish Initiatives, with its several sub-committees surveying national youth agencies, examining data on personnel working with teens, and scanning community youth services across the country.

In 1998 the Continuity Commission of UJA-Federation created the Strengthening Jewish Identity for Teens Task Force in an effort to "facilitate community-wide support for addressing the particular interests of New York teens" and to stimulate the development of more and better proposals for funding in this area. New York was not the only community grappling with these questions. In addition to the communities that had been working with the JCCA, Boston, Philadelphia, Minneapolis, Washington DC, Cleveland, Metrowest NJ, San Francisco, and Montreal were all engaged in or had recently completed a study of the teen agenda.

In essence, there were two communal approaches in play and on the planning table: capacity building and outreach or program development. There was wide

recognition that teens were busy and hard to reach and solid belief that there were action steps the community could take. Common recommendations included better recruitment and marketing of teen programs and services; use of technology; professional recruitment and training; new and expanded programs for diverse teens (by interests and by stages of development); scholarships for Israel experiences and retreats; and the creation of oversight committees, program evaluation and the like.

Why are we back to the same questions? There are several possible answers. Perhaps the prodigious work of the 1990s was too focused on planning and was never sufficiently active to change the direction of teen engagement. Perhaps too much effort was put into capacity building—something over which the community has control—and not enough into new ideas. Perhaps the ideas that did emerge, such as engagement through service learning and mentoring, were not big enough to capture the imagination and create a sea change in teen participation in Jewish life.

Perhaps the problem of teen engagement is intractable. It seems that some segments of the community “gave up.” In the late 1990s, Israel Experience Inc. experimented with two-week trips to Israel in the hopes of lowering cost and thereby increasing the number of teens who could have an Israel experience. The vision was to make an Israel experience as normative as a bar mitzvah. By 1999, however, the high school experiment was over and a far greater one was beginning with the first 5,000 college students heading off to Israel on Birthright Israel (see Saxe & Chazan, 2008). More than 200,000 young adults

have gone on Birthright, a quarter of them with connections to the UJA-Federation catchment area, and the number is growing yearly. This shift in Israel programming is emblematic of the larger trend. Teen commissions and taskforces ended their work and researchers stopped studying Jewish teens. The last large-scale systematic study was published in 2000 (Kadushin et al.). Perhaps we hit a wall and there was nothing new to learn.

New Attempt

The current ETE Task Force puts new energy into the teen challenge, and the current research puts us back into questioning mode.

The study is based on teens who celebrated a bar/bat mitzvah between 2006 and 2009 and were in 9th, 10th or 11th grade in school year 2010-2011, the time of data collection. Knowing that all of these teens had started on the *bimah* at age 12 or 13, the purpose was to find out how many had continued with Jewish education and involvement and how many had left the path. The selection method produced a sample of Jewishly-educated teens from affiliated families; in other words, those most likely to become or remain engaged. We can assume that the probability of reaching the remainder of the Jewish teen population, which began adolescence at a further distance from Judaism and the Jewish community, is even lower than it is for the teens in our sample.

In some sense, this sample continues to represent the “elites.” Almost all of the families have maintained their synagogue membership. About two-thirds of the children currently receive formal Jewish

education, either in a Jewish day school, Hebrew high school, or other part-time program. A similar proportion of teen respondents identify with a Jewish denomination and are proud to be Jewish. Some 45% are involved in a Jewish extracurricular program, most for one or two hours a week. At the same time, the results are disquieting. About half care about having a strong Jewish identity. Even fewer very much feel part of the Jewish people or feel it is important to be involved in a Jewish community or to observe Jewish rituals.

Engaging Jewish Teens employed multiple surveys in order to view Jewish teens and their relationship to Jewish life from three perspectives: that of the teens, their parents, and communal professionals involved in the work of teen engagement. This triangulation strengthens the results of the study, sometimes pointing to agreement across perspectives and other times to differences. Youth professionals give relatively low ratings to the support they get from parents, and parents give relatively low ratings to the importance of their child being involved in a Jewish community. Parents believe they have great sway over their children's decisions about Jewish engagement; their teenage children, however, do not grant them such influence. Any one perspective fails to give the full picture.

The research benefited from the review and input of a Youth Professional Panel, convened under the auspices of The Jewish Education Project. The panel was comprised of 12 outstanding youth professionals whose positions entail engaging teens in Jewish life. Panelists represented the denominational and Zionist youth movements as well as diverse work environments, including day schools,

synagogues, Hebrew high schools, Jewish community centers, and independent youth organizations. The panel met once in August 2010 and once in December 2010 to consult on the design of the research and pilot test survey instruments.

During Fall 2010, panel members also carried out face-to-face interviews with teens, male and female, in grades 9 to 11, both current and potential participants in their programs. The interviews reached out beyond the "usual suspects" in order to bring new perspective to the study. Interviews lasted about a half hour and covered three topics: school, extracurricular activities, and Jewish engagement. All totaled, 65 interviews were conducted. These interviews helped us understand the importance of a "special teacher" at school, the early formation of the close friendship circle, and the continuation of Jewish home practices during a time when the teen's involvement in Jewish activities has dwindled or disappeared. These and other insights were incorporated into our survey instruments and informed our interpretation of results.

Outline of the Report

The first section of this report offers a review of the recent social scientific literature on adolescents and on youth professionals. Included are findings on American society writ large and on the Jewish community in particular. The second section describes the methods of the current study and the next sections present the findings, first for parents and their teens and then for the professionals who work to engage teens in Jewish life. The final section presents an interpretation of the findings and their application to the work of the ETE Task Force.

Background

Our review of the literature is presented in two sections, the first focusing on teens in North America and the second on youth professionals. Each of these provide background on the design and content of the current study and comparison points for current findings.

American (Jewish) Teens

The literature review begins with the research of the 1990s, a time of concerted focus on the teen agenda both in the United States overall and in the Jewish community in particular. It then looks at more recent research, beginning with the Jewish Adolescent Study, the last systematic study of Jewish teens, conducted in Boston just over a decade ago (Kadushin et al., 2000). This study, which strove to understand how Jewish teens experience their lives in the open society of America, was based on over 1,000 teens from non-Orthodox Jewish congregations and day schools in Eastern Massachusetts. Its findings essentially confirmed that American Jewish teens were very much like any other American teen and its conclusion was that teens' Jewish identity could not be understood apart from an understanding of their secular lives. The study found no difference between Jewish and non-Jewish American teens in terms of their immersion in school, rates of participation in extracurricular activities, work for pay, and risk behaviors (i.e., sexual activity and drug use).

The review also presents findings from recent large-scale studies of American youth, particularly those concerned with religion and the impact of extracurricular activities on adolescent development.

Teens in the 1990s

Research in the 1990s described American teens as an ambitious group. Most expected to go to college and to work in professional jobs. Some researchers considered these ambitions to be unrealistic and noted that schools often did not meet the developmental needs of these teens (Hine, 1991; Schneider & Stevenson, 1999, both cited in Kadushin, et al.). The research debunked the prevailing view of adolescent rebellion and showed that parent-child relationships held steady through the teenage years for the great majority of families (Steinberg, 1990, cited in Kadushin et al.). Research also demonstrated that parents had strong influence on their teenager's values, aspirations, and behavior (Sneider & Stevenson, 1999, cited in Kadushin et al.).

American teenagers then, as now, spent significant time in the school environment and their lives were largely shaped by that institution (Eckert, 1989, cited in Kadushin et al.). In addition, 80% of American adolescents worked for pay during their high-school years, typically 15 to 20 hours a week, a large increase over the statistics from the 1970s (Sneider & Stevenson, 1999). As well, teens had high

levels of participation in extracurricular activities and low levels of participation in “unstructured individual pastimes” (such as reading for pleasure) (Zill et al., 1995, cited in Kadushin et al.).

In terms of religion, the extant research supported the significant place of religious beliefs and values in the lives of adolescents (Bachman et al., 1997; Gallup & Bezilla, 1992, cited in Kadushin et al.). However, considering rates and intensity of participation in Jewish day schools, synagogue, and youth groups, Kadushin et al. concluded that Jewish teens spent a relatively small amount of time dedicated to purely Jewish involvements as they moved back and forth between the Jewish and secular spheres of life.

Teens in the 2000s

Although American adolescents have been among the most closely studied people in the world, a current perusal of the literature shows how globalized the research has become with a preponderance of articles focusing on adolescents in various societies around the world and now, increasingly, on adolescents of diverse ethnicities and sexual orientations. We focused our search on studies most closely aligned with our population.

Families. The Jewish Adolescent Study found most families to be intact two-parent families, relatively affluent and well-educated in comparison with the general American population (Kadushin et al., 2000). The present study used frequency of family dinners as a measure of intactness. Family dinners have been shown to have positive effects on children’s connections to their parents, diet, risk behaviors, and

school performance (Eisenberg et al., 2004). A recent study on the impact of family dinners on teens shows that nationally 58% of teens have dinner with their families at least five times a week, a number that has remained consistent over the past decade. Although difficult to establish cause and effect, these teens, in comparison with those who have fewer than three family dinners a week, have higher quality relationships with their parents and siblings. They also attend religious services more often and are less likely to use or abuse tobacco, alcohol, or marijuana (Eisenberg et al., 2004).

Religious Life. The National Study of Youth and Religion (NSYR), conducted from 2001 to 2005, finds religion to be a significant presence in the lives of many American teens (Smith & Denton, 2005). By and large, American teens are affiliated with religious institutions, attend worship services regularly, and embrace different aspects of religious identity (Cnaan, Gelles, & Sinha, 2004; Pearce & Denton, 2011; Smith & Denton, 2005). The NSYR sheds little light on the beliefs and practices of Jewish teens given their small number in the sample. Nonetheless, it does find that Jewish teens are disproportionately at the low-end of the religiosity scale in categories descriptively labeled “avoiders” and “atheists” (Pearce & Denton, 2011).

The most important social influence on the religious and spiritual lives of adolescents is their parents and, commensurately, the religious lives of adolescents correlate highly with their parents’ practices and affiliations (Pearce & Denton, 2011; Smith & Denton, 2005). Indeed, one of the strongest findings in the Jewish Adolescent Study was the close resemblance between

the teenagers' Jewish values and practices and those of their parents. In this case, however, the resemblance led to "a moderate version" of Jewish life. Like their parents, these teens cared about being Jewish and about Jewish history and culture, but they eschewed particularistic practices that would set them apart from the general culture.

Religiosity is fairly stable over time, with little change evidenced between younger and older adolescents (Pearce & Denton, 2011). It is also stable across cohorts. Monitoring the Future, a national longitudinal survey of American high school seniors, finds that seniors today are remarkably similar to those surveyed 30 years ago on every dimension measured—individualism, self-esteem, locus of control, hopelessness, happiness, life satisfaction, anti-social behavior, time spent working or watching television, political activity, social status, and the like. Also unchanged is the degree of importance teens assign to religion in their lives (Trzesniewski & Donnellan, 2010). In sum, religiosity is fairly stable across the teenage years and across generational cohorts.

In terms of Jewish teens, this conclusion may describe their "religiosity," but it does not match their trajectory of engagement in Jewish education. The Jewish Adolescent Study found that after the precipitous post-bar/bat mitzvah drop off, participation in Jewish education—both formal and informal—declined each year from 7th through 12th grades (Kadushin et al., 2000). This decline occurred despite the fact that just over half of the parents either required or strongly encouraged post-bar/bat mitzvah Jewish education. One contributing factor was the negative attitudes toward Jewish education and

Jewish life expressed by many of the teen respondents, especially boys.

Studies of Jewish teens involved in specific Jewish programs suggest that the adage of "the more the more" continues to hold today. Involved teens tend to have high levels of Jewish education (i.e., sufficient for a bar/bat mitzvah) and family synagogue affiliation rates (Cohen & Blitzer, 2007; Groeneman Research & Consulting, 2011). Studies differ on the question of whether formal affiliations are linked to continued engagement in Jewish life. A recent study found that teens involved in programs at a Jewish community center are generally more engaged in Jewish life than teens whose families do not belong to JCCs (Cohen & Blitzer, 2007). An evaluation study of a Moving Traditions pilot project for teenage boys, in contrast, found that while participants in the group were technically affiliated (families belonged to a synagogue, participants celebrated a bar mitzvah), few of them were highly involved in Jewish groups or institutions (Reichert & Ravitch, 2010).

Extracurricular engagement. The research on teen participation in extracurricular activities and youth group points to the critical importance of these activities to life success.

Overall, participation in extracurricular activities is associated with positive academic, psychological, and behavioral outcomes (Barber, Eccles, & Stone, 2001; Fredricks & Eccles, 2006). Research shows that high school students engaged in extracurricular activities achieved better educational outcomes than non-participants even after controlling for social class, gender, and intellectual

aptitude. High school extracurricular participation is associated with a higher grade point average, and greater likelihood of college matriculation and college graduation (Eccles, et al., 2003). Different benefits appear to accrue from different activities. Sports and arts most often develop initiative while service activities more often develop teamwork, positive relationships, and social capital (Larson, Hansen, & Moneta, 2006). Participation also decreases the likelihood of depression and mental illnesses (Mahoney, Cairns, & Farmer, 2003). In addition, the benefits of extracurricular activities have been found to extend into young adult civic engagement (Zaff et al., 2003).

The research additionally shows the following:

- Participation in extracurricular activities is widespread. The Jewish Adolescent Study found that, like any American teen, the overwhelming majority of the Jewish teens (86%) participated in school-based extracurricular activities, especially sports, and many (60%) held leadership roles. Their level of participation varied little by grade or gender (Kadushin et al., 2000).
- Approximately half of American teens participate in religious youth groups at some point during adolescence. This number varies from a low of 32% of Catholic youth to a high of 58% of Mormons (Smith et al., 2002). The Jewish Adolescent Study placed monthly youth group participation at around 20% through middle and high school.
- For American teens, participation in religious youth group is highly correlated with attendance at worship services (Smith et al., 2002). For Jewish teens it is most highly correlated with enrollment in a formal Jewish education program (Kadushin et al., 2000). Teens who are engaged in these religion-based activities reap developmental benefits including identity development, emotional health, social skills, teamwork, and adult networks and social capital (Larson, Hansen, & Moneta, 2006).
- Teens engaged in these programs are also less likely to be depressed; to have trouble in school; or to engage in risk behaviors, including substance abuse (cigarettes, drugs, alcohol), violence, and sexual activity (Regnerus, 2007; Sinha, Cnaan, & Gelles, 2007; Smith & Faris, 2002). For American teens in general, religiosity is as great an influence on sexual behavior as parents, social class, and race (Regnerus, 2007). This appears not to be the case for Jewish teens, however. The Jewish Adolescent Study found no significant relationship between sexual activity or drug use and denomination, home observance, or participation in formal Jewish education (Kadushin et al., 2000).

Teens and technology. Earlier studies measured time spent watching television but made no mention of computers, smart phones, the Internet, or social networking sites which had yet to assume their dominant role in everyday life. More recent studies confirm that about 93% of American teens use the Internet, most

often for the purposes of social contact through text messaging, Facebook, and other social media (Pew Internet and American Life Project, 2009). As teens get older, online communication and closeness to friends increases (Valkenburg & Peter, 2007).

Adolescent boys and girls. The large body of literature on adolescents and gender shows male and female adolescents to be similar in many ways and significantly different in others.

- In national studies of American teens and religion, girls score somewhat higher than boys in terms of religious service attendance, importance of religious faith in daily life, involvement in youth group, and identification with a particular religion (Desmond, Morgan, & Kikuchi, 2010; Smith & Denton, 2005; Smith et al., 2003; Wallace et al., 2003). The Jewish Adolescent Study found that girls participated in formal Jewish education in greater proportions than boys in every grade except 9th. Boys rejected their supplementary Jewish education, and with it continued involvement in Jewish life, more decisively than did girls (Kadushin et al., 2000).
- Girls and boys spend equal amounts of time on extracurricular activities, between seven and eight hours a week (Luthar, Shoum, & Brown, 2006). Within that time, boys are more likely to be involved in sports and girls in non-athletic school clubs (Fredricks & Eccles, 2006). This finding is mirrored in Jewish settings as well where girls are found to be more interested in social programming while boys prefer sports and “action-related” activities (Ravitch, 2002). Girls also participate in a wider variety of extracurricular activities than do boys (Simpkins, Eccles & Becnel, 2008). Both equally benefit from their respective participation with a boost to their self-esteem. Perhaps because of their emphasis on sports, boys are more likely than girls to have high levels of physical self-esteem and confidence in their bodies (Gadbois & Bowker, 2007).
- Considerable behavioral differences between males and females have also been found in research based in educational and classroom settings. (For a full review, see Gurian & Stevens, 2004.) For current purposes, suffice it to say that boys are less engaged with school and more often than girls experience academic failure. Girls generally have higher grades and report more attachment to school and to important adults in their lives (Luthar, Shoum, & Brown, 2006; Woolley & Bowen, 2007; Zamboanga et al., 2011).
- According to the Jewish Adolescent Study, academic demands increase over the course of the high school years as does the teens’ sense of competition for grades. Commensurately, the amount of time spent on homework increases year by year. Boys spend less time on homework than do girls but still show the same degree of increase each year (Kadushin et al., 2000).
- Boys are more likely than girls to engage in risk behaviors of all sorts: aggression, substance use, and risky sexual behavior (Chun & Mobley, 2010; Zamboanga et al., 2011). At the same

time, mitigating factors such as high parental expectations and participation in school clubs and sports are more likely to reduce risk behaviors in boys than in girls (Fredricks & Eccles, 2006; Luthar, Shoum, & Brown, 2006).

- Boys and girls spend similar amounts of time on the Internet—an average of an hour a day—although boys are more than twice as likely as girls to spend this time playing electronic games (Willoughby, 2008). There have been few studies of adolescent on-line communication, but it appears that gender differences are relatively small (Cassell et al., 2006).

Youth Professionals

The current survey of youth professionals is based on *quality of work life* (QWL). Although there are many definitions and metrics for quality of work life (e.g., Levine, Taylor, & Davis, 1984; Mirvis & Lawler, 1984; Taylor, 1978), it is widely maintained that a high quality of work life is linked to employee satisfaction, loyalty, and productivity and hence to organization growth and success (Heskett, Sasser, & Schlesinger, 1997; Kopelman, Brief, & Guzzo, 1990). It stands to reason that youth professionals who are satisfied with their jobs and with the people they work with, who feel well supported by the organization, and who feel respected and appreciated by management and lay leadership will commit to the organization and to building a strong and successful teen program.

In the private sector, QWL surveys have been a tool of organization development.

Used in the spirit of action research—in which an organization engages in a cycle of data collection, feedback, planning, implementation, and evaluation—these surveys have helped identify and solve workplace problems at the same time that they have contributed to theories of individual behavior and organizational life (Austin & Bartunek, 2006; Mirvis, 2006).

Our task in *Engaging Jewish Teens* was to understand who is professionally involved in the work of teen engagement and the extent to which they have the quality of work life needed to build this as a field of practice. Our purpose from the beginning was applied research, to develop an analysis that would become part of communal understanding, planning, and action. The QWL rubric suited the project well.

Recruitment and Retention

The literature on professionals working within the Jewish community has largely focused on recruitment and retention, “chronic” issues that go back to the 1950s. Educators at a 1956 conference on the topic ascribed the problem to low status, poor recruitment procedures, and inadequate chances for advancement (Kelner et al., 2004). These themes continued through taskforces and commissions in the 1980s, initiatives in the 1990s, and public conversation in the 2000s (e.g., Edell, 2008; Flexner & Gold, 2003; Jewish Life Network, 2004; Mandel et al., 1987; Moses, 2001; Schaap & Goodman, 2006). Debate has circled on whether the personnel problem is most acute at entry or upper levels; whether it concerns quantity or quality of personnel; and whether its

source is professional, organizational, or systemic. Much of this activity has taken place with little systematic data on vacancies in the Jewish sector, turnover rates and their causes, career trajectories, and the like.

