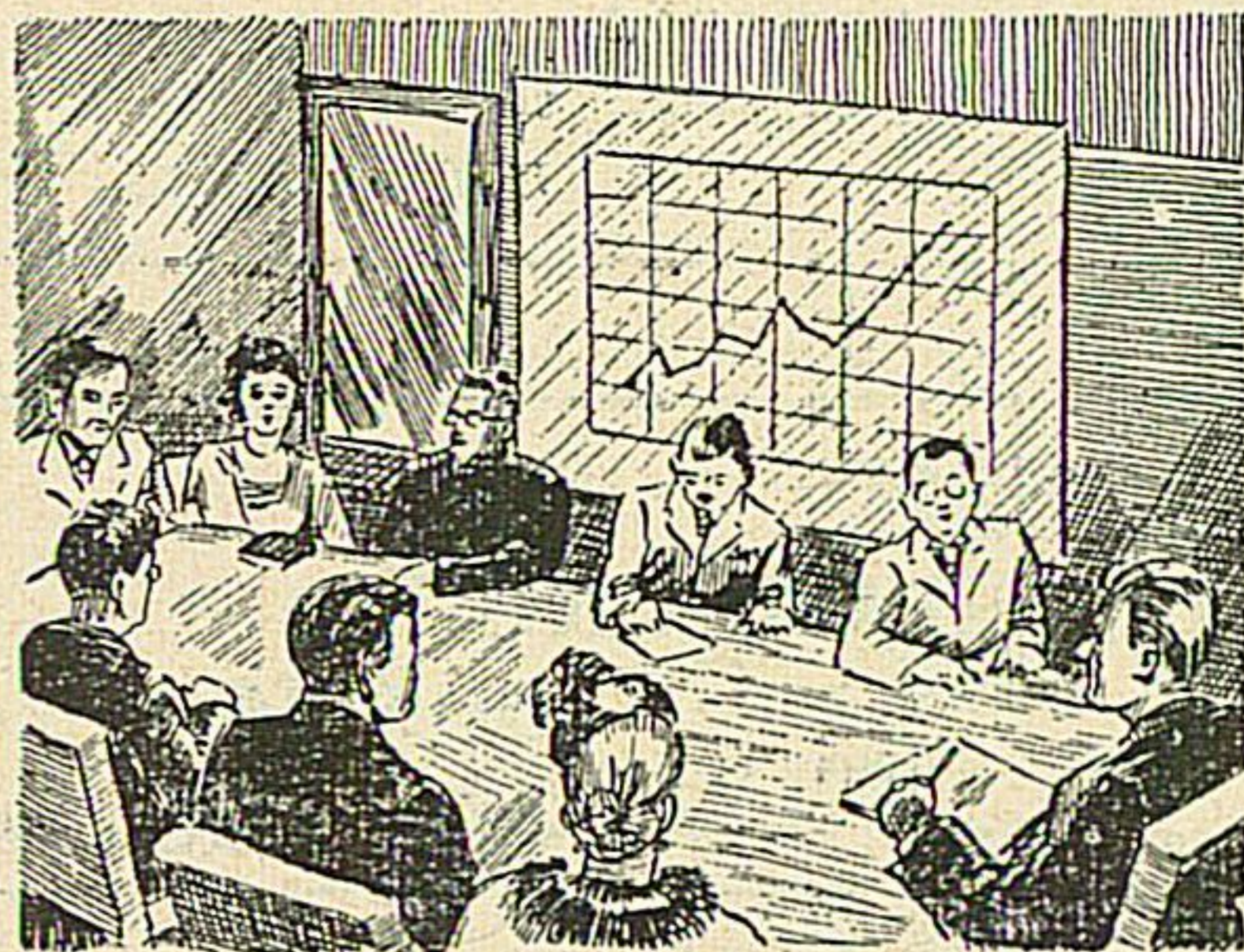