The 2005 Jewish Sector's Workforce Study (JSWS) provided a uniquely comprehensive study of Jewish communal professionals across communities and sectors (Kelner et al., 2005). It found turnover rates that exceeded prediction and a large percentage (one-third to one-fourth, depending on position) of Jewish professionals who had actively explored other job possibilities over the past two years. Of these, many had thought about leaving the Jewish sector entirely. The 2006 Educators in Jewish Schools Study (EJSS), a national study of educators in Jewish day and part-time schools, estimated a 25% turnover rate in Jewish education (JESNA, 2006). A national study of informal youth educators conducted in the mid-1990s measured the intention to turn over and found that 23% of professionals working in informal Jewish education definitely intended to leave their present job within the next two years; another 31% said they were "quite likely" to do so. About half of these workers were intending to look for a job outside of Jewish organizations (Sales, 1998). Lowest turnover rates have been found in the Jewish community center field, where only 10% are new to their position, a proxy measure for turnover (Schor & Cohen, 2002).

Quality of Work Life in the Jewish Sector

A key issue in staff retention is quality of work life. In general, those less satisfied

with their jobs are more likely to consider looking for work elsewhere. This relationship holds even for temporary workers. Our study of Jewish summer camp staff, for example, found three primary factors contributing to the decision to return to camp the following summer: overall satisfaction with the camp experience, contact with camp colleagues during the year (the "social glue"), and age (Sales, Samuel, & Boxer, 2011).

Studies in the Jewish sector consistently find high overall job satisfaction (JESNA, 2006; Kelner et al., 2005; Sales, 1998; Schor & Cohen, 2002). The important question is which aspects of the job are most likely to satisfy and which are most likely to fuel turnover. Across these various studies, the highest positive most often relates to mission—the chance to "make a difference" and "to impact the life paths of young people." In other words, the key motivator is the work itself and not the organizational context. High marks also tend to go to co-workers in the Jewish world.

The two aspects most likely to lead people to consider leaving their current positions in the Jewish community are dissatisfaction with advancement opportunities and dissatisfaction with the recognition they receive for their work (JESNA, 2006; Kelner et al., 2005; Sales, 1998; Schor & Cohen, 2002). Although pay tends to be the lowest rated item across studies, feelings of dissatisfaction with pay are so widespread that they are poor predictors of turnover (Kelner et al., 2005). Notably, in the education world, organizations were also given low marks for how they support their educators in terms of making the best use of their talents and

giving them the support they need to do their jobs well and develop professionally (JESNA, 2006).

A 1998 survey of youth professionals, the closest population to the current study, surfaced additional issues faced by those involved in youth-serving organizations. For one, respondents to this survey felt that they were “on call” all the time with poor boundaries between their personal and professional time. Almost all said that they were often expected to work beyond their regular days or hours and indeed there was noticeable difference between the hours of their contract and hours actually worked. Only half felt the amount of work they were expected to do was reasonable. And commensurately, half were having feelings of professional burnout (Sales, 1998), another significant predictor of turnover.

Background of Jewish Communal Workers

Two characteristics of workers in the Jewish community consistently emerge in the research. Studies invariably find a predominance of women in almost every job category and setting—whether in Jewish schools, camps, youth groups or

movements, JCCs, synagogues, federations, or other settings (Cohen, 2010; JESNA, 2006; Kelner et al., 2005; Sales, 1998; Sales, Samuel, & Boxer 2011; Shor & Cohen, 2002).

Studies also confirm that camps, religious schools, and youth groups are primary gateways into Jewish communal work. Large percentages of the staff of Jewish community centers, overnight camps, and part-time and day schools have participated in formal and informal Jewish educational experiences (Cohen, 2010; Cohen et al., 1995; JESNA, 2006; Sales, Samuel, & Boxer, 2011; Shor & Cohen, 2002). Their participation rates often exceed those of the broader Jewish population, putting them in the category of Jewish “elites” (Sales, Samuel, & Boxer, 2011). The Jewish Sector Workforce Study concluded that these experiences provide local Jewish communities with about half of their Jewish personnel (Kelner et al., 2005). Jewish camp, youth group, and other informal Jewish educational experiences appear to be especially influential on the decision to work in Jewish education (JESNA, 2006).

Method

Engaging Jewish Teens included surveys of New York teens and their parents, two important—and distinctive—perspectives on the lives of Jewish teens, as well as a survey of Jewish communal professionals working to engage teens in Jewish life. The parent and teen surveys were designed in conjunction so that it is possible to understand the current reality through the eyes of the parents and of their teenage children. The parent survey was conducted first as one of its purposes was to gain parental consent to survey their child. The teen survey followed. A summary of the methods employed in these three surveys follows. Full methodological details are available at <http://www.brandeis.edu/cmjs/publications.html>.

Parent Survey

The parent survey had three purposes: (1) to verify the child's eligibility for the study; (2) to gather information on the parents' background and to solicit their views on their teenager's activities and their aspirations and concerns about this child; and (3) to obtain permission to survey the child.

The focus of the study was current 9th, 10th, and 11th graders who celebrated a bar/bat mitzvah in synagogues located in Brooklyn, Manhattan, Nassau County, or Westchester between 2006 and 2009. Twenty-eight synagogues in these areas were sampled and all families included on the b'nei mitzvah lists provided by these synagogues were surveyed. Families with more than one teen in these grades were

asked to respond to the survey in terms of the teen whose birthday was next on the calendar. Given that the entire sample of teens had some Jewish education and formally became a bar/bat mitzvah, the study was able to measure the degree to which they have remained on a Jewish path from this common starting point.

The four geographic areas were selected to represent diverse settings in the UJA-Federation of New York catchment area. Working with a full list of synagogues, a sampling frame was designed to include Reform, Conservative, Orthodox, and other synagogues within each area. Some synagogues signed on to the study immediately, but others were reluctant to share their lists of eligible households. The recruitment of synagogues for the study extended over several months. It eventually required a replacement strategy in which selected synagogues that chose not to participate were replaced in the sample with a synagogue of the same denomination, geographic area, and size. The final sample is based on 28 congregations, whose combined lists of bar/bat mitzvah families totaled 2,720 households.

Alternating "Parent 1" and "Parent 2," one parent in each of the 2,720 households was selected to receive the parent survey. The extended synagogue recruitment process necessitated administering the parent survey in four waves, beginning in October 2010 and concluding in April 2011. Participants in each wave received multiple communications via email and

telephone urging their response. A total of 1,383 parents responded. Of these 258, or 19% of respondents, were ineligible for the study. The final sample includes 1,125 parents, a 51% response rate (AAPOR RR3).

Teen Survey

The teen survey was designed to gather information about the teens' activities, family environment, and values and concerns in regard to both secular and Jewish issues. Teens were asked many of the same questions we had asked their parents, so it was possible to match their responses and assess the confluence or divergence of the two points of view.

Only teens with parental permission were eligible to participate in the survey. Of the responding parents, 1,056 answered the permission question: 693 granted permission for us to contact their child; 363 denied permission. As noted above, the survey was limited to one child per household. Those who granted permission were significantly more likely than those who denied permission to be engaged in Jewish life. They were more likely to have received formal Jewish education themselves, to attend synagogue events with their family, and to send their teen to Jewish part-time school. Permission was also more likely from the parents of girls and the parents in Conservative Jewish households. The teen sample was thus skewed toward more Jewishly identified and involved households.

The teen survey was administered in three waves from March 2011 through June 2011. Eligible teens with parental permission received multiple email

reminders to complete their surveys. Parents were also contacted during this time in the hopes that they would help motivate their teen's participation. In addition, the teens were incentivized with a chance to win a \$100 gift card to American Express, Amazon.com, or iTunes. Each week for 11 weeks, a survey respondent was randomly selected to win. All totaled, this effort yielded 344 completed surveys, a 50% response rate.

The 344 teens who responded to the survey differed significantly from those who had parental permission but did not respond. Girls were significantly more likely to respond than boys. Teens from more engaged families in terms of Shabbat dinners, regular attendance at services, and the parents' own Jewish educational background were also more likely to respond than other teens. As well, teens receiving formal Jewish education (either day school or part-time school) and teens who had visited Israel were more likely to participate than those without these experiences. As a result, the final sample was skewed even further toward the Jewishly engaged or "elite" teens.

For the purposes of analysis, both parent and teen data were weighted to compensate for over- and under-sampling of specific cases relative to the overall New York synagogue population. Respondents were divided into four strata based on their synagogue membership (Orthodox, Conservative, Reform, unaffiliated) and synagogue location (Manhattan, Brooklyn, Nassau County, Westchester) and weighted accordingly. Analysis of parent items is based on the full sample of 1,125 parents. Analyses that look at household data or juxtaposes the views of teens and parents

are based on the 344 parents whose children also participated in the study.

Beyond the overall description of these teens and their parents is the question of whether or not high school experiences and Jewish connections differ between boys and girls, between 9th graders and older students, and between those who attend public schools and those in Jewish day schools or other independent schools. As seen in Table 1, our sample permits these analyses. It should be noted that the original sample was 52% female (close to the actual number in the population). Girls, however, responded to the survey in higher numbers than boys resulting in a final sample that is disproportionately female.

It should also be noted that response rates differed greatly by geographic area. The majority of respondents live in Westchester (57%) or Manhattan (25%). Far fewer live in Nassau County (15%) or Brooklyn (4%). Analysis by geographic area is therefore limited to comparisons between “urban” and “suburban” teens.

Finally, we would note that the sample represents little of the Jewish cultural diversity to be found in New York. Some 95% of the parents were born in the United States and only small numbers were born in Israel, Canada, the FSU, or other countries.

Table 1: Teen Key Demographics

	Percent
<i>Gender</i>	
Male	44%
Female	56%
<i>Grade</i>	
9 th	25%
10 th	41%
11 th	35%
<i>School</i>	
Public school	68%
Jewish day school	15%
Independent school	17%

Note: Percentages do not total 100% due to rounding.

Teen Practitioner Survey

The survey of youth professionals offers a third perspective on Jewish teens and possibilities for engaging them in Jewish life. The survey gathered data on the backgrounds and quality of work life of practitioners whose jobs involve teen engagement. It also asked about their vision for the future of their teen programs and what it would take to make that vision a reality. The population for the survey was all such practitioners in the geographic areas of the overall study (Brooklyn, Manhattan, Nassau County, and Westchester), whether they were paid professionals or volunteers. These practitioners have the job of engaging the same kinds of students as those who responded to the teen survey. To be eligible for the study, practitioners needed to be doing informal Jewish education in an organization whose programs and services primarily occur during the school year.

In developing the sample for the study, we sought lists not only from The Jewish Education Project but also from all Zionist youth groups and movements, synagogues, denominational and pluralist youth groups (NFTY, USY, NCSY, BBYO), Jewish community center teen programs, Jewish

day schools, Hebrew high schools, and “alternative” organizations (e.g., JTeen, Moving Traditions). Lists from various sources were combined, de-duplicated, and then verified by means of Internet searches and telephone calls to organizations. All duplicates, errors, or missing information were corrected prior to launching the survey on March 1, 2011. The final list contained the names of 465 youth professionals along with their email address and the name and location of their organization. Nineteen of these individuals were never reached due to erroneous email addresses or spam filters.

Ongoing and vigorous attempts were made to get as high a response rate as possible from the remaining names on the list. Participants received over a dozen communications from the research team, UJA-Federation of New York, and prominent colleagues in the field. Late respondents were offered a monetary incentive in the form of a raffle. At the end of seven weeks, the survey was closed. Responses were received from 244 participants (53% response rate). Fourteen of the respondents did not meet the eligibility requirements for the survey. Reported results are based on a total of 230 eligible respondents.

Teens and their Parents

We begin from the vantage point of the current or potential targets of the community's Jewish engagement efforts, the teens and their parents. We first present data from the parent survey that describe the parents and the households in which the teens are being raised. We next look at the major aspects of the teens' lives: school, friends, and extracurricular activities. We then turn our attention to Jewish concerns: the teens' Jewish activities, practices, identities, and their views—both positive and negative—of being Jewish.

Who Are the Teens?

The answer to “who are the teens?” is found in the parental data about households and in the teen data on Jewish experiences outside the home.

Parents and the Households They Create

Similar to past research in the Jewish community, most of the teens in our study come from intact families with well-educated parents. The parents not only serve as models when it comes to values and achievement, but also in terms of the implicit messages they give about Jewish life by their own actions and histories.

Intact families. The great majority of the teens live with two parents (92%). The others live with a single parent who never married (3%) or a single parent who is separated, divorced, or widowed (5%).

About 2% of the teens split their time between two households. The study used family dinners as a behavioral measure of intactness, as past research has shown a strong association between family dinners and the quality of child-parent relationships. Importantly, over three-fourths of the teens in our study (77%) usually have family dinners, a rate significantly higher than the national figure (58%).

The parents are models of educational achievement. Half hold a professional or doctorate degree and another 30% have a Masters degree. Almost all of the others have a Bachelors degree.

The parents are also largely engaged in the workforce. Some 34% of the teens are in households in which both parents work fulltime. Another 29% have a parent who works fulltime and one who works part-time. About 31% have a parent who is a homemaker, student, retired, or otherwise not in the workforce. Of all parents (including respondent and spouse), only 6% are unemployed but actively seeking work, a number well below local unemployment figures.

Jewish ambience. The intermarriage rate of this sample is 6%. Parents have significant Jewish backgrounds, particularly in terms of Jewish summer camp experiences and visits to Israel (Table 2).

Table 2: Parent's Jewish Experiences

<i>Have at least one parent who...</i>	
has been to Israel	79%
attended an overnight camp with Jewish educational or Shabbat programming	60%
worked at an overnight camp with Jewish educational or Shabbat programming	27%
participated in an intensive Jewish adult education program	27%
works professionally for a Jewish organization	10%
<i>Responding parent...¹</i>	
attended Jewish day school	17%
attended Jewish part-time school	67%
participated in a Jewish youth group during high school (somewhat/very much)	40%
involved in Jewish activities during college years (somewhat/very much)	24%

¹ These figures are based on information about the responding parent only and therefore should be considered the minimal level of background within a family.

On average, parents attended day school for 10 years and part-time school for 7 years. If we put these figures together, we find that 78% of parents received some type of formal Jewish education growing up.

With this as background, it is easy to understand how 80% of the parents say that being Jewish is very important in their lives today. The importance, however, extends to the celebration of Jewish holidays but not to observance of Shabbat. Moreover, even though these parents have had Jewish education, only one-fourth of the teens say that their parents frequently carry on family conversations related to Jewish topics (Table 3).

When asked the same questions about the family's Jewish actions, parents and teens gave remarkably similar answers. For example, 36% of parents said that the family attends Jewish worship services together at least once a month, and 34% of the teens reported that they had gone to synagogue services at least once a month in the past year.

Teens' Jewish Background

Given our sampling frame, all of responding teens had a bar/bat mitzvah and most of their families currently belong to a congregation. The survey looked at engagement in Jewish life beyond these two foundations and found generally high levels.

Table 3: Family Jewish Actions

<i>Teen Responses:</i>	
Light Hanukkah candles (every year)	96%
Celebrate the High Holidays together (every year)	96%
Hold or attend a Passover seder (every year)	89%
Share special meals on Friday night (usually/always)	46%
Have conversations related to Judaism, the Jewish people, or Israel (usually/always)	25%
<i>Parent responses:</i>	
Family belongs to a congregation	99%
Family members take part in activities at a synagogue, Chabad, etc. (monthly or more)	46%
Family attends worship services together (monthly or more)	36%
Family belongs to a JCC or YMHA-YWHA	21%
Family members take part in activities at a JCC (monthly or more)	8%

Note: In order to combine responses from parents and teens, parent figures are based on the 344 parents whose teens responded to the Teen Survey.

Jewish experiences outside of the home include both formal and informal educational programs. These experiences begin in preschool, where 68% of the teens in our study had their first formal Jewish education, and continues to today with 64% engaged in Jewish learning either through formal school or through a Jewish youth group or club. (See Table 4.)

Summer experiences. Just over 56% of the teens have had a summer experience grounded in Jewish life. Over half of the teens (55%) have attended a summer camp with Jewish educational or Shabbat programming. (About 37% attended a camp with no Jewish content and the other 9% have never been to summer camp.)

Table 4: Teens' Jewish Educational Experiences

<i>Formal Jewish education</i>	
Attended Jewish nursery or preschool	68%
Attend a Jewish day school	15%
Attend a Jewish part-time school	42%
<i>Informal Jewish education</i>	
Attended a Jewish summer program	56%
Have visited Israel	55%
Involved in a Jewish youth group or club	45%
Have a formal leadership role in a Jewish youth group or club	15%

Teens who attended a Jewish camp have done so for an average of five years and 40% of them say they are very likely to return as a CIT or counselor in the next few summers. These teens are not just campers but they have “camp careers.” A small number (9%) have also been on a Jewish summer program that is neither camp nor Israel experience (e.g., USY on Wheels, Genesis at Brandeis).

School experiences. The parents are assuring that their teens receive far more formal Jewish education than they, themselves, did as adolescents. At one time or another, 43% of the teens have attended a Jewish day school (versus 17% of the responding parents) and 85% have attended a Jewish part-time school (versus 67% of the responding parents). Those who have attended a Jewish day school spent an average of 9 years there. For those who have attended a part-time school, the average is 7.8 years. As seen in Table 4, however, much of this experience occurred in earlier grades, as far fewer of these children are currently enrolled in a Jewish school.

Consistent with figures on day school enrollments, the vast majority of the day school students in our study attend an Orthodox school (70%). Others are in Conservative (20%) or pluralist/nondenominational schools (10%). There is no Reform-affiliated high school in the New York catchment area and, commensurately, none of the teens attend schools associated with Reform Judaism.

Israel. The teens are familiar with Israel. Over half (55%) have visited the country,

the vast majority on a family trip. Many more (71%) plan to travel to Israel within the next four years.

The Big Two: School and Friends

At the heart of both the teen and parent surveys are two sets of questions, one about life values, the other about concerns. The former questions are aspirational and describe what is seen as important to or for these teens. The latter present the converse and describe worries or concerns. The results make clear that teenage life is largely framed by school and friends.

Values

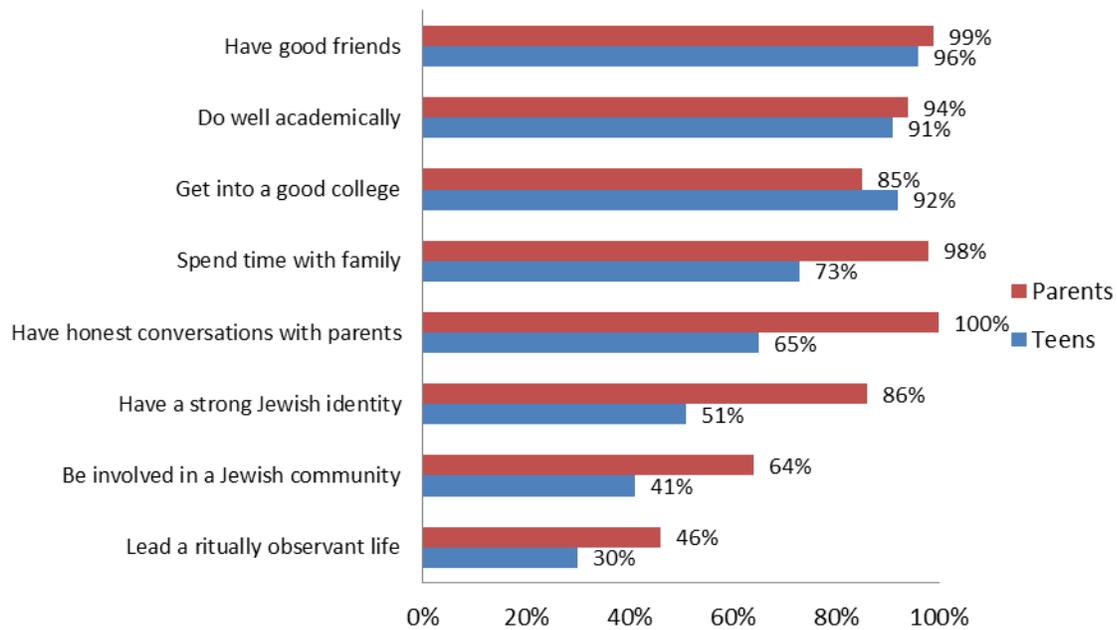
When asked to rate how important various aspects of life are to them, the teens gave top ranking to their friendships (Table 5). The importance of friendships is clearly not a question of popularity, which is in last place on the list. Rather than seeking popularity, which suggests positive regard within broad social networks, teens value the close friendship circle.

Just as teens were asked what was most important to them in their lives, their parents were asked what they want for their child. Overall, parents and teens agree that friendships and academics are of top importance, but they differ on the importance of family and Jewish life. The most stunning differences concern the importance of honest conversations between the child and his or her parents and the importance of a strong Jewish identity—both items show over a 30-point difference between teens and parents (Figure 1).

Table 5: Teens' Life Values

	% Very/extremely important
Have good friends	96
Get into a good college	92
Do well academically	91
Spend time with family	73
Help others or make the world a better place	71
Have honest conversations with parents	65
Have a strong a Jewish identity	51
Be actively involved in a Jewish community	41
Lead a ritually observant Jewish life	30
Be popular	16

Figure 1: What's Important to Teens versus What Their Parents Want for Them (% very or extremely important)



Note: Parent figures are based on the 344 parents whose teens responded to the Teen Survey.

Within families, it is clear that teens and parents often see the value structure quite differently. Table 6 is based on a calculation of the differential within each family between the response of the parent and the response of the child.² Lowest levels of agreement concern family dynamics and Jewish identity and practices. As noted above, in most instances, it is the teen who rates it lower. There is a strong gender effect when it comes to family dynamics with boys significantly more often than girls rating the importance of family time and honest conversations with parents lower than do their parents. In terms of Jewish identity and community, there is significantly higher agreement between parents and

teens in day school families and in families that have Shabbat dinner together.

At both the individual family level and overall, what stands out is the lower importance of the Jewish items to teens versus to their parents. In addition to these relative values, we should not lose sight of the meaning of each item from an absolute point of view. Ritual observance is at the bottom of the list for both parents and their children. Still it is remarkable that many parents do not place high importance on involvement in a Jewish community, and some place relatively low weight on their child's Jewish identity.

Table 6: Within Family Ratings of Life Values

	Percent		
	Teens rate LOWER	SAME	Teens rate HIGHER
Have good friends	5	95	0
Do well academically	8	87	4
Get into a good college	6	82	11
Spend time with family	26	72	2
Have honest conversations with parents	35	65	0
Have a strong a Jewish identity	45	51	4
Be actively involved in Jewish community	43	48	9
Lead a ritually observant Jewish life	37	44	19

² Calculation was based on three categories of responses: not at all/a little, somewhat, very much/extremely.

Concerns

Academics are not only a very high value for teens, they are also their primary concern. The great majority of the teens are highly concerned about doing well in school and figuring out their future, a reference to the impending college decision. Although some are concerned with body image, few have issues with bullying and other risk behaviors. (See Table 7.)

As compared with girls, boys are significantly less concerned with getting enough sleep, being teased or bullied, being dependent on parents, and using substances. The differences are seen most starkly at the low end of the scale (“not at all” or “a little” concerned). For instance, 27% of boys are unconcerned about lack of sleep but only 12% of the girls are. Some 66% of boys are unconcerned about dependence on their parents while only 50% of the girls are.

Concerns do not vary significantly by grade nor by school type. The one exception is the concern with being teased or bullied which is significantly higher for students in private school than it is for those in a public school or Jewish day school (32% versus approximately 15%).

Parents were similarly asked for their concerns about their children and the extent to which they worry about these various behaviors. Results show parents to be far less concerned than their teenagers. For example, over half of teens are concerned about getting enough sleep or finding free time but only one-fourth of the parents are concerned about their children being over-programmed. Similarly, parents are half as likely as their child to be concerned about the child being teased or bullied, being sexually active, or even being dependent on the parents.

Parents were asked an additional question about their teen’s use of technology. Some

Table 7: Teens’ Concerns

	% Very/extremely concerned
Doing well in school	82
Figuring out the future	61
Finding “free” time	56
Getting enough sleep	53
Body image	33
Being teased or bullied	19
Being sexually active	13
Being dependent on parents	13
Using alcohol or other substances	11

42% say they are highly concerned about the amount of time their child spends on the computer and phone. Indeed, parents worry more about this behavior than any other including use of illicit substances or being over-programmed, teased, bullied, sexually active, or dependent on their parents. We do know from the teens that almost all of them (94%) are on Facebook, and for one in four this activity consumes ten hours a week or more. (Because the scale truncated at 15 hours a week, we are unable to establish the precise upper limit.) Note, as well, that Facebook is only one component of the behavior that is troubling to parents. Including other uses of computer and phone would undoubtedly cover a significant amount of time in a child's day.

Views of School

Adolescents spend most of their waking hours at school and, as noted above, place

academics at the top of the list of what is important in their lives and what concerns them most. Given school's preeminence, we asked teens about the quality of their life in school in terms of the social and academic experience. Overall results show the great majority to have close friends in their classes and a teacher that they respect and admire. Most do not find their schools to be highly cliquy although a sizeable minority do. In terms of the academic experience, few are bored and many, albeit fewer than half, are very challenged by their classes. Stress is an important issue in the teenage years and the Jewish teens are certainly not immune from it. About 45% are highly stressed about school and another 31% are somewhat stressed. (See Table 8.)

Some aspects of the school experience differ significantly by grade. Each year—from 9th to 10th to 11th grade—the likelihood increases of a teenager

Table 8: The School Experience

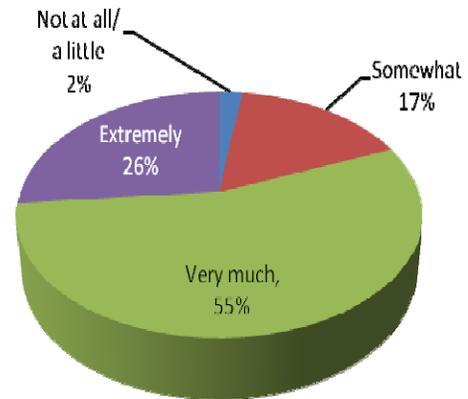
	% Very much/great extent
Have close friends in your classes	73
Have a teacher you really admire and respect	72
Are challenged by your classes	47
Are stressed about school	45
School is cliquy	36
Are bored at school	11

experiencing high challenge in his classes, high stress at school, and a connection to a respected and admired teacher. For example, 33% of the 9th graders are very challenged by their classes. In 10th grade this number increases to 44%, and by 11th grade it is 59%. Stress levels closely parallel these numbers.

The school experience varies little by school type, except for the social dimension. As compared with their counterparts in other types of schools, Jewish day school students are significantly more likely to have close friends in their classes (over 90% say they do) and public school students significantly more often describe their school as cliquy (43%).

Happiness in school. Most of the children are described by their parents as very happy and well-adjusted in high school although for almost 20% this is not entirely the case (Figure 2).

Figure 2: Extent to Which Child is Happy and Well-Adjusted in School



Jewish part-time school. At the time of the study, about 42% of teens not in day school were enrolled in a Jewish part-time school (i.e., Hebrew high school). As a result, half of responding teens were receiving formal Jewish education in the 2010-11 school year.

About one-third of those attending part-time Jewish school (34%) say that their parents were very insistent that they go. The others are more or less there on their own volition. As seen in Table 9, some of the teens attend part-time Jewish school with their close friends, and some have a teacher whom they admire and respect.

Table 9: Part-time Jewish School Experience

	% Very much/great extent
Have close friends in your classes	41
Have a teacher you really admire and respect	50
School is cliquy	4
Are bored at school	10
Are challenged by your classes	2

Note: Based on the 93 students who are in part-time school.

Responses to these items, however, are noticeably lower than ratings on comparable items for high school (public or private). The part-time schools are not cliquy, and in this regard, they have a more positive social environment than the high schools.

Teens are not challenged by their Jewish part-time school experience. Given that they are also not bored, we might conclude that the program is sufficiently fun and engaging to make up for the lack of challenge. Alternatively, after a day at school, the absence of intellectual challenge may be just the break that the teens need.

Friends

Friendships are a crucial part of a teen's life. As noted above, the teens consider having good friends the most important aspect of life. Reflecting on the extracurricular activity in which they are most involved, over half (53%) say that the presence of their friends was very important in attracting them to the activity.

The Jewish density of one's friendship network is related to various Jewish behaviors and, ultimately, appears to have an important impact on Jewish life choices. The survey asked both the parents and the teens about their closest friends.

As seen in Table 10, the Jewish density of the teens' friendship circles vary. And overall, the teens have sparser Jewish friendship circles than do their parents. About half of the teens (54%) have friendship circles that are primarily Jewish while over three-fourths (79%) of the parents do.

These data raise the question of whether the differential between the parents' and the teens' social circles is an age effect or cohort effect. That is, will the children eventually grow up to have denser Jewish friendship circles in their adult years once they take on a life partner and have children of their own? Or are today's youth forming their friendships in a decidedly different way than did their parents? As evidence for the latter, we note that teens place relatively high value on forming inclusive friendships circles that cut across the lines of religion. Some 44% of the teens

Table 10: Number of Closest Friends Who are Jewish

	Percent	
	Teens	Parents
None/a few	21	3
Half	25	18
Most/all	54	79

Note: Parent figures are based on the 344 parents whose teens responded to the Teen Survey.

in our study say that it is very important to them to have a diverse circle of friends—both Jewish and non-Jewish—while only 20% say it is very important to them to have friends who share their way of being Jewish.

Friendship circles differ significantly by denomination for both the teens and their parents. In both generations, those who are Reform or secular Jews show a similar friendship pattern of relatively sparse Jewish connections. Those who are Conservative Jews have somewhat denser Jewish social circles but do not reach the levels of the Orthodox. Regardless, the differential between parents and children holds across the non-Orthodox denominations (Table 11).

Looking within individual families, we see that in 54% of the cases, the teens' friendship circle replicates that of their parents. In most other cases (39%),

however, the parents have a decidedly more Jewish circle than does their child. In rare instances (7%) the opposite pattern holds. Interestingly, these numbers also differ by denomination, with declining levels of correspondence between parents and teens from Orthodox (97% correspondence), to Conservative (60%), Reform (44%), and secular (40%). It appears that parents provide models or otherwise influence their children's choice of friends and this influence is strongest among Orthodox and Conservative Jews.

Not surprisingly, school type is implicated in the design of teens' friendship circles. 99% of those who attend a Jewish day school have primarily Jewish social circles as compared with 50% of those who attend a private school and 46% of those in public school. Importantly, there is no difference by grade, suggesting that the Jewish nature of the close friendship circle is set by 9th grade.

Table 11: Most/all of Friends are Jewish

	Percent	
	Teens	Parents
Orthodox	100	98
Conservative	60	87
Reform	43	69
Secular	43	74

Beyond Academics

When teens were asked to indicate how many hours they spend on various activities in a given week, studying and doing homework topped the list with virtually every teen engaging in this activity and for an average of over 10 hours per week (Table 12). The second most common activity is working out or playing sports. Television and Facebook are also high on the list, and both far exceed reading for pleasure. Because the scale truncates at 15 hours a week, these means should be considered minimum estimates.

Some 63% of the teens engage in volunteer activities, an impressive result in comparison with national data that place teen voluntarism at approximately 26% (Corporation for National & Community Service, 2011). To understand the social issues that motivate the teens' interest in volunteerism, participants were given a list of nine options and asked to indicate up to two areas on which they would focus if they could work to make a difference in society. Poverty and environmental degradation topped the list (Table 13).

Table 12: How Teens Spend Time

	Percent of teens engaging in activity	Average number of hours per week ³
Studying/doing homework	100	10.7
Working out/playing sports	93	6.8
On Facebook	94	6.4
Watching television	95	5.7
Reading for pleasure	71	3.4
Volunteering	63	2.9
Working for pay	49	3.4

³ Average hours per week is based only on those engaging in the activity. Upper limit of the scale was 15 hours per week and all averages should be considered minimum estimates.

Table 13: "If you could work to make a difference in society, where would you focus?"

	%
Poverty/hunger/homelessness	36
Environmental problems	23
People with disabilities	22
Antisemitism	20
War and terrorism	19
Diseases	19
Natural disasters	15
Arab-Israeli conflict	13
Illiteracy	12
"I don't care about any of these"	0

Most of the teens would not attribute their motivation to Jewish teachings. About 45% agree with the statement, “My sense of right and wrong comes from Judaism” (but only 10% strongly agree). The other 55% do not agree with this statement.

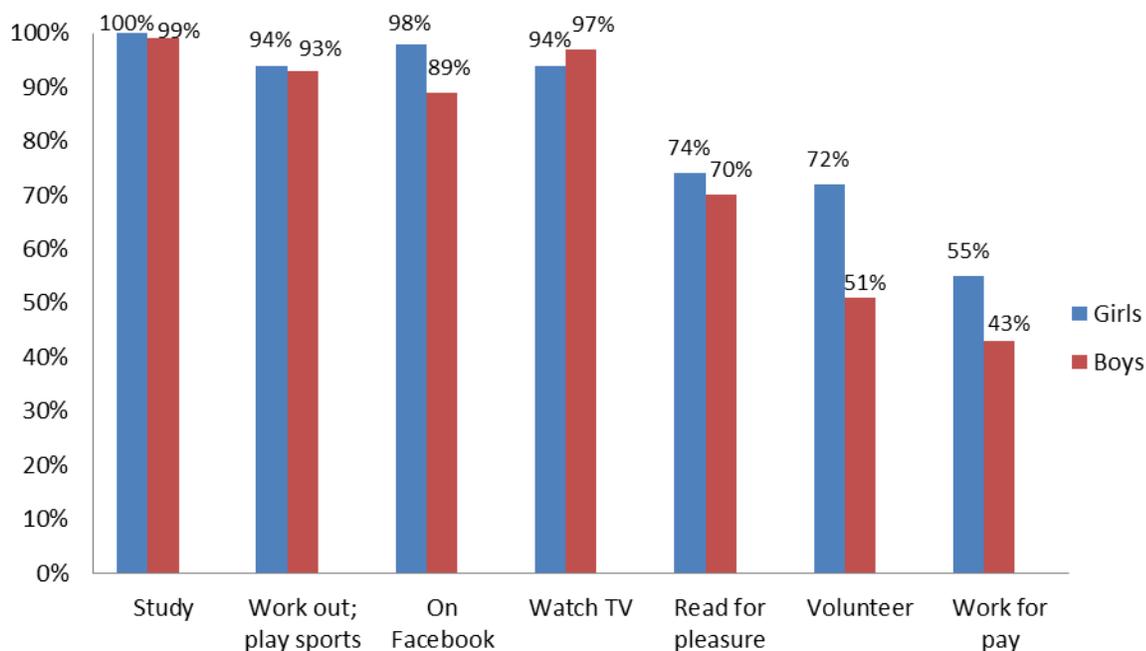
There is little difference across grades in terms of the percentage of teens doing homework, playing sports, or watching television. Participation in other activities, however, shows greater differences by grade:

- Volunteering and working for pay increase noticeably after 9th grade. Just over 50% of the 9th graders volunteer versus 64% of 10th graders and 70% of 11th graders. Some 48% of 9th graders work for pay. By 11th grade that number is 58%.

- Reading for pleasure decreases in 11th grade. Close to 80% of 9th and 10th graders read for pleasure but only 65% of the 11th graders do.
- Use of Facebook increases across the high school years. About 84% of the 9th graders spend time on the social networking site. By 10th grade that number is 95% and by 11th grade it is up to 99%. Although the number of users increases each year, the average amount of time users are on the site remains steady at over six hours a week.

Adolescent boys and girls do homework and work out or play sports at similarly high rates. With the sole exception of watching television, girls have higher rates of participation in every other listed activity (Figure 3).

Figure 3: Rates of Participation in Activities by Gender



In terms of the amount of time spent by those engaging in the particular activity, boys on average spend significantly more hours per week watching television than do girls (6.2 versus 5.3 hours). At the same time, girls spend significantly more time doing schoolwork (11.7 versus 9.4 hours per week). Time spent on other activities does not differ significantly by gender.

Top Extracurricular Activity

Virtually every teen (97%) is engaged in at least one extracurricular activity and over half (58%) hold at least one leadership position (Table 14).

Teens were asked to name the one extracurricular activity in which they are *most* involved. Sports appear at the top of the list, Jewish activities at the bottom.

- 42% are most involved in team or individual sports (e.g., baseball, basketball, cross-country track, tennis, swimming, etc.)
- 20% spend their time on theater, music, dance, filmmaking, photography, and other artistic endeavors.

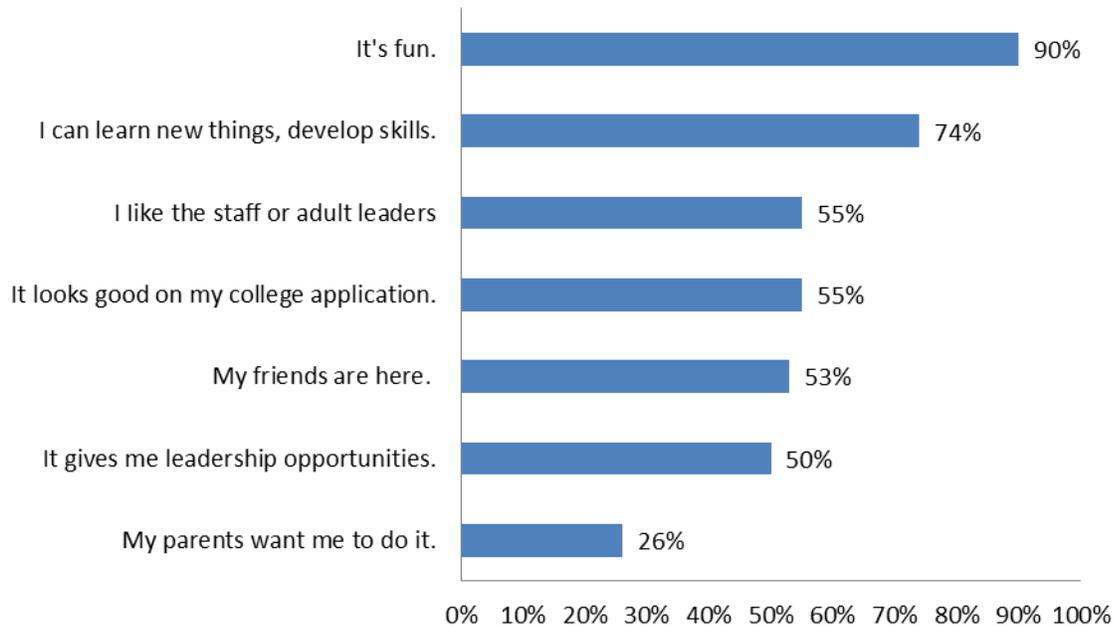
- 18% are most involved in academic activities such as debate, mock trial, Model UN, Model Congress, or other school-based clubs including yearbook, newspaper, and student government.
- 13% are most involved in a service, volunteer, or awareness/advocacy activity (e.g., Gay-Straight Alliance, Autism Speaks, Youth Against Cancer). Also included in this category are a small number involved with Girl Scouts or Boy Scouts.
- 7% cite a specifically Jewish activity, most often participation in youth group but also work as a Hebrew school assistant.

Fun is the #1 reason that teens choose these activities (Figure 4). Utilitarian motivations—what the participant stands to gain from the activity by way of personal development or a stronger college application—are distant seconds. Many activities involve friends, but not necessarily the top activity, which is often an outlet for a personal talent or passion. Students who want to go into theater, or students whose passion is basketball, or students who have great musical talent or

Table 14: Participation in Clubs, Teams, and Groups

	% Involved	% Hold leadership position
School clubs	87	47
School sports teams	63	37
Jewish youth groups	45	36

Figure 4: Attraction to Activities (% very or extremely important)



care deeply about a cause will take on the related activity with only secondary consideration to the participation of their friends. By high school, at least from the perspective of the teens, the decision where to invest their “free” time is largely out of the hands of their parents. In reading these findings, it should be noted that although some factors are more important than others, all of them—with the exception of the parents’ desires—are very important to at least half of the teens.

The above numbers are supported by comments written on the survey (by 233 of the 344 participating teens). Asked why else they chose this activity, over half of the respondents explained that they did so because of their interest, enjoyment, or love of the particular activity. Many fewer said they arrived at an activity because of

other people, whether a friend’s participation, the recommendation of a sibling, or the community or team spirit of the other participants. Only six chose an activity because it looks good on a college application. The representative sample of comments below gives a flavor of their explanations.

- A ninth grade track athlete on Long Island “initially joined track because I love playing sports and being active. I now enjoy it for a multitude of reasons. Exercising regularly is beneficial for both my physical and mental health... It gives me an outlet for stress and frustration, as well as a chance to reflect on my day. Also, I have made great friends from track who I enjoy spending time with everyday. My teammates have become some of my

best friends. I am also very competitive, and enjoy having the opportunity to compete and improve.”

- A 10th grader in Manhattan takes dance as a way “to express myself in a special art form which I find graceful, challenging, and liberating.”
- A 10th grader in Brooklyn chose filmmaking because it “is something that inspires me. I put a lot of hard work and effort to create a film and it’s fun as well. Not many things are hard work and fun.”
- A 10th grade debater “wanted to join a school club and this one in particular seemed like the most fun. I enjoy debating, and I also know a lot about politics, which this club is heavily related to, and speaking about politics. Additionally, a lot of my friends joined the club with me, so I felt I would not be alone in this experience.”
- A member of the student government at a public school in Manhattan chose this activity because “I like to be in leadership positions and I care deeply about my school. While looking good on a college application was an added bonus, I mainly ran for this position because it’s something I love doing and I’m good at it.”
- An 11th grader in a public school in Brooklyn joined the Hispanic/Latino club at her school “because I am proud of my heritage and I want to learn

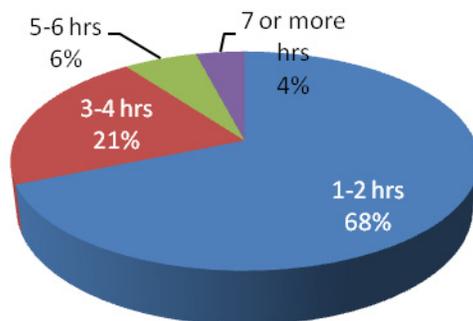
about ways in which I can help out my community. Having attended a Jewish day school for seven years, and as a student of the [Hebrew high school program], I know a great deal about my Jewish roots and my Jewish community. Now I want the chance to participate in and explore a community that I am a part of but know so little about.”

The comments of those who have chosen a Jewish activity as their primary involvement match these same themes of interest and fun but also take on a special flavor with their evocation of Jewish memories, friendships, camp, and identity. An 11th grade USYer talks not just about making friends but also about “making memories” through this organization. A 10th grade youth group participant who moved from a Jewish day school into a private high school “missed that constant Jewish presence and I found it in youth group. I made friends with other people I went to day school with and never got to know, kids from other schools, and even kids at my school who happened to go to youth group too.” An 11th grader in NFTY “chose this activity because it allows me to be a leader in the Jewish community while also being able to spend time with my friends from camp. Also, I am given the opportunity to song lead at the youth led service, which I find to be a lot of fun.” Yet another chose youth group because “it is a place where I feel welcome and my ideas are welcomed. It is also a place where I don’t need to hide my Judaism.”

Jewish Engagement

The data above bring us to the key question of Jewish engagement. We use this term to refer to organized activities that teens might engage in with peers, outside of the purview of home and family. We have already noted that 45% are involved in such activities, at least by their definition. On average, those who participate in Jewish youth group do so for an average of 2.4 hours a week, less than any other activity noted above. About 40% estimate their time in Jewish youth group at an hour a week; another 27% put it at two hours a week. (See Figure 5.)

Figure 5: Hours per Week in Jewish Youth Group Activities



We first present findings on who is currently involved and who is not. We next consider the issues of attracting teens and providing them valuable experiences.

Who is Involved

Our analysis looked at who is involved in three different types of informal and experiential Jewish educational programs: youth group, Israel experiences, and summer programs.

Youth group. The primary factors in involvement in youth group are related to the synagogue. Logistic regression analyses show that teens with at least ten years of part-time school education (most of which we can assume was in a synagogue setting) and teens whose families attend synagogue-sponsored events are more likely to participate in youth group than are other teens. It is true that more girls participate than boys, that more students in public school participate than those in private or day school, and that participation seems to peak in 10th grade. But the factors that increase the likelihood of a teen participating in Jewish youth group is neither these demographics nor other variables in the survey, but rather the teen's sustained years in part-time Jewish school and the family's synagogue involvement.

Part of this finding is artifactual. When teens were asked to specify in which Jewish youth groups or clubs they are active, many listed USY or NFTY, denominational groups housed in synagogues. As well, some listed other synagogue-based groups and classes or their part-time school. It is not surprising, then, that the synagogue plays a significant role in engaging teens in these groups.

Israel experiences. Logistic regression models indicate two main factors in teen participation in Israel experiences. Older teens and teens receiving any formal Jewish education—whether in day school or part-time school—are more likely than others to have gone on a teen trip to Israel.

Summer experiences. Day school students, teens whose families attend services

together on a regular basis during the school year, and Jewish youth group participants are more likely than others to attend a summer program with Jewish content. No other variables contribute significantly to the regression model.

Attraction and Value

In order to understand what attracts or repels teens from participation in Jewish activities, we look first at their familiarity with various Jewish organizations and then examine their positive and negative views of these organizations. We then look at the specific attributes of programs that drew them in and their parents' level of satisfaction with these programs.

Familiarity. In order to become involved in an activity, teens need to be aware of it. The survey asked teens to indicate the Jewish organizations with which they were familiar. "Familiar" was defined as having heard the name and perhaps knowing someone who was involved. Birthright Israel and Hillel, both college programs, made the top of the list (Table 15). With the exception of Young Judaea, the Zionist youth movements cluster near the bottom of the list.

From the teens' perspective, the decision of whether or not to participate in a Jewish activity is almost entirely in their hands. Most parents (79%) claim to know about various social, recreational, cultural, and learning opportunities for their teens, and most (70%) say they frequently receive information about teen programs being run by the Jewish community. Some 73% of parents say they have at least some influence on their teen's choice of

activities, but only 38% of teens say likewise. If we look at this question within individual families, we find that in the majority of households (59%), the parents believe they have more influence than their teens would grant them. It is possible that the parents and/or the teens are over-estimating their own influence on these decisions.

The next step is understanding how teens view these organizations. In separate text boxes on the survey, teens were asked to write about their positive and negative views of the organizations with which they were familiar. On both questions, they were asked to check "none" if they held no views.

Table 15: "With which of the following organizations are you familiar?"

	% Familiar
Birthright Israel	67
Hillel	59
Chabad	48
NFTY	44
USY	40
UJA-Federation	35
BBYO	32
Young Judaea	30
J-Teen	27
AIPAC	21
Rosh Hodesh: It's a Girl Thing!	17
NCSY	16
JSU	16
Bnai Akiva	12
Prozdor	9
Habonim Dror	5
Hashomer Hatzair	2
No'ar Hadash	1

Positive views. 275 of the 344 teens responding to the survey answered the question calling for positive views. About one in five checked “none,” indicating that they had no positive views. Many of the others wrote about how Jewish organizations create opportunities for involvement and help people in need. A sample of comments follows.

- “They give people an accessible means of being involved in a Jewish community and/or Israel,” wrote an Orthodox 9th grader in Manhattan.
- “They are very educational and fun, and give you a chance to become friends with other Jewish people in your area” said a 10th grader in public school in Westchester.
- “I think it is good that there are Jewish organizations that maintain the sense of community, while offering good opportunities to kids and often helping the world,” wrote a 9th grader who describes herself as “just Jewish.”
- “They help bring the Jewish community together to do positive things regarding our religion, service, and helping others,” commented a 10th grader from Nassau County.

Many wrote in reference to a specific youth group. Overall, respondents see the groups as a way for Jewish teens to connect with others who share their interests. The groups, they say, not only create community and friendships outside of school, but also provide Jewish content and opportunities for leadership. For example, an 11th grader on Long Island

wrote, “They strengthen the Jewish community by bringing Jews together. Without these organizations some Jewish teens would be isolated from other Jewish teens.” A 10th grader also from Long Island said, “They bring together Jewish teens to talk about all issues, not just Jewish ones. In this way, it feels less like Hebrew school and more like just hanging out.” “All of these organizations are places where Jewish teens can just be Jewish teens,” commented an 11th grader from Westchester.

Here are comments on four Jewish youth groups in New York. Those that are involved, truly love their groups.

- “I am personally a NFTYite. I love the *ruach* and sense of community. I get terrible withdrawal after each event. My closest friends don’t go to my school; I see them at NFTY events! It’s the only place where I don’t dislike anyone and I truly feel that no one dislikes me. Everyone is very accepting.”
- “I love BBYO to death. It’s a great way to get to know kids around the area that are Jewish as well and is very good at keeping up with Judaism.”
- “USY is a great way to meet people that have something in common with you that can a lot of the time separate you from others. I have found that USY has been a great way to make friends and have a good time observing Shabbat and participating in Jewish activities that I’ve never really known before.”

- “J-Teen is great. It’s more focused on community service (a Jewish value) than the Jewish religion itself and is a lot different than other Jewish youth groups above. The objective isn’t to meet Jewish people or have fun (although we always do have a fun and meaningful project), but rather to do community service and take on leadership roles in evoking change for the better.”

Several respondents wrote of their interest in participating in Birthright Israel. They know how much fun it is supposed to be and appreciate how the program helps young Jews strengthen their connection to Israel and to their Jewish identity. The remaining comments are a smattering of positive remarks about Hillel, Chabad, Rosh Hodesh—It’s a Girl Thing!, UJA-Federation, AIPAC, Prozdor, Storahtelling, Write On for Israel, and J-Street.

Negative views. 268 teens answered the question calling for negative comments. About two-thirds of these respondents checked “none.” Of the others, half referred to Jewish organizations in general and described them as too religious or not religious enough, pushy or “preachy,” exclusive, cliquey or not friendly, promoting views that differ from their own, or requiring too much time. A sample of these comments follow.

- “Some of these organizations are too focused on being observant, and sometimes I want a place where I can go do community service without worrying about my religion,” wrote a Conservative girl from Westchester.

- “Some of these organizations have no real Jewish purpose, other than a social aspect of Jews meeting other Jews. They fail to have any religious or cultural aspect that is being taught or learned,” said an 11th grade boy in public school on Long Island.
- “Teachers and others at school try and cram these organizations down our throats and force us to do them all. It makes me, personally, not want to do any of it,” wrote an Orthodox boy at a day school in Manhattan.
- “A lot of the people my age that I know that are involved in those organizations are not very nice and negatively color those organizations for me,” said a girl in Manhattan.
- “The meetings take up valuable time, which teens often do not have,” said an 11th grade day school student.

The rest of the comments refer to specific youth movements or organizations. Most teens wrote about the social aspects of the program; others commented on religious practice, ideology, and values. The teens who hold negative views of Jewish youth groups describe them as “cliquey,” “cultish,” “aggressive,” “JAP-y,” and “exclusive.” “I have experienced them to be very judgmental,” wrote an 11th grade girl, “attracting status-conscious teens, looking for other Jews who share their similar values.” Others note that the groups are less about Jewish content and more about “Jews hooking up.” They are “sometimes more a social event than Jewish.” Some of the comments are based on personal experience; others appear to draw on stereotypes. A 9th grade girl in a

suburban public school provides us with this definition: “USY as well as having a dance spends the majority of the time in prayer. BBYO is more social and doesn’t really have much structure—it is more about partying.”

Parental satisfaction. The survey asked parents to assess a program or activity during the school year that had recently been important to their child. By and large, those whose answers referred to a Jewish-sponsored activity were very supportive of their child’s participation. Most reported that the participants were Jewish but the content was not, although

few were dissatisfied with the program’s Judaic content. For the great majority, cost was not a threshold issue. (See Table 16.)

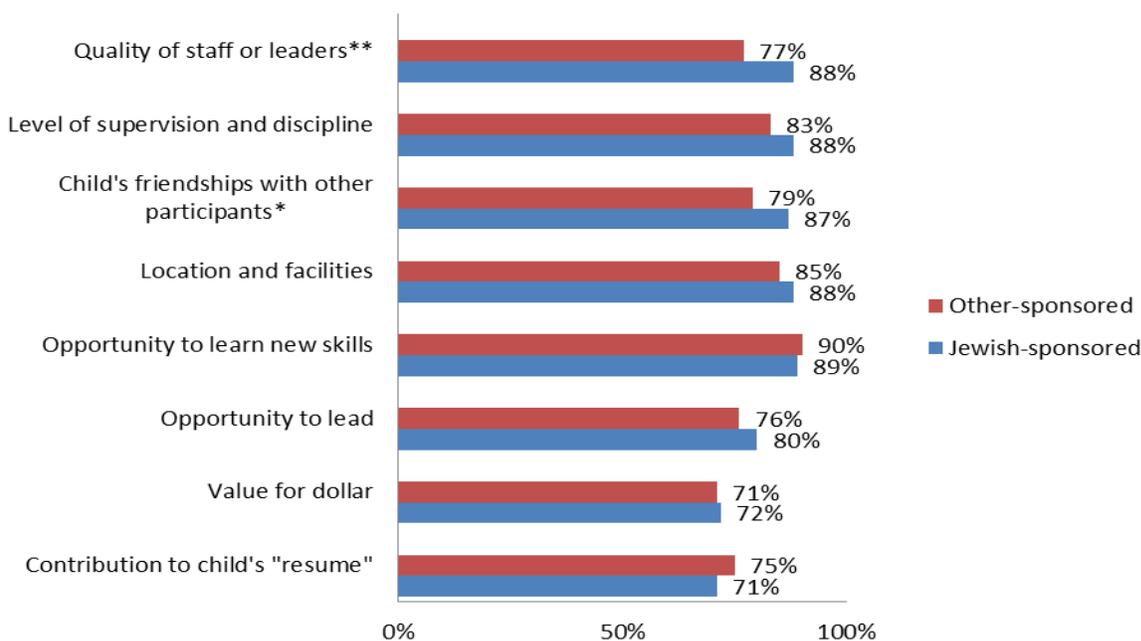
In terms of satisfaction with the activity and its benefits, findings were compared between those who based their answers on a Jewish activity and those who based their responses on a non-Jewish activity. From the parents’ point of view, Jewish programs significantly exceed other programs on the social dimensions: the quality of the staff and the child’s friendships (Figure 6).

Table 16: Parents’ Description of a Jewish-Sponsored Activity of Importance to their Teen

Participants				
Mostly non-Jewish 2%	Mixed group 4%	Mostly Jewish 11%	All Jewish 81%	Don’t know 2%
Jewish content				
None 28%	A little 10%	Some 18%	Great deal 39%	Don’t know 5%
Satisfaction with the Judaic content of the program				
Very dissatisfied 2%	Somewhat dissatisfied 2%	Neither 21%	Somewhat satisfied 15%	Very satisfied 60%
How supportive parent was of his/her teen doing this activity				
Very unsupportive 8%	Somewhat unsupportive 1%	Neither 0%	Somewhat supportive 6%	Very supportive 85%
Extent to which cost was an issue in the decision to participate				
Not at all 84%	A little 9%	Somewhat 6%	Very much 2%	

Note: Figures are based on the 221 parents in the full parent sample of 1,125 respondents who answered these questions in reference to a Jewish-sponsored activity.

Figure 6: Parents' Satisfaction with Teen's Most Recent Activity by Sponsorship (% somewhat or very satisfied)



**p< .000 *p<.02

Note: Figures are based on the 221 parents in the full parent sample of 1,125 respondents who answered these questions in reference to a Jewish-sponsored activity and 668 parents who answered these same

Teens' Jewish Identity

By and large, the teens in our study identify with a Jewish denomination and are proud to be Jewish. Their emotional connections to the Jewish people and to Israel, however, are lower than would be predicted by their Jewish backgrounds.

Denominational Identity

Two-thirds of the teens identify with a Jewish denomination, most often Conservative or Reform. Almost all of the others consider themselves secular or cultural Jews or the indeterminate category of "just Jewish." Very few

identify with two religions or with no religion at all. (See Table 17.) Only 15% agree with the statement, "Different world religions are part of my spiritual life." These findings may be an indicator of the teens' proximity to their bar/bat mitzvah experience which, for most everyone in the sample, took place in the context of an affiliated synagogue. They may also be an indicator of their parents' continuing membership in a synagogue.

Using the same response choices, parents were asked how their child was being raised. In 62% of the cases, parents and teens gave the same answers; that is, children who are being raised in the

Table 17: Teen Denominational Identity

	Percent	
	Teen Response	Parent Response
Reform	28	31
Reconstructionist	<1	0
Conservative	30	31
Orthodox	8	10
Secular, cultural, just Jewish, or other Jewish	30	26
Jewish and another religion	1	1
No religion	2	0

Note: In order to compare teen and parent responses, parent figures are based on the 344 parents whose teens responded to the Teen Survey.

Conservative movement, for example, describe themselves as such. The gap for the others is not between denominations, but between secular or just Jewish and a denomination. About 12% are being raised as secular Jews but personally identify with a denomination. Twice as many, 21%, are being raised in a denomination, but self-identify as secular. Most of the movement is toward or away from Reform or Conservative Judaism.

A number of the respondents (29%) did not find the given denominational labels fit their practices or beliefs and felt the need to qualify their responses. Orthodox respondents wrote to explain that they are “Modern Orthodox,” or as one said, “Very Modern Orthodox.” Others wrote to describe their particular practices. Here are examples from each end of the spectrum:

- “I think that I am culturally religious, meaning that I participate in many Jewish related activities and groups, but I do not study the Bible or go to temple often.”

- “I keep Shabbat and go to shul every week. I also keep kosher. I think that the way I feel about Judaism is very similar to Modern Orthodoxy yet I very strongly believe that women should be included in services.”

For several respondents the issue concerns belief in God. Some added the words *agnostic* or *atheist* to our list. Others tried to explain. For example, one wrote, “I am Jewish because both my parents are and I like being Jewish, but I don’t believe in God.” Another explained, “I am happy being Jewish and would like for my children to have some Jewish values... but I do not believe in God and I am not religious.” Yet another said, “I don’t believe in God, but I believe in the teachings and the culture.” The core struggle is a common one between Judaism as ethnicity or as religion.

Jewish Connections

Jewish pride is high among the teens although their sense of connection to the Jewish people and to Israel is noticeably

lower. Only about half say that having a strong Jewish identity is very important to them in their lives. (See Figure 7.)

Views of Being Jewish

The survey asked the teens two open-ended questions regarding how they feel about being Jewish. The first focused on the positives: *What do you like most about being Jewish? What aspects of Judaism, Jewish life, or the Jewish community give you the most pride, happiness, or other positive feelings?* The second focused on the negatives: *What do you like least about being Jewish? What aspects of Judaism, Jewish life, or the Jewish community worry you, turn you off, or give you other negative feelings?* Some 258 teens answered the former question and 241 answered the latter question. A small number of these (n=37) said they did not have an answer to the latter question, suggesting that they do not

dwell on the negative aspects of their Jewish identities.

Content analysis, displayed in Table 18, shows the general topics of their remarks and the number of teens writing on each. The prevailing positives are a sense of community and Jewish tradition and culture. The negative comments, beyond the issue of antisemitism and Jewish stereotypes, do not have a such a dominant theme.

Unqualified Positives

Sense of community. Sense of community and connection to other Jews sit at the top of the list of positives. Many teens feel comfortable in the community and find it welcoming and respectful. They speak about “the support of the community,” its “cohesiveness,” and their own sense of “being part of something greater than just

Figure 7: Jewish Pride, Identity, and Connections

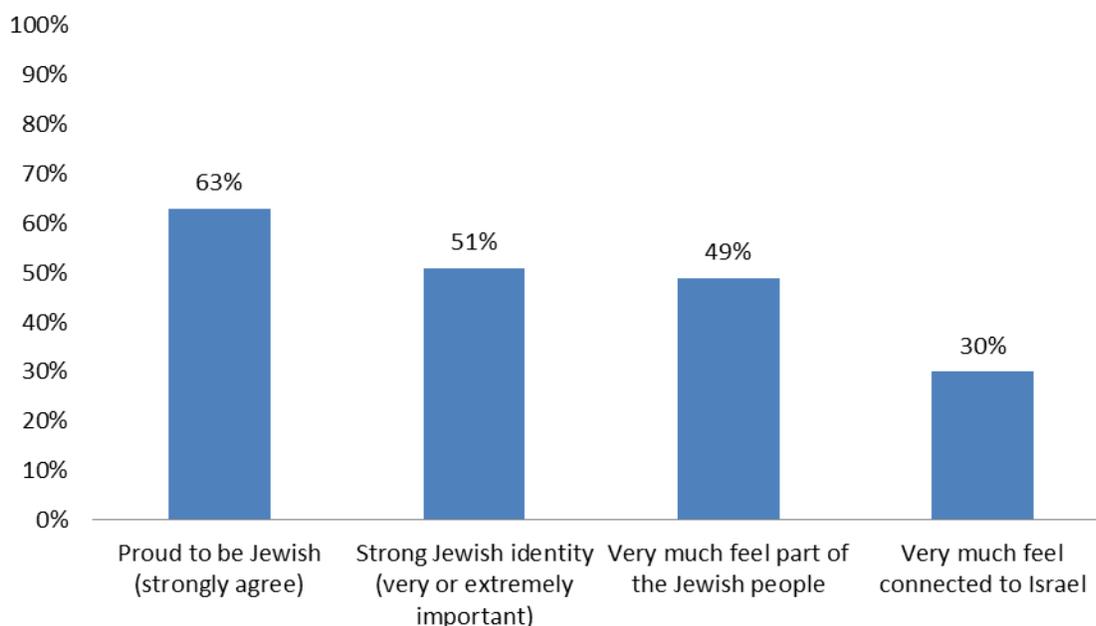


Table 18: Comments on What is Most and Least Liked about Being Jewish

	Positive Comments	Negative Comments
Sense of community	137	--
Tradition and culture	92	--
History (positive); antisemitism, stereotypes (negative)	52	68
Values	46	18
Minority status	16	22
Israel	19	16
Study	18	14
Prayer	17	53
Conflict among Jews	--	42
Religion	--	22

myself.” They love that “all Jews look out for each other,” and that as a Jew “you are at home anywhere in the world just with one other Jewish person, no matter how different you are in other ways.” The sentiment of connection was well expressed by a 9th grade girl: “I like that when you are Jewish and you meet someone else who is also Jewish, it is very easy to make a connection with them and become friends. I also like the sense of community I get from having a close group of Jewish friends, because with similar backgrounds it is easy to relate to them.”

Jewish tradition and culture. Many teens speak about Jewish tradition and culture, including the holidays and Shabbat. They like the sense of continuity embedded in the traditions and take pride in the fact that “these rituals and holidays have survived so many years.” As one teen said, “I like celebrating the holidays and hearing the stories that I will pass down to my

children one day.” These comments, it should be noted, come from across the religious spectrum. An Orthodox teen wrote about Shabbat which “gives me time to get away from my normal activities. I don’t have my phone or my computer, and I can just relax, spend time with my family and with my friends.” A Reform teen wrote that she loves “being able to have traditions for the holidays especially Passover, since it is my FAVORITE holiday because my entire family comes together and since I am the youngest, I still say the 4 questions and it makes me feel...special, like I AM the tradition in a way.”

The fact that the holidays are family occasions adds to the teens’ positive feelings about them while also making the teens appreciate Judaism’s focus on the family. “I love how the religion brings my family together and how close we are because of it,” wrote one teen. “I love the

focus on family. My family is normally together for all meals, weekends, vacations, etc. But I love that Jewish customs stress that,” wrote another. The traditions also include Jewish foodways, from challah to matzah ball soup to special holiday foods, all of which evoke positive feelings about Jewishness in these teens.

Two Points of View

Jewish history. Some frame their sense of connection in terms of Jewish history, the “story of our people” of which their own family story is a part. They are “proud to share such a long and meaningful history with people all over the world.” “I am so proud when people talk about my history,” wrote an 11th grade girl growing up Reform, “because it’s mine and my people go back so far in time—it’s incredible.” In part, this pride resides in how the Jews have persevered and “survived many tragedies.” Respondents talk about the Jewish people’s “rich history of never giving up” and of their determination “to keep their faith.” Some place these feelings within the broad sweep of Jewish history: “I am only here because my ancestors were strong enough to survive the hatred and bitter times throughout their lives, in Egypt, the Holocaust. This makes me proud,” wrote one teen. “I like the resilience of the Jewish community throughout history. I appreciate how much people have sacrificed so I can practice Judaism freely,” said another. Others write more personally about their own family histories, including great-grandparents who fled pogroms in Russia or grandparents who survived the Holocaust.

The obverse is the long history of antisemitism. Teens are “nervous” about “the prejudice and misunderstanding from non-Jews” because of “the bad things in history that have happened to us for being Jewish.” They view antisemitism as alive and prevalent in New York and around the world. “I really dislike knowing that there are people out there who despise us because we are Jewish. It worries me that some of our people are being targeted,” writes a Reform 10th grader. “Antisemitism bothers me because there is no reason for it. I am not a huge target of antisemitism since I live in a safe neighborhood, but there have been times where I feel uncomfortable being Jewish because of it,” writes an Orthodox 9th grader.

Part and parcel of this antisemitism are Jewish jokes and classic stereotypes held by non-Jews (e.g., images of the rich Jew, the Jewish American Princess, and the Jewish mother). The teens do not like any of this. “There are a lot of people in my school and even my friends who make ‘Jew jokes’ all the time. While they might seem fun at first it gets old and is simply annoying and ignorant now,” writes a 9th grader from an intermarried family. “The only issue I have with Judaism is the prejudice and stereotypes that people still rely upon today,” writes a 10th grader who considers herself “just Jewish.” “I feel hurt when I hear someone calling someone else a ‘Jew’ all because they bought a sweater on sale, or picked up a quarter on the ground. People such as Bernie Madoff are only encouraging such stereotypes, and proving them to be true.”

Values and teachings. Others take pride in Jewish values. They like being part of a community “which elevates *tikkun olam* to such a high place” and “places an emphasis on helping others” and “being kind to them.” They appreciate that their Jewish education has provided them “with strong moral guidelines while being open to interpretation so I can reach my own conclusions.”

On the negative side, a few question or disagree with Jewish values, viewpoints, or tenets. For example, they do not like the traditional Jewish view toward gays and lesbians or the concept of Jews as the Chosen People. “I don't like being preached at and I find some of my temple's values to conflict with my own,” writes a secular 11th grader.

Minority status. Being part of a minority group makes some teens feel “unique,” “special,” and “proud.” They like being “different from most people in the world.”

A similar number consider minority status a negative. They say that it is difficult to be Jewish “in a society in which the majority of people are Christian.” They find it “frustrating” when Shabbat or youth group conflicts with a secular activity. They “don't like that fact” that their suburban community has so few Jews.

Israel. Israel, for some teens, is the Jewish homeland and a source of pride. “I think that Israel gives me the most pride because it is the underdog,” wrote a 9th grade girl growing up in a Conservative household in the suburbs. And while not many people like it, I feel a strong connection with it.”

An almost equal number write about Israel

as a source of concern or difficulty. Their comments span the political spectrum and vary from concern for Israel's safety to disagreement with the Israeli government's policies regarding the Palestinians. They do not like that “Israel, the only Jewish state, is constantly competing for a right to exist.” They are worried that “there are people who hate Israel with such a passion that they are willing to become suicide bombers just to kill some Jews.” They are “nervous for Israel that the Arabs and Palestinians will destroy it.” Others do not like “how we are generally only presented with one side of the Israeli-Arab conflict,” or “how my grandparents, rabbis, etc. make me feel like I have to be pro-Israel to be Jewish.”

Study. Some of the teens appreciate the high value that debate and study hold in Jewish tradition. As an 11th grade boy growing up as a secular Jew in Brooklyn wrote, “The most positive thing, in my opinion, about being Jewish, is the intellectualism that Judaism encourages. The emphasis on education, questioning, and intellectual achievement is a tradition I strongly support.”

At the same time, others do not appreciate their own Jewish education. They find Hebrew school to be “boring” and “a waste of time” and lament the double curriculum and long hours at Jewish day schools. Some complain of having certain views or interpretations of text “pushed” on them. A 10th grader in the Reform movement cleverly notes that “my Hebrew school turns me off to Judaism, which is ironic.” A 9th grader in an Orthodox day school rails against eight hours a week of Talmud study. “I mean seriously. 8 hours? *Gemara* is okay, but that's WAYYYYY too much.”

Songs and prayer. On the positive side, a few teens express love for Jewish songs and prayer. Here are the comments from two high school girls, both in the Conservative movement: “One of my favorite things about being Jewish is singing in services. I really love hearing the blending of voices, on key and off, singing the words that move so many of us,” wrote one. “Saying prayers in another language. Even though I don’t understand them I feel like the Hebrew gives it more meaning,” noted the other.

Far greater numbers, however, do not like Jewish prayer, services, rituals and religious observances. “This may just be my synagogue,” writes a Reform boy, “but I feel like the services sometime miss the spiritual point. I just don’t think the melodies and the organization of the service get at the deep emotional aspect as much as they could.” These teens do not like fasting on Yom Kippur or forgoing bread during Passover. In their minds, *kashrut* and Shabbat observance are restrictive and separate them from their non-observant friends. Some see the “rules of Judaism” as “unnecessary” or “overwhelming.” An Orthodox girl writes that “there are many rules and *halachot* that we have to follow. Sometimes it can be overwhelming and hard to follow everything. I do not like having all these rules.” A Conservative boy feels that “certain Jewish customs are outdated and should not really apply anymore.” A secular girl in Manhattan says that she “would really rather go out on Friday night than stay home and have a Shabbat dinner.”

Unqualified Negatives

There are two main categories of negative comments for which there are no corresponding positive comments: Conflict among Jews and the concept of religion.

Conflict. Teens disparage the behavior and attitudes of other Jews and the “divisions, sects, and disagreements amongst the Jewish community.” Here are but three examples:

- “Different groups of Jews have different opinions, which is fine, but I do not like when one thinks that they are superior to the other.”
- “I’m tired of being ‘too Jewish’ or ‘not Jewish enough’ to other Jews. We are all of the same religion. Can’t we just all respect each other? I don’t make fun of you for wearing a black hat and robe in the middle of May; don’t become all ‘holier-than-thou’ at me for wearing shorts and a tank top. We all pray to the same God, so just accept the fact and move on!”
- “I feel as though the Orthodox Jews sometimes go too extreme in their adaptations of the Torah and its meanings. I think sometimes that is what people view as the only Jew, when really I am Jewish and am just like everyone else.”

Some of this same feeling is applied to Jews with differing stances toward Israel.

“Larger parts of the Jewish community seem to be turning against each other in small ways; a house divided against itself cannot stand up against greater opposing

forces (in this case, Antisemitism and Arab aggression),” writes one respondent. “I don’t like how Jews—Israeli Jews especially—expect pity from the world when they are attacked by Arabs (though it is tragic) when they are equally as intolerant and they are oppressive,” writes another. “The anti-Israel Jews and self-haters are rather depressing. I think this means that those people are uneducated in Jewish history, and need to be [educated] to fully appreciate Zionism and Judaism,” writes yet another.

The teens also hold negative views of ultra-Orthodox Jews in Israel. “One of my many experiences in Israel,” writes one such teen, “was witnessing hundreds of *Charedi* and *Edah HaChareidis* Jews running down the street in Jerusalem yelling, screaming and throwing rocks because the mayor decided to allow a parking lot to be opened in Jerusalem on the Sabbath...It’s people like that who take their religion to such extremes that it blinds them from the big problems in their world and in their society...that make me ashamed to be Jewish.”

Religion. Several teens are uncomfortable with religion and/or do not believe in God. They “don’t really feel attached to any of the religious/spiritual aspects of the religion” and are not sure “how to respond to those who question my faith.” “While I connect deeply to the spirituality and culture of Judaism,” writes one teen, “it makes me feel almost inadequate sometimes because I do not know what I believe and what I don’t.” For another, the lack of belief cuts even deeper: “I don’t feel as if I am Jewish, I consider myself agnostic. If I was Jewish, I would have to conform to preset beliefs which I do not always agree with.” These comments, albeit relatively few in number, come from across the denominational spectrum. The comments make clear that having an Orthodox or Conservative upbringing or even having a rabbi for a parent does not prevent the struggle with religion, God, and belief.

Teen Engagement Practitioners

In this section we turn our attention to the communal professionals and volunteers who work to engage teens in Jewish activities outside of the home and the classroom. We begin with the challenge of defining the professional identity of the workers. We then look at their backgrounds, quality of work life, and their views on programming for teens. We conclude with their visions for the future of their teen programs.

Defining A Field of Practice

There are several challenges to defining “teen engagement” as a field of practice. At the simplest level is the question of what to call the adults responsible for this work. “Youth professional” seems inadequate as 14% of our respondents are volunteers, not paid professionals. “Teen worker” or “youth worker” are misleading titles. They suggest a relatively low level position, but 32% of our sample are at the top of their organizations (rabbis, principals, or executive, associate, or assistant directors). These titles also suggest that the person’s job is primarily dedicated to teens when the reality is that 34% spend less than half of their time with teens. To avoid misnomer, we decided to refer to the adults whose job it is to engage teens in Jewish life during the school year as “Teen Engagement Practitioners” (TEPs).

The next challenge is arraying the variety of positions that come under the TEP

rubric. The various dimensions of these positions are shown in Table 19. To begin, there are distinctions between volunteer and paid positions, fulltime and part-time positions, and positions at the local, regional, or national level. Our study is focused on teen engagement in UJA-Federation of New York’s catchment area, and commensurately 90% of our sample work at the local level. The field is almost equally split between fulltime and part-time workers (51% vs. 49%). All of the volunteers and 40% of the paid professionals are part-time.

In addition, jobs differ in terms of level, sponsorship, and denomination. TEPs may be directors, coordinators, principals, teachers, social workers, rabbis, group leaders, trip leaders, chapter advisors, and others whose task is to engage teens in Jewish life. Other than this shared mission, there may be few commonalities among these roles when it comes to responsibilities, job design, and the like.

Just over half of the New York TEPs we surveyed work for a synagogue and another one-fourth work for a youth movement (which may be in the context of a synagogue). The movements are Zionist (Bnei Akiva, Habonim Dror, Hashomer Hatzair, Young Judaea), denominational (NCSY, USY, NFTY), and pluralistic (BBYO), each with its own mission, structure, and population.

Table 19: Composition of the Field

<i>Time</i>	<i>Percent</i>
Fulltime	51
Part-time	49
<i>Level of primary job</i>	
Local	90
Regional	9
National	2
<i>Primary position</i>	
Executive director	3
Associate or assistant director	4
Program or youth coordinator	27
Principal	14
Teacher	15
Social worker	1
Rabbi	11
Group leader, trip leader, chapter advisor	11
Camp counselor	3
Other	12
<i>Employer</i>	
Synagogue	54
JCC or YMHA	6
Youth movement	23
Overnight camp	0
Day school	9
Community supplementary school (e.g., Hebrew high school)	4
Other	3
<i>Synagogue denomination</i>	
Orthodox	6
Conservative	34
Reform	57
Reconstructionist	3

Note: Based on the 230 TEP respondents.

On average, about 60 percent of the TEPs' job involves direct work with teens although as seen in Table 20 this average masks notable differences.

Table 20: Proportion of Job Dedicated to Working with Teens

	Percent of TEPs
10-30 percent of job	30
40-60 percent of job	17
70-90 percent of job	22
100 percent of job	31

Barely, one-third have jobs devoted solely to work with a teen population. These TEPs are distinguished from the others only by their relatively low positions in their organizations. Most often they are program or youth coordinator, teacher, group leader, trip leader or chapter advisor. It is rare for someone in a higher position to devote all of his/her time to teens.

Adding to the complexity of defining the TEP position is the fact that 29% of the paid professionals work for more than one employer or organization. Most of these TEPs work for two employers; only a small

number (<1%) work for three, four, or five employers. Respondents were asked to check one or more reasons for working multiple jobs. Most commonly they need the extra money (~52%). In addition, some feel committed to more than one organization (~40%) or find that the arrangement works best for their personal life (~37%), suggesting that even if they could find and manage with a single job, they nonetheless might choose to hold multiple positions. About one in five say that the reason they work two or more part-time jobs is that they have not been able to get a fulltime position.⁴

The variation of TEP positions suggests both a widespread and shared concern with teen engagement but also the absence of a coherent or identifiable field of practice. This conclusion is supported by the finding that 48% of the TEPs do not feel well informed about other youth-serving organizations in the Greater New York Jewish community and 54% are not networking with others in the field (Table 21). Without knowledge of other organizations and connection to other practitioners, it is difficult to achieve a sense of a unified field.

Table 21: Connections to the Field

Extent to which TEPs--	Percent		
	Not at all/a little	Somewhat	Very much
...are networking with others in the field	54	26	20
...feel well informed about other youth organizations in the Greater NY Jewish community	48	39	13

⁴ Given the possibility of multiple jobs, participants were instructed to respond to the survey "based on the organization in which you work with a teen population. If you work with teens in more than one organization, answer based on the organization where you spend the most time. If you work equal hours at two organizations, choose the one that is most central to your career goals."

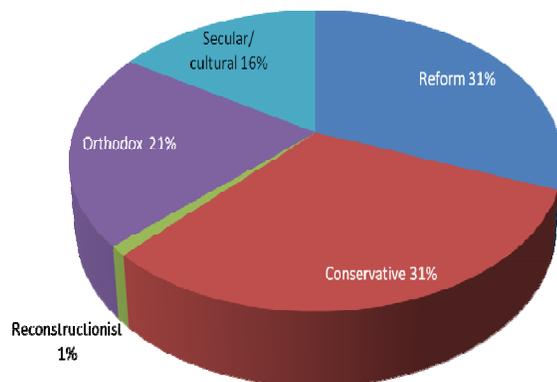
Who Holds These Jobs?

Detailed information on the socio-demographic characteristics and Jewish experiences of the Teen Engagement Practitioners is presented in the Appendix.

Women in our sample outnumber men in the field (58% versus 42%), a division that mirrors the gender imbalance found throughout the Jewish sector.

Most of the TEPs in our study are denominationally identified, with only 16% referring to themselves as secular or cultural Jews or “just Jewish.” None of them say that they have no religion and none report that they adhere to a religion other than Judaism (Figure 8).

Figure 8: TEP Denominational Identity



Note: Numbers do not total 100% due to rounding.

As compared with Jewish summer camps, the other arena in which informal and experiential education prevail, most of the adults working in year-round Jewish engagement are mature, married, and well-educated in terms of both secular and

Jewish education. Some 37% attended a Jewish day school or yeshiva, for almost ten years on average. About 70% attended a Jewish part-time school, for almost nine years on average. Only 7% report no formal Jewish education growing up. Almost all of the TEPs have visited or lived in Israel (94%). Three-quarters had experience at an overnight camp with Jewish educational and/or Shabbat programming and a similar percentage were involved in a Jewish youth group during high school. Almost half (46%) were Jewishly active during both their high school and college years. About 18% report no such participation at either stage of life.

In sum, the data indicate a group of adults who early on had important Jewish educational experiences that, for well over half, started young and continued through college. For many the impulse may have started in their childhood home: 51% had a parent who was a volunteer leader in the Jewish community and 25% had a parent who worked for a Jewish organization. All totaled, 60% came out of households committed to the Jewish communal enterprise by way of their parents' lay leadership and/or professional practice.

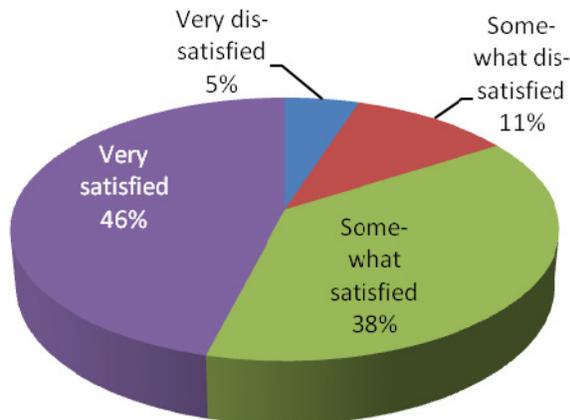
Quality of Work Life

The TEP survey is based on Quality of Work Life metrics. This section presents data on two key indicators, overall job satisfaction and intention to turnover, and then presents results for the various components of satisfaction.

Key Metrics

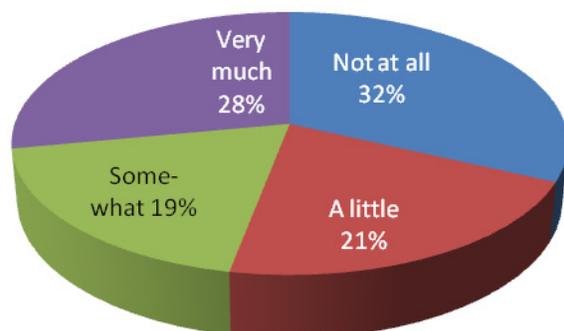
All in all, 84% of the TEPs are satisfied with their current jobs; 16% are dissatisfied (Figure 9).

Figure 9: Overall Job Satisfaction



Nonetheless, almost half of the professional TEPs in New York (48%) and a quarter of the volunteer TEPs (24%) are somewhat or very likely to leave their current position in the next two years. Together these figures represent 47% of the TEPs in our sample (Figure 10).

Figure 10: Likelihood of Leaving Job in Next Two Years



High turnover among TEPs was identified in prior research and is well known in the field. Indeed, between the time we developed our participant list and the time we administered the survey, several people left their jobs.

Not surprisingly, overall job satisfaction and intention to leave are related items—the more satisfied employees are with their position, the less likely they are to seek work elsewhere. About 66% of dissatisfied TEPs say they are likely to leave their positions in the next two years while only 42% of the satisfied TEPs say so. Satisfaction increases the likelihood of remaining on the job, but it does not guarantee it.

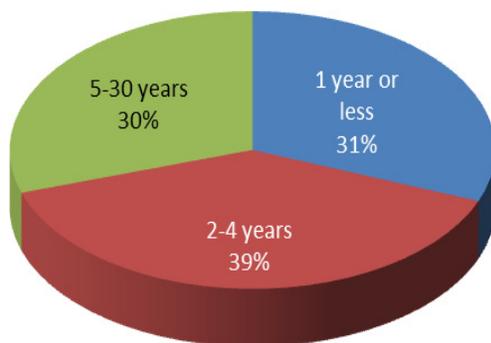
Of those who will likely leave their current positions in the near term, some will continue to work with Jewish youth. Of the professional and volunteer TEPs who say it is somewhat or very likely they will leave their positions, 64% say it is somewhat or very likely their next position will involve work with Jewish youth. About one-third will be “lost” to the field. In the past two years, approximately 28% of the paid professional TEPs seriously thought about leaving Jewish youth work and/or actively looked for work that does *not* involve Jewish teens, verifying that this rate of loss is a real possibility. Potential loss among the volunteer TEPs is comparable.

Most of the professional TEPs in our sample (79%) report that their current job is on their chosen career path. This does not necessarily mean that they will make teen engagement a lifelong career, but it does indicate that the current job is consistent with their future goals. The others (21%) have diverse career interests,

most often related to education and academics; science, technology, and research; but also including the arts, law and politics, psychology, chaplaincy, social work, medicine and veterinary science. The volunteers are different in this regard. For most of the volunteer TEPs, work with teens is a sideline, unrelated to their career path (83%). Only five of them (17%) report that the volunteer work is on their chosen career path.

Other data on job tenure add to the sense of a moving stream of Teen Engagement Practitioners. Just over 30% of the professional TEPs are new on the job, working in their current position for one year or less. Another 39% have been on the job between two and four years. (See Figure 11.)

Figure 11: Tenure on the Job



Such numbers are an indicator of high turnover and/or growth in the field.

The high rate of new hires is likely to continue as turnover is greatest among the most recent employees. Indeed, 63% of the professionals who are somewhat or very likely to leave their jobs in the near term have been in their current position for three years or less (Table 22).

Table 22: Years on the Job of Those Most Likely to Leave

Of those who are somewhat or very likely to leave their positions in the next two years:

39% have been on the job 1 year or less.
 24% have 2-3 years on the job
 15% have 4 years
 22% have 5 years or more on the job

The likelihood of turnover also differs significantly by age, with those in their 20s being almost three times more likely to leave than those in their 30s or older. Such fluidity means that TEPs often come to their current work with relevant experience. As seen in Table 23, 36% had been working in the organization for one or more years before taking on this position, and an impressive 87% had prior experience working in Jewish education. Being a Teen Engagement Practitioner is the first job in Jewish education for only a very small number.

Table 23: Years of Experience Prior to Assuming Current TEP Position

Years	Percent	
	In Jewish education	In this organization
None	13	64
1-2	13	12
3-4	13	11
5-6	19	6
7-8	11	3
9-10	6	1
11 or more	26	3

N.B. Based on paid professionals only (n=184). Numbers do not total 100% due to rounding.

Components

Quality of Work Life measurement is loosely based on Maslow's hierarchy of needs (1943). At the base of the hierarchy are questions about the "bread and butter" issues of pay and benefits. The top of the hierarchy, opportunities to learn new things and to accomplish something worthwhile, relates to Maslow's rubric of "actualization" or the fulfillment of human potential.

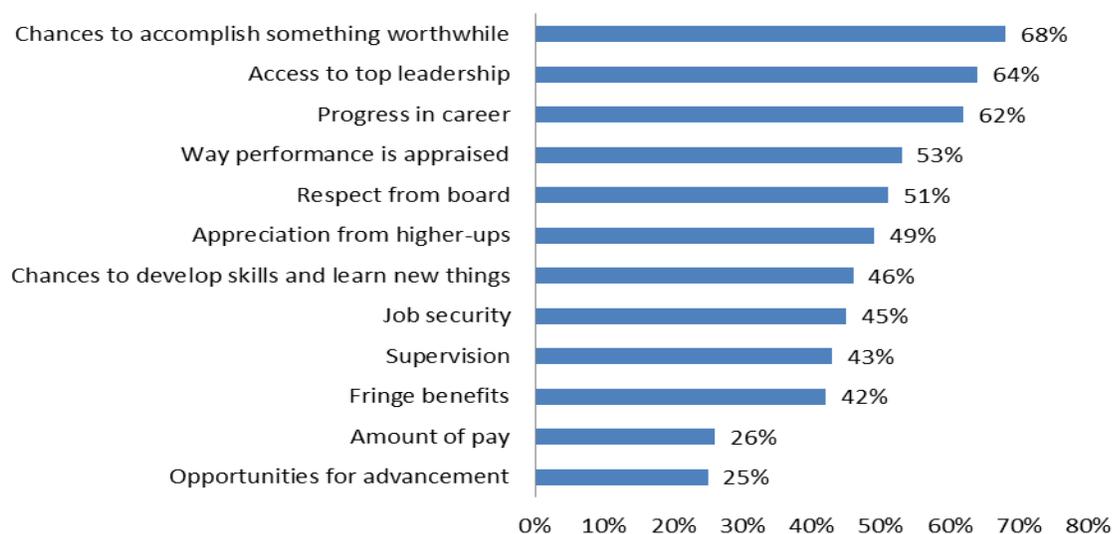
Some 168 Teen Engagement Practitioners completed the QWL bank of questions. In addition, 65 TEPs offered comments on what makes for quality of work life. Their remarks, both positive and negative, are summarized here to add texture to the numeral data.

Any one item was deemed "not applicable"

by 3% to 26% of the participants. For example, 26% do not have fringe benefits. Some 23% say advancement is not relevant to their positions, perhaps because they already hold the top position, are not interested in advancement, or see teen work or their particular position as a dead end job. As well, about 10% claim that questions of supervision, job security, and performance appraisal are not applicable to their current positions.

Figure 12 shows the results for those professionals for whom the item applies. The rank ordering of results is similar to that in other studies of Jewish communal professionals. The greatest source of satisfaction is the chance to do something worthwhile; the lowest sources are pay and chances for advancement. A TEP position is filled with meaning but offers little by way of pay, benefits, or career growth.

Figure 12: Components of Job Satisfaction (% very satisfied)



Volunteer TEPs were asked only those questions relevant to a volunteer position. Their numbers are small so it is difficult statistically to compare their responses to those of the professionals. Nonetheless, it does appear that the volunteers have higher levels of satisfaction with the chances they have to accomplish something worthwhile (84% vs. 68%) and with the supervision they receive on the job (53% vs. 43%). In terms of appreciation, respect, access to top leadership, and opportunities for skills development and for advancement, their answers look almost identical to those of the professionals.

Chances for accomplishment. Highest levels of satisfaction, for both professionals and volunteers, are with the chances they have to accomplish something worthwhile. This number is not surprising given that two-thirds (65%) of the TEPs say they are “very much” making a difference in the

lives of young people through their jobs; and most of the others say somewhat.” (Only 2% say “a little” and no one says “not at all.”)

Written comments give voice to the importance of mission in the TEP’s job satisfaction. As a fulltime paid professional in a synagogue setting enthusiastically wrote, “I love what I do, and I love where I do it. I’ve been incredibly blessed to be able to work hard doing what I love for the benefit of the Jewish people, nearly always feeling appreciated for what I do, and always, everyday, feeling like what I do really matters.” Key to the mission is the opportunity to work with teens. “Getting to know the teens over time is very satisfying,” wrote a synagogue professional. “I am gratified by making long-term connections with students...and learning that I have made a positive difference in their lives,” said a professional in a part-time community school. “The

most satisfying experiences from work involve the excitement and appreciation from the participants. Seeing them learn, enjoy and get involved is invaluable,” wrote a TEP based in a day school.

Chances for Development. TEPs express mid-level satisfaction with their chances to develop skills and learn new things, the other “actualization” factor. Ratings may be affected by insufficient opportunity but also by a lack of information about the opportunities that exist and insufficient support to be able to take advantage of these. Only 26% of the professional TEPs are “very much” aware of opportunities for professional growth and 28% “very much” find that their organization provides time and financial assistance for professional development (Table 24).

The opportunity to learn and to develop skills may also be linked to on-the-job training, feedback, and performance appraisal. About 53% are very satisfied with how their performance is appraised by their supervisor but fewer than half of the TEPs have an annual performance appraisal (45%). As well, one-third do not have a formal job description, a document that can be helpful in performance appraisals and in career planning with employees.

The survey asked the TEPs to comment on their professional development needs and wants. About one-fourth of the 102 who responded to the question spoke of a general interest in academic or professional training programs. For example, one fulltime professional wrote that he would “love to work towards an additional degree that will enable me the flexibility for future growth either in my current job or any future one.”

The others focused on specific areas of interest. A number of TEPs would like to develop their capacity in the use of social media, web design, and blogging. They understand that they need to become more savvy in the use of these technologies in order to reach teens and market their programs. Others want to learn how to widen program offerings, create events that are more “interesting,” “exciting,” and “relevant” to teens, and expand current Jewish content. “I need to get better at thinking out of the box and coming up with really crazy ideas for programming instead of always using the same methods that were run for me when I was twelve,” wrote a volunteer TEP. “I would like to evolve as an educator and youth leader by learning and working on creating more personally relevant (while still Jewishly specific) programs,” wrote a

Table 24: Extent of Support for Professional Development

	Percent			
	Not at all	A little	Somewhat	Very much
Aware of opportunities for professional growth	11	20	44	26
Organization gives time and financial assistance for professional development	17	17	38	28

part-time professional. “I feel that I need to broaden the extent to which content covered in sessions and programming reaches outside of the JCC or synagogue and into the actual lives which my teens experience every day.”

A few respondents would like to develop their management skills, specifically in the areas of supervision, staff development, and organization leadership. A few want more opportunities to learn from others. “I would love to be able to observe and network more with my colleagues,” wrote a synagogue-based TEP. “I think you can learn great skills and wonderful new ideas from colleagues who are right here in NYC. It’s just there is never time to do that within the schedule of my day.” “I always seek room for professional growth, but my greatest need is a network of people within and outside of my work place to collaborate, build new curriculums, and collect resources,” wrote a second synagogue-based TEP. “I want some real leadership and on-the-job mentoring. I want my supervisor to be at the level of someone who can challenge me and help me grow,” wrote a third.

Supervision. Supervision is near the bottom of the satisfaction list but, in regression analyses, proves to have the most influence on the likelihood of leaving the current position. By and large people are not likely to leave because of how they feel about their pay, their opportunities, or the support they are getting from the organization. Outside of age, the number one predictor of the likelihood of turnover is satisfaction with on-the-job supervision.

Pay. Near the bottom of the satisfaction list is pay and many of the negative comments on the survey focus on low pay and the consequent need to work multiple jobs. A fulltime TEP in a day school setting wrote, “I have three different jobs throughout the year, in large part necessitated by economics. The pay for teachers is hardly adequate as a primary income and barely suffices as a second income.” “My pay is relatively low for what I do, and we recently took pay cuts making it even harder,” wrote a fulltime TEP in a synagogue. A part-time synagogue worker wrote, “Since I don’t work 40 hours a week, there are no benefits. If I miss school because I am sick, I am docked pay.”

Given the variety of jobs under the TEP rubric, it is not surprising that the range of salaries is large, distributed across income categories from \$20,000 to \$100,000 or more (Table 25). Of the 93 fulltime workers providing salary information, close to one-fourth earn less than \$50,000 a year and just over one-fourth earn \$100,000 or more. On average, the highest salaries go to the executive directors and rabbis; the second highest to principals and teachers. The lowest paid workers, on average, are social workers and program or youth coordinators. For the fulltime workers, the amount of pay is significantly correlated with satisfaction with pay. Notably, however, the amount of pay is not associated with overall job satisfaction or intention to turnover, neither for fulltime nor part-time paid employees.

Table 25: TEP Salary

	Percent	
	Fulltime (n=93)	Part-time (n=60)
Less than \$20,000	2	65
\$20-49,999	20	35
\$50-74,999	27	7
\$75,000-99,999	24	3
\$100,000 or more	27	0

Note: Respondents who hold more than one job in the field were instructed to indicate their combined total income from all jobs.

The distribution for part-time workers is different given that some work very few hours a week. Of the 60 part-time workers reporting their salary levels, 46 also provided information on number of hours per week in their contracts. Those earning less than \$20,000 a year on average are contracted to work for about 7 hours a week. Those earning \$20,000 to \$49,999 on average are contracted to work for 13.5 hours a week. The few who are earning over \$50,000 a year effectively have half-time jobs, with contracts for an average of 20 hours a week.

Pay satisfaction may be linked not only to dollars but to the number of hours worked to earn the salary. The paid professional TEPs are contracted to work 27.3 hours per week on average but, in fact, work an average of 35.8 hours a week, a difference that amounts to an additional day of work each week.

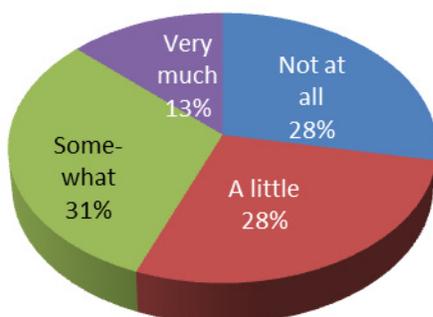
Overall, 72% of the paid TEPs in our sample work more than the contracted amount of time (Table 26) and almost none (4%) are paid additional for overtime. Importantly, this differential is unrelated to overall job satisfaction or the intention to seek work elsewhere.

Table 26: Difference between Hours Contracted and Hours Worked

	Percent
20-35 hours more	18
10-19 hours more	29
1-9 hours more	26
Same	24
1-6 hours less	4

Despite issues of pay and extra hours worked, the burnout rate, among both volunteer and professional TEPs, is low. About 12% of the TEPs feel very burned out while far greater numbers report being not at all or only a little burned out (Figure 13). Burnout is significantly related to overall job satisfaction and the intention to seek work elsewhere.⁵

Figure 13: Burnout



Note: based on 183 paid professionals and volunteers.

Opportunities for advancement. At the bottom of the satisfaction list is opportunities for advancement. In many regards, informal Jewish education may be a lifelong career path, but direct work with teens is not. This realization is clear in respondents' written comments, many of whom work in synagogue settings. "I am a youth director," wrote one synagogue TEP, "so there is no position above me that I am achieving to get. My supervisors are more concerned with other parts of the

shul and its membership than with the youth department. I really get no praise or supervision. My job security is nil, as the board can choose to fire me at any time." "I want to keep working with teens," wrote another synagogue professional, "but there are very few management/senior level positions for teen education that have a high enough salary and/or a manageable schedule to raise a family."

Programming

Quality of Work Life measures are based on the structures surrounding the job—pay, people, professional growth and the like—but not the content of the job itself. Building the field and supporting the TEPs also requires an understanding of the challenges that the Teen Engagement Practitioner faces on the job every day and the resources and support that s/he has for getting the job done. This section begins with programming obstacles and then presents findings on resources and support.

Challenges

Respondents were asked to what extent various challenges affect their work. The eight challenges concern participants, staff, funding, technology, and Jewish content. Items were not applicable to 3% to 12% of the respondents. For example, some are not responsible for finding staff (12%) or securing funding (9%), or their mandate does not include reaching a more diverse audience (10%).

⁵ <.000 and p<.003 respectively.

Analysis is based on those for whom the items apply. Results are presented in descending order with the greatest obstacles at the top. As seen in Figure 14, the greatest issues are competition for teens' time and attention and the difficulty of attracting participants. Youth leadership, funding, and Jewish content are secondary concerns. Staffing, diversification, and technology (including social media) are lowest on the list.

Participants were asked to comment on the adequacy of various resources for accomplishing the goals of their organization's teen programming. Across the board, few report "very adequate"

resources (Table 27). The greatest need is funding for programs and scholarships. Some 40% say that such funding is not at all or only a little adequate for accomplishing their goals.

Support

By and large, volunteer leadership, co-workers, and colleagues support the Teen Engagement Practitioners in their work. Very few respondents indicated that any of these individuals were great obstructions to their work so we combined "greatly obstruct" and "somewhat obstruct" in our analysis. Even then, the greatest obstruction, the parents, is problematic for

Figure 14: Obstacles (% very much)

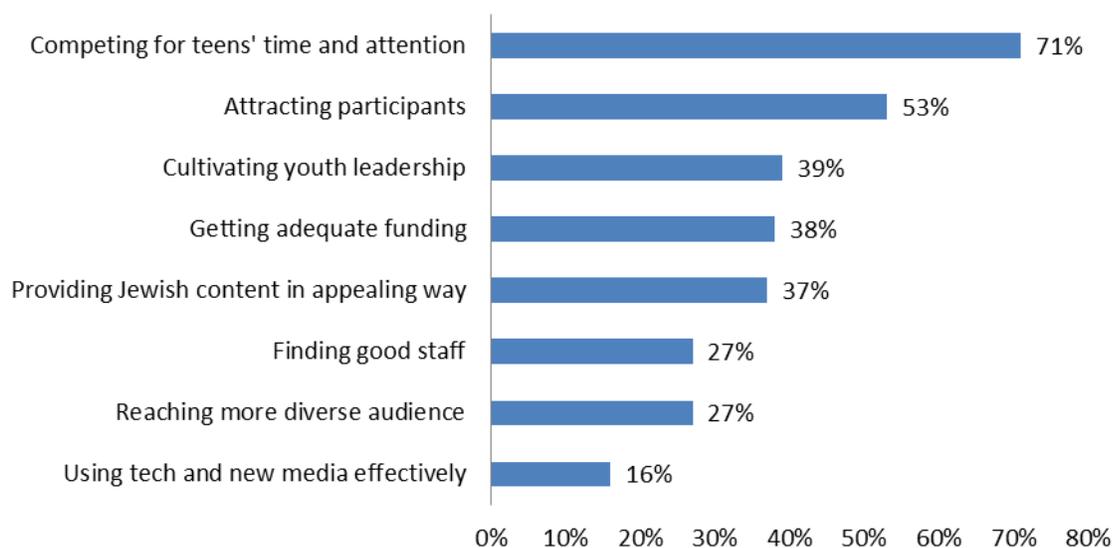


Table 27: Adequacy of Resources for Accomplishing Goals

	Percent			
	Not at all adequate	A little adequate	Somewhat adequate	Very adequate
Level of staffing	7	17	43	34
Computers, Internet access, etc.	17	18	34	31
Physical space for programs	9	27	34	30
Funding for programs and scholarships	13	27	38	22

only 13% of the sample. The greatest support comes from rabbis, educators, and co-workers. (See Table 28.)

Importantly, these questions were deemed “not applicable” by a large number of participants. It appears that 38% are not working within a regional or national system; 31% do not have colleagues in other organizations; and 20% are not in a system with a rabbi or top educator. Almost everyone has a connection to parents but other items have between 5% and 11% of respondents indicating that

they were not applicable (i.e., no connection to colleagues, lay leadership, or top management).

In their written comments, some of the respondents talked about the support they receive from their organization as a key element of quality of work life. These TEPs feel “appreciated,” “respected” and “important.” For example, a fulltime paid professional in a synagogue setting wrote, “My workplace values youth programming and pays very well for hard work. I am encouraged and motivated by my superiors

Table 28: Extent to Which Others Support or Obstruct TEPs’ Work

	Percent		
	Somewhat or greatly obstructs my work	Somewhat supports my work	Greatly supports my work
Rabbi or top educator	5	29	66
Co-workers	6	30	64
Top management in your organization	7	35	58
Colleagues in other organizations	5	54	41
Lay leadership in your organization	8	49	43
Regional or national office	11	52	37
Parents of teens	13	50	37

and have the respect and admiration of the board. Whatever programs I feel are valuable to our teens are funded—no problem.” Others note that their organization is “supportive,” that it looks “to raise up what worked and offer to assist to make things easier, more organized, or just better.” The priority of the board is “to do educationally important things,” and it backs this up with emotional and financial support. In one of the youth movements “most of the board members did our jobs when they were our age so they appreciate our importance.” In these settings, the TEPs are “able to strive for improvement.”

TEPs in other settings note the lack of support and guidance from supervisors and volunteer leadership. And they write about economic constraints within their organization that are affecting the amount of time and attention that can be given to the teens.

In addition to these formal role relationships, most of the paid professionals (71%) and half of the volunteer TEPs (50%) have someone in their life that they consider their mentor. These relationships are another source of support for the TEPs and the great

majority describe them as valuable (Table 29).

Support for collaboration. The survey asked about the relationship between the informal, experiential education being provided by the TEPs and the formal education that might be taking place elsewhere within their organizations. Some 47% say that the organization very much promotes collaboration between formal and informal education; 32% say somewhat. Although the link between informal and formal education is somewhat more common in the synagogue setting, the difference between synagogues, youth movements, and other organizations is not statistically significant.

Support of creativity. Teen engagement work requires and calls forth high levels of creativity. Over 90% of the TEP respondents said that their organization encourages them to be creative and to experiment with new ideas (30% somewhat; 62% very much). Creativity is the hallmark of informal, experiential education and it is thus not surprising that support for creativity and experimentation is strongly correlated with overall job satisfaction and intention to remain on the job.

Table 29: Extent to Which Mentoring Relationship is Valuable

	Percent			
	Not at all	A little	Somewhat	Very much
Paid professionals (mentor relationship valuable in professional life)	2	7	24	68
Volunteers (mentor relationship valuable in work with teens)	0	18	55	27

Conversely, where creativity is squelched—a minority of instances to be sure—the dissatisfaction is palpable. These TEPs feel “very limited” as educators. They “want to try new things, develop unique programming, and truly meet my teens with ‘Jewishness’ where they are at in their lives,” but they feel unable to do so because of “apprehension on the part of management and higher-ups to take some risks, be creative and original, and allow our programming to evolve along with our teens.”

Barriers to Best Work with Jewish Teens

The programming issues above were given texture in the comments that 70 respondents wrote in response to the question of what makes it difficult for them to do their best work with Jewish teens.

Well over half of the comments refer to competition for teens’ time. Regardless of the setting in which they work—day schools, synagogues, youth movements, JCCs, or other venues—the TEPs say that their programs compete with academics and homework, extracurricular activities, and college test preparation. They also are up against the prevailing sense that Jewish activities are less important to college applications and resumes. All of this is exacerbated by the difficulty of communicating with the teens. TEPs note that teens do not respond to their communications, regardless of whether these are Facebook messages or posts, text messages, emails, or telephone calls.

- “They are so over-programmed! And exhausted! They love youth group but

often can’t commit to events because of SAT tutors, regional sports championships, debate club, the list goes on...”

- “In Westchester the Jewish teens have Jewish friends in school, and they are very busy, so parents (and teens) don’t prioritize having their teens connect with the synagogue teen community. One of the biggest challenges in our community is making Jewish time a priority for our families and teens.”
- “This is a high pressure community with high pressure teens so getting them to recognize the value of Judaism to their lives is a real challenge. Some don’t see it as a priority or important, whereas others see it as secondary to activities they think will help them get into the top universities.”

The relatively low level of support from parents is described as a failure to endorse their child’s involvement in Jewish-sponsored activities, especially in comparison to their support for academic and other extracurricular activities. TEPs note that parents “are not always supportive of the amount of time that teens might want to spend on Jewish activities thinking that they are detrimental to achievement.” Or they “undermine” the program “by saying it is not important.” One TEP concludes that for parents, Jewish engagement “is less and less a priority. As a result, it is harder to draw the teens.”

In addition, current economic conditions have affected a few of the TEPs. They write that decreases in funding make it

difficult to engage teens as they are now unable to subsidize program fees and other costs that can be barriers to participation. The economic downturn also affects staff hiring because quality candidates “are often attracted to other organizations that offer more competitive salaries, better benefits, and clearer career paths.” “Unfortunately,” a day school professional wrote, “in recent years, economic realities have caused involvement to drop, parent support to drop and funding to dry up.”

A few of the TEPs feel that they are working against the existing culture in their organizations or in the community. For example, synagogue workers confront the “culture of the synagogue as b’nei mitzvah factory.” JCC workers face competition from other youth programs. A few see the structure of their jobs or the lack of sufficient staffing as an obstacle to doing their best work with the teens. “I wear so many hats at the synagogue that sometimes I feel the youth work takes a back seat,” wrote one.

Organization Changes Needed

Some 107 TEPs answered the question of what changes in their organization would raise the level of the teen program and its success.

About one-fourth commented on staffing. Respondents would like additional staff members for their organization or program. They would like to convert part-time positions to fulltime and temporary positions to permanent. They comment on the limitations of rabbinical interns who leave the synagogue after a year or two and of the part-time student workers who do not always have the youth group at the top of their To Do lists. They also note the

limitations of having a single TEP rather than a team that could work together to create the program.

An almost equal number say that additional financial resources are required to raise the level of their teen programs. While some respondents simply wrote that more funds are needed (“more money, more money and more money”), others explained that additional income would be used to expand the range of activities offered, cover program fees and student subsidies, and provide salaries for additional staff. The need for fundraising is clearly articulated by a TEP working within a day school setting: “The organization gives me what they can, but they need stronger philanthropic generosity to provide for the overall needs of the organization. Greater funding would provide for greater spirit building, identity strengthening and even alumni relations as we move forward.”

Some TEPs believe that reaching unaffiliated teens and increasing the number of participants in their activities would raise the level of their program. “Teens don’t want to hang around where there is not a critical mass. With more teens, I can have more money allocated to do great things,” explained a fulltime synagogue youth worker. “I feel like the teens would be more involved if more of them came, and while that sounds ridiculous, it is true,” wrote a part-time synagogue TEP. A volunteer TEP in one of the youth movements thinks the focus of programming needs to shift from those already involved in the movement to the wider community. “I think this would help our participants see the wider impact they can have as leaders both within and outside of the movement,” he said.

Smaller numbers of respondents cited parental involvement, “buy-in,” or support for Jewish education or youth group activities as a much needed change. These respondents want to find a way to convince parents of the value of the teen program. Or they want the organization to reconsider its vision and goals for the program so that it can articulate why it is important to support teen education.

Vision for the Future

Over 100 TEPs wrote about their vision for their teen program five years from now. For nearly half, the vision includes the creation of new programs and the reimagining of existing offerings. These TEPs envision “thriving” and “dynamic” programming that engages teens and “makes them feel part of a greater Jewish community” and “prepared for college and beyond.” Their ideas range from volunteer and service learning opportunities, to leadership training, to travel programs, to a “Jewish Driver’s Ed” program that would combine driving classes with sessions in Jewish values connected to driving (e.g., protecting the environment, taking care of others). Israel experiences, in particular, are seen as an incentive to stay involved in the high school program, as a capstone to Jewish education, and as a bridge between formal and informal education.

TEPs would seek “multiple ‘on-ramps’ to the ‘highway’ of Jewish life for our teens—so that there can be many different ways in which teens engage in Jewish life even if they are not enrolled in a formal classroom setting of post-b’nei mitzvah education.” As one synagogue worker described the vision, there would be “multiple options for study, engagement, social connection and personal growth opportunities. Students would have a number of program options to find their connection to the synagogue and would feel like a valuable constituent of the institution.”

The vision for many others includes growth in their attendance numbers and in the size and strength of their particular movements. And for almost a third, it includes resources—space, funding, and staffing. All of these are linked concerns. TEPs see dedicated, appealing, teen-friendly space as important to their efforts to encourage participation. Teens, they argue, need a place to go after school to do homework and hang out, what one referred to as “a Starbucks but better.” They also believe reducing cost barriers to participation—especially in intensive experiences like conventions and Shabbatonim—is critical to success. And they believe that adequate numbers of quality staff will make a difference in the program’s future success.

Conclusion

Commonsense notions of American adolescents abound, derived from our own teen experiences, observations of our children and their friends, or the portrayal of teen life in books and film. Engaging Jewish Teens undertook a social scientific approach to understanding this age group so that the deliberations of the Experiments in Teen Engagement Task Force of UJA-Federation of New York could be based less in personal experience and anecdote and more in systematic, empirical data. The study describes Jewish teens, their everyday reality, and the factors that contribute to or detract from their engagement in Jewish life. Its purpose is not simply to check beliefs and assumptions, but to open a conversation about Jewish adolescents and the possibilities for stimulating their Jewish sentiments and captivating their imagination.

Questions concerning Jewish teens last arose in the 1990s and repeated answers were offered by the teen commissions and research of that decade. In some sense it seems that little has changed. The values and concerns of today's Jewish teens look remarkably similar to those of a decade ago. This finding is validated by Monitoring the Future, the ongoing national study of American high school seniors which similarly finds high consistency in attitudes across time. As well, job satisfaction and quality of work life issues of the Teen Engagement Practitioners mirror those reported by youth professionals in the 1990s.

Yet we know that the world has changed significantly since the 1990s. High-speed Internet, smart phones, and social media have thoroughly permeated everyday life. Although many parents express concern about their child's extensive time on the computer and phone, technology does not register in the teens' responses. Media for them are as much a part of existence as breathing; and like breathing, the media call for no comment as long as they are working. The terrorist attacks of 2001 led to the creation of the Office of Homeland Security with its alert codes and the imposition of security measures in airports and other public institutions. Terrorist threats and security responses have become a constant in the news and in public discourse. Despite memories the teens and their parents may have of 9/11, security is also not mentioned in survey responses. We might similarly contrast the 1990s Clinton era of "peace and prosperity" with the continuous wars and economic turmoil that define today's reality. Our sense is that such societal changes form the backdrop of life but do not measurably affect the nature of the teens' everyday behaviors, interests, and concerns.

School continues to dominate the daily lives of adolescents and academic demands continue to rise toward the crescendo of college planning and admissions. Participation in extracurricular activities is as high as ever. Similar to their predecessors, today's teens are proud to be Jewish but that sentiment generally does not translate into an interest in ritual

observance or organized Jewish activities. From the perspective of the TEPs, the number one issue remains attracting teens and winning the steep competition for their time and attention. This challenge far outweighs any concerns they have with funding, staffing, technology, or space, even though few would say that these resources are fully adequate to the task.

The Jewish Challenge

Engaging Jewish Teens is based on a select sample of intact, affiliated families with high rates of education and low rates of intermarriage. The great majority of the teens are described by their parents as happy and well-adjusted in school. Almost all of them have had some form of Jewish education and celebrated a bar/bat mitzvah. These teens, well situated within the Jewish world, are the ones most likely to be captured by engagement efforts.

In fact, two-thirds of these teens are engaged in Jewish activities during the school year, whether through Jewish day school, part-time school, or an organized youth group or club. It is difficult to say whether this number represents a strength or a problem. It is certainly a higher level of participation than seen in the parents' generation and, from a business perspective, represents an admirable market share. From a communal point of view, however, the glass is part empty, with one-third of the most promising candidates not part of any regular, organized Jewish activity.

Jewish pride runs high among the teens in our study. Their positive feelings about being Jewish are grounded in an appreciation for the sense of community,

connection to other Jews, and Jewish tradition and culture, most especially holiday celebrations with family. Like most American Jews, their views are not unqualifiedly positive and they also express negative feelings about antisemitism, Jewish stereotypes, religious services, and divisiveness within the Jewish community. Nonetheless, the reader is struck with the overwhelming number of strong positive statements made on the teen survey.

At the same time, fewer than half of these teens very much feel part of the Jewish people or connected to Israel. Having a strong Jewish identity is very important to about half of them. Their top life values center on close friends, academic success, and getting into a good college. Jewish identity and participation in Jewish life appear at the bottom of the list of what is important to them in their lives. Many give high importance to family and to making the world a better place, but they do not attribute their sense of personal or societal right and wrong to Jewish teachings. In short, their concerns are American and not Jewish; their outlook is universalistic and not particularistic.

These findings are based on a sample that is disproportionately affiliated and, therefore, should be viewed as the most positive description of the Jewish teen population. Beyond this sample are untold numbers of teens untouched by the community. Not included in the study, for example, are Israeli teens, Russian-heritage teens, and teens from other Jewish ethnic groups in New York. These teens are particularly difficult for Jewish programs to identify and reach. Many of their families are not affiliated with

synagogues, and other institutions that are familiar with these families are loath to grant access to their lists. Clearly, efforts must be redesigned and redoubled not only to do more for the affiliated teens but also to reach those who either come from immigrant families, have only one Jewish parent, are not synagogue members, have dropped out of Jewish education, or are otherwise on the margins of the community.

Pieces of the Puzzle

There are several pieces to the puzzle of teen engagement in Jewish life, each with its own complexity. These include the place of extracurricular activities during high school, and the role of friends, parents, Teen Engagement Practitioners, and the synagogue. Below we summarize the strengths and weaknesses of each in terms of its potential role in helping to solve the Jewish teen engagement problem.

Place of Extracurricular Activities

Extracurricular activities are seen as both the “fun” part of high school and the primary means of resume-building for the college application. Aside from their utilitarian value, the literature makes clear that these activities are critically important to life success. They are linked to positive academic, psychological, and behavioral outcomes—everything from higher grade point averages to happiness and mental health, to higher levels of civic engagement in young adulthood. Participation in religious-based activities has additional benefits including identity development, social capital, and a reduction in risk behaviors. Jewish engagement activities, whatever form they may take, come under the rubric of

extracurricular activities and the literature thus validates the ETE Task Force’s interest in them.

When it comes to engaging teens in specifically Jewish activities, there is good and bad news. On the one hand, like any American adolescent, the teens in our study are deeply involved in extracurricular activities. Their rate of participation in Jewish youth groups, 45%, exceeds numbers from prior research on Jewish teens and is certainly in line with data from other religious groups. On the other hand, these teens are busy. Over half are *very* concerned about finding “free” time and getting enough sleep; close to half are *very* stressed about school. After doing well in school and figuring out the future, their top concerns are lack of free time and sleep. And even though parents are far less worried about their “over-programmed” teen, the time demands of school and extracurricular activities are fundamental to the teens’ reality.

The main reasons teens choose the activity in which they are most involved is that it is fun and gives them opportunities to learn new things and develop skills. The presence of friends and likeable adult leaders, or the contribution of the activity to their college application—albeit of some importance—are in the second tier of the list of attractors. This finding holds equally for Jewish and non-Jewish sponsored activities. When it comes to their #1 activity, the teens in our study are drawn by interest, enjoyment, and even passion for the particular activity. This motivation largely explains why only 7% cite a Jewish activity as their top involvement.

The solution to getting more teens to choose Jewish extracurricular activities

does not lie in better recruitment and marketing, at least not for the affiliated teens. Almost all of the teens in our study are familiar with one or more Jewish youth organizations. Curiously, they are more likely to know about college opportunities (Birthright Israel, Hillel) than they are about high school programs; and they are more familiar with Chabad and the non-Orthodox denominational youth groups (USY, NFTY) than with other types of groups. Nonetheless, asked about their views of these organizations, the great majority of respondents wrote positively about how they provide opportunities for involvement and leadership, help people in need, create community and friendships outside of school, and incorporate Jewish content. A small minority had negative comments that referred to Jewish organizations as too religious or not religious enough, too pushy, exclusive, cliquy or unfriendly. But, by and large, the teens are aware of what the community offers and have a positive view of it.

Role of Friends

Although the participation of friends is not an essential factor in a teen's choice of primary involvement, friends are the most important aspect of a teen's life and the Jewish composition of the close friendship circle is an aspect of Jewish community for teens. Almost a fourth of the teens in our study have few or no close friends who are Jewish. About a fourth have mixed friendship circles and just over half have friendship circles that are predominantly Jewish. The Jewish nature of their friendship circles appears to be set by 9th grade. Moreover, having close Jewish friends proves not to be a predictor of

participation in Jewish extracurricular activities. Nonetheless, the likelihood remains that participation in Jewish activities can help build Jewish relationships, and were the experience to have the same power as a summer at overnight camp, it could indeed create deep and lasting Jewish friendships.

Role of Parents

Three-fourths of the teens in our study regularly have dinner with their family, a rate significantly higher than the national figure. The literature makes clear that this simple behavior is associated with higher quality relationships with parents and siblings. Our finding thus suggests that the parents are regularly talking with their teens and have the possibility of influencing them. Almost all of the parents feel that honest conversations with their teens are very important. The teens do not always agree with their parents on this question but, nonetheless, about two-thirds say that honest conversations with their parents are very important to them.

The parents seem well positioned to direct their children toward Jewish life. The great majority of the parents we surveyed had some type of formal Jewish education growing up, attended a Jewish overnight camp, and visited Israel. On average, they are assuring that their teens receive far more formal Jewish education than they themselves did as adolescents. Over 80% say that being Jewish is very important in their lives today and that it is very important to them that their child have a strong Jewish identity. Moreover, they hold the family together when it comes to the Jewish holidays, whether this is

lighting Hanukkah candles, celebrating the High Holidays, or holding a Passover seder, which the vast majority do every year. Comments from the teens make clear that it is these home observances that continue to power their Jewish sentiments.

The parents' modeling, behavior, and influence do not extend to attendance at religious services, Shabbat dinners, or engagement in activities sponsored by the synagogue, JCC, or other Jewish institution. Fewer than half of the families in our study regularly engage in these activities. About a third of the parents do not feel their child's involvement in a Jewish community is very important and over half do not feel Jewish ritual is very important for their child. These parents, it should be recalled, are synagogue members and relative Jewish "elites."

The general literature shows parents to be the key social influence on the religious and spiritual lives of adolescents, and it shows a high correlation between the practices and affiliations of both. Although our data show correspondence between Jewish parents and teens in terms of practices and affiliation, they also reveal differences in the views of parents and teens. Notably, the greatest differentials concern the Jewish dimensions of life: As compared with their parents' responses, teens most often give a lower rating to the importance of Jewish identity, Jewish community, and Jewish ritual.

It is also not clear that parents have much say over their teens' decisions when it comes to extracurricular activities. A small percentage of the teens we surveyed say that their parents' desires had a strong influence on their decision to participate in

a particular activity (whether Jewish or not), and only a minority of those in Jewish part-time school say that they are there at their parents' insistence. For their part, the great majority of parents say that they do have influence on their teen's choice of activities.

According to the TEPs, parents are the least supportive stakeholders (as compared with co-workers, lay leadership, rabbis, and others). Some of the TEPs believe the parents undermine their efforts by placing a lower priority on Jewish activities and sending the message to their child that Jewish activities are not important. At the same time, 85% of the parents report that they were highly supportive of their teen's participation in a Jewish-sponsored activity. Again, there appears to be more than one truth.

There may be work to be done to bring parents into the fold, and it is possible that increasing their enthusiasm for Jewish engagement could prove useful. Nonetheless, if we view the world from the teens' perspective, they are their own decision makers, and the factors driving their decisions lead them to places that often have little or nothing to do with the Jewish community.

Role of the Teen Engagement Practitioner

There are clear and persistent issues within the realm of the TEPs, many of which connect to the fact that they do not work within a defined field of practice. There are no designated entry points, career paths, professional development programs, inter-organizational or field-wide convenings, communities of practice, or other such developmental, motivational, and support

structures. Turnover rates continue at the high level found in other studies, with over one-fourth saying it is very likely that they will leave their current position in the next two years. The field, such as it is, is characterized by low tenure and high turnover. The result is that almost 40% have been on the job for one year or less.

The great majority of TEPs are satisfied with their current jobs overall. The key issues for them are opportunities for advancement, supervision, and pay. These items imply that youth work is not designed as a long-term career.

Importantly, outside of age, the number one predictor of the likelihood of turnover is unsatisfactory supervision. Even where job structures do not permit career tracks and where resources do not permit better salaries, employers could do more to provide the kind of supervision that improves the TEP's work experience, performance, and longevity on the job.

It is also clear that more could be done to provide professional development for the TEPs. Fewer than half are very satisfied with the chances they have to develop skills and learn new things. Few are well aware of opportunities for professional growth or find that their organization provides time and financial assistance for them to participate. As well, improvements could be made in related internal procedures such as formal job descriptions and annual performance appraisals, both of which many TEPs lack. The driving factors in satisfaction are the chances to accomplish something worthwhile and the chance to make a difference in the lives of young people.

Comments make clear that these workers are “mission driven” and it is the teens who make the job what it is. Such opportunity for accomplishment and success appear to be both the attractor to the job and the glue that holds people in their positions. In the end, it is indeed about the teens.

In terms of the recruitment of new professionals, there is but one need to be filled—attracting more men into the field. The predominance of female TEPs mirrors the gender imbalance found throughout the Jewish sector, but it represents a particularly serious shortcoming when it comes to working with teenage boys and providing role models for them.

The TEPs potentially play an important role in the lives of the teens. The parents give high ratings to the quality of the adults who staff Jewish-sponsored programs and, indeed, rate them significantly higher than the adults who run non-Jewish programs. In interviews, the teens spoke of the role of a beloved teacher in turning a class into one of their favorites and in drawing them into extracurricular activities in which the teacher is involved. From our studies of Jewish summer camp, we understand the significant impact that counselors can have on campers, even through the teen years. The need for a “counselor” does not disappear during the school year. In fact, the Teen Professional Panel for our research discovered that the highest value may be in the relationship between the individual teen and the TEP rather than in the program per se. Panel members met with teens to interview them about their school, extracurricular activities, and

Jewish involvement. The professionals were excited by the conversations and uniformly reported back that, in the one-on-one setting, the teens opened up to them and told them about parts of their lives that they had not previously shared. In a short time, a bond was created between teen interviewee and TEP interviewer, an outcome that outweighed the value of the data itself.

Given their commitment and positions within the organized Jewish community, the TEPs could be a partner in developing new frameworks for engaging teens in Jewish life. However, in order to gain full advantage of what they have to offer, the community would need to develop a comprehensive list of players, weave them into a network, increase participation in professional development, improve supervision, help them secure more resources for their work, and stem the turnover rate. None of these are easy tasks.

As well, the TEPs may lack the vision needed to make a significant difference in current rates of teen engagement. Almost all of the TEP respondents say their organization encourages them to be creative and to experiment with new ideas. Creativity is obviously important to the TEPs as such support is strongly correlated with overall job satisfaction and the intention to remain on the job. Nonetheless, it seems that with all of the creativity bound up in these TEPs, they do not think big enough or have not been given license to imagine far beyond current realities. Asked about future vision, they talk about more staff and more money. Given how hard they work to attract teens, they understand the challenge to be growing the number of involved teens. They understand that more teens participating would create a critical

mass which would *ipso facto* raise the level of their program and its impact and then, in turn, raise support for the program. Although they do not express it in these terms, they envision a virtuous spiral driven by increased numbers. Unfortunately, a vision rooted in numbers is unlikely to captivate teens.

Role of the Synagogue

From the array of organizations that are potential partners for UJA-Federation in its teen engagement experiments, we single out the synagogue for several reasons. The great majority of American Jewish teens celebrate becoming a bar/bat mitzvah and do so most commonly in a synagogue. The synagogue is thus a common starting point. Based on the lists we received for Engaging Jewish Teens, we estimate that there are at least 16,000 teens known to the synagogues within the four geographic areas studied. If these teens are similar to those selected for the study, then almost all of the parents have maintained their synagogue membership after their teen's bar/bat mitzvah, and a majority of their children feel comfortable in the synagogue. As well, the denominational youth groups offer a ready-made youth function within the synagogue setting. The analysis shows that the two factors that increase the likelihood of participation in a Jewish youth group involve the synagogue (i.e., multiple years of part-time school education and family attendance at synagogue-sponsored events). Synagogues should thus be a way to tap into a talent pool of youth professionals and to gain access to large numbers of Jewish teens.

Despite the presence of a youth group, the synagogues' readiness to embrace the teen agenda is questionable. Many synagogues in the catchment area were reluctant to be part

of this study, even though it promised to help them learn more about their high schoolers. Of those that joined the study, only a few actively encouraged their families to participate. According to their comments on the survey, TEPs who work in congregational settings can feel like “islands” separated from the rest of the synagogue. In the words of one, there is “no time, no money, no space, no interest from leadership.” Post-bar/bat mitzvah retention rates suggest that the synagogues have not universally positioned themselves as leaders in Jewish teen life.

There are certainly synagogues that have the will, leadership, and resources to move the teen agenda, but a few pockets of excellence cannot produce the kind of sea change that is needed. In the four geographic areas of our study, there are at least 150 synagogues with a sizeable teen population. It would take tremendous effort to energize a critical mass of these synagogues although doing so could be a win for all concerned—the synagogues, their professionals and families, and the community.

Big Ideas Needed

Examination of the puzzle pieces suggests that steps can be taken to move parents toward greater concern with their teens’ engagement in Jewish life, to improve the work lives and performance of the Teen Engagement Practitioners, and to energize the youth movements and synagogues to embrace a new teen agenda. These steps, however important, would limit efforts to current institutional structures and would have little impact beyond the realm of the affiliated. If past experience is any

indication, they would not produce a sea change. In addition to these improvements, a process is needed to generate new thinking and action.

The challenge of teen engagement may be what is referred to as a “wicked problem” (Collins, 2001; O’Grady, 2008). Such problems are complex and, despite superficial similarity to other problems, they are unique. The effort to solve them is never “completed” but simply ends when some resource runs out or the solution creates a newer problem. The results of Engaging Jewish Teens do not point to specific programs that could significantly increase teen participation in Jewish life and activities. They do, however, provide parameters for the solution to the engagement problem and steps for creative problem solving.

In terms of parameters, the results of the research make clear that the programs will need to fit with the reality of teens’ lives—their absorption in academics and college preparation, their lack of “free” time, and their commitment to their friends. They will have to stimulate interest among those who do not place Jewish life high on their list of priorities. They can build on the positive feelings that teens have about being Jewish (the pride, the family celebrations) but they will also have to circumvent the negative feelings that some hold. They will need to impress teens from across the spectrum, from the relative “elites” in our study to those who are less engaged and more marginal to the Jewish community.

In terms of process, the following steps can help release the new thinking that will be

required to solve a problem of this complexity.

1. Define the problem. What is the nature of the program that The Jewish Education Project and the ETE Task Force are trying to solve? Is there a single problem or a set of related problems? And is there agreement on definition? According to our research, the problem might be the number of teens who are receiving no Jewish education during high school and are otherwise not engaged in Jewish life. Or the problem might be the erosion of Jewish identity and teens' superficial understanding of what it means to be a Jew. Or it might be the small numbers who make Jewish activities their primary involvement. The first problem is based on the broad population, the second on the affiliated teens, and the third on leadership. Each suggests a different solution from broad-based initiatives aimed at increasing numbers to efforts to devise richer, deeper, more powerful programs for the relative "insiders." Regardless, the ETE Task Force and The Jewish Education Project must arrive at a shared understanding of the problem and a commitment to the solutions.

2. Set goals. If teen engagement is in fact a wicked problem than the goal must be "audacious," or as *Good to Great* author Jim Collins says, it requires BHAG: "Big Hairy Audacious Goals." In the 1990s, too much time and effort undoubtedly went into planning and too little into action. The resultant initiatives were too small and too far removed from the teens to make a difference. Needed now are audacious goals and big ideas.

3. Seek big ideas. Big ideas should not be confused with big programs. Big ideas are

powerful concepts that can mobilize energy and drive a social movement. Birthright Israel was founded on the big idea that it is every young Jew's birthright to go to Israel as part of an educational program. The power of the idea and its capacity to change the trajectory of a Jewish life (Saxe & Chazan, 2008) has stimulated a multiplicity of program forms and caused the entire enterprise to grow in numbers. The bar/bat mitzvah celebration functions like a big idea. The idea is that there is a transition in a Jew's life from childhood to adulthood and this transition is linked to Torah study. The power of this idea has made the bar/bat mitzvah normative in North America, for both boys and girls, so that thousands of bar/bat mitzvah ceremonies take place every year. The process involves participants in Jewish education over a period of years; it engages the entire family, brings them into the synagogue, and impels them to invest heavily (dollars and time) in the preparation and the occasion; and it leaves the child with wonderful memories. Like Birthright Israel, the bar/bat mitzvah is not a unitary program. And it, too, is appreciated more for its impact than its size. Note that neither Birthright Israel nor bar/bat mitzvah was a new idea. Both derived from ideas that the Jewish community has long known "works"—Torah study and Israel experience (Mittelberg, 1992). Although there may be original aspects to their application to the teen and young adult populations, they are not inherently novel ideas.

The big ideas that can drive experiments in teen engagement may already exist and, if so, the first purpose of problem solving is to uncover them. These ideas might harness the teens' wide ranging interests and talents and enormous energy. Or they

might change the bar/bat mitzvah so that it becomes more of a launch pad and less of a graduation. Or they might capitalize on teens' curiosity about the world and take advantage of the global nature of the Jewish enterprise. Or they might emphasize the application of Jewish values to life. Or they might concern teen empowerment, healthy development, or life success, to name just a few possibilities.

4. Look at existing programs. Do not do so with an eye for adoption, but to understand the theory behind them and the ideas that drive them. Also, look at existing youth movements, not to replicate them but to understand the power of ideologically-driven movements.

5. Bring this information to the planning table. Wicked problems inherently require multi-disciplinary approaches to problem solving that open up new thinking. The planning group should cover diverse perspectives: religion, psychology, sociology, medicine, social work,

community organizing and other disciplines, all of which may contribute valuable insight and ideas. Once this group has elaborated big ideas, the programs—whether service learning, youth philanthropy, Israel experience, international partnerships, physical challenge, cultural arts, or a new form yet to be named—will follow.

The challenge for the community is to move quickly and audaciously from ideas to action. If we are indeed solving a wicked problem, the big ideas will be neither right nor wrong. But implemented with force, they should provide a “good enough” solution to the problem of teen engagement by creating a profound Jewish experience that touches young people and becomes a normative or expected life opportunity. The community will know that it has succeeded when the 12 or 13-year-old on the *bimah* is not only relishing the moment of becoming a bar/bat mitzvah but is also looking forward to what awaits him or her as a Jewish teen.

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Appendix: Teen Engagement Practitioner Background Characteristics

The findings below describe the background characteristics of the 230 Teen Engagement Practitioners who responded to the TEP survey.

Appendix Table 1: TEP Socio-demographics

	Number	Percent
<i>Age</i>		
20s	73	41%
30s	45	25%
40s	26	15%
50s	26	15%
60s and 70s	7	4%
<i>Marital status</i>		
Married	95	53%
Living with a life partner	4	2%
Engaged to be married	5	3%
Single, never married	68	38%
Separated, divorced, widowed	8	5%
<i>Education (Highest degree completed) (n=179)</i>		
High school, vocational, or associate	23	13%
Bachelor's	61	34%
Master's	59	33%
Rabbinic ordination	25	14%
Ph.D. or other professional degree	11	6%
<i>Birthplace</i>		
United States	163	93%
Canada	4	2%
FSU	4	2%
Israel	5	3%
<i>Place growing up—childhood through college</i>		
United States	162	92%
Canada	4	2%
FSU	2	1%
Israel	9	5%

Age. Many people in their 20s hold a TEP position although the average age across the field is 36. This differs significantly from summer camps, where the average age of professional staff (from counselors through executive directors) is closer to 22 (Sales, Samuel, & Boxer, 2011).

Marital status. Over half of the TEPs are married, living with a life partner, or engaged to be married (58%). About 38% are single, never married; 5% are separated, divorced, or widowed. Many have children at home (39%).

Education. Some 13% have earned a high school diploma, vocational or associate degree; 34% have earned an undergraduate degree; and 53% hold an advanced degree (Master's, Ph.D., or other professional degree, or rabbinic ordination).

In addition to working as TEPs, 52 of the respondents in our survey are currently in school. Of these, 22 are working to complete their undergraduate degrees; 19 are studying for their Master's degree; 6 are preparing for rabbinic ordination; and 4 are pursuing their doctorates. (One respondent did not report degree.) Another 27 TEPs intend to go to graduate school in the next two years.

Of the undergraduates, only three have majors related to Jewish education or Jewish studies. At the Masters level, however, more are engaged in advanced studies relevant to a career in this field. Of the 17 indicating their major, 8 are pursuing degrees in Jewish studies or Jewish education; another 3 are working towards degrees in nonprofit management or public administration.

National background. Most of the TEPs in our study are American born and spent most of their youth in this country. Small numbers grew up in Israel, Canada, or the FSU. Given the small number of Israelis in our sample (n=9), it is difficult to arrive at generalizations about who they are and whether or not they represent the population of Israelis working in teen engagement in New York. Most of them are *hiloni* (secular) Jews. They attended non-religious public schools, were involved in youth movements growing up, did a year of national service after high school, and served in the Israeli military. Only two have served on *schlichut*. In both instances, *schlichut* included time at a summer camp in North America and also includes their current TEP assignment. None of the Israelis have participated in Birthright Israel.

Formal Jewish education. Some 37% attended a Jewish day school or yeshiva, for almost ten years on average. These TEPs disproportionately identify as Orthodox (49%) and work in an Orthodox setting more often than do their non-day school colleagues. About 70% attended a Jewish part-time school, for almost nine years on average. Only 7% report no formal Jewish education growing up.¹

¹ Numbers do not total 100% because a small number of respondents (n=16) had both types of Jewish educational experiences growing up.

Informal Jewish education. Three-quarters of the TEPs had experience at an overnight camp with Jewish educational and/or Shabbat programming: 62% attended as campers (for an average of 5.9 years) and a similar percentage worked as staff (for an average of 4.6 years). Almost half of the New York TEPs (49%) were at Jewish overnight camp as camper and then later as staff, spending an average of 11 summers of their lives at a Jewish camp.

About three-fourths of the TEPs were involved in a Jewish youth group during high school (74%) and a Jewish campus organization during college (54%). Almost half (46%) were Jewishly active during both their high school and college years. About 18% report no such participation at either stage of life.

Most of the TEPs (94%) have visited or lived in Israel. About half of these TEPs were in Israel for six months or more (Appendix Table 2). Only 14% (n=22) went on a Birthright Israel trip, either as staff or participant. Given their early involvement in Jewish life, it is possible that many of them did not qualify to go on Birthright as participant. As well, some could not have participated in Birthright because of their age.

Appendix Table 2: Longest Time Spent in Israel

18%	2 weeks or less
20%	more than 2 weeks but less than 2 months
11%	2 months to 6 months
14%	more than 6 months but less than a year
37%	one year or more

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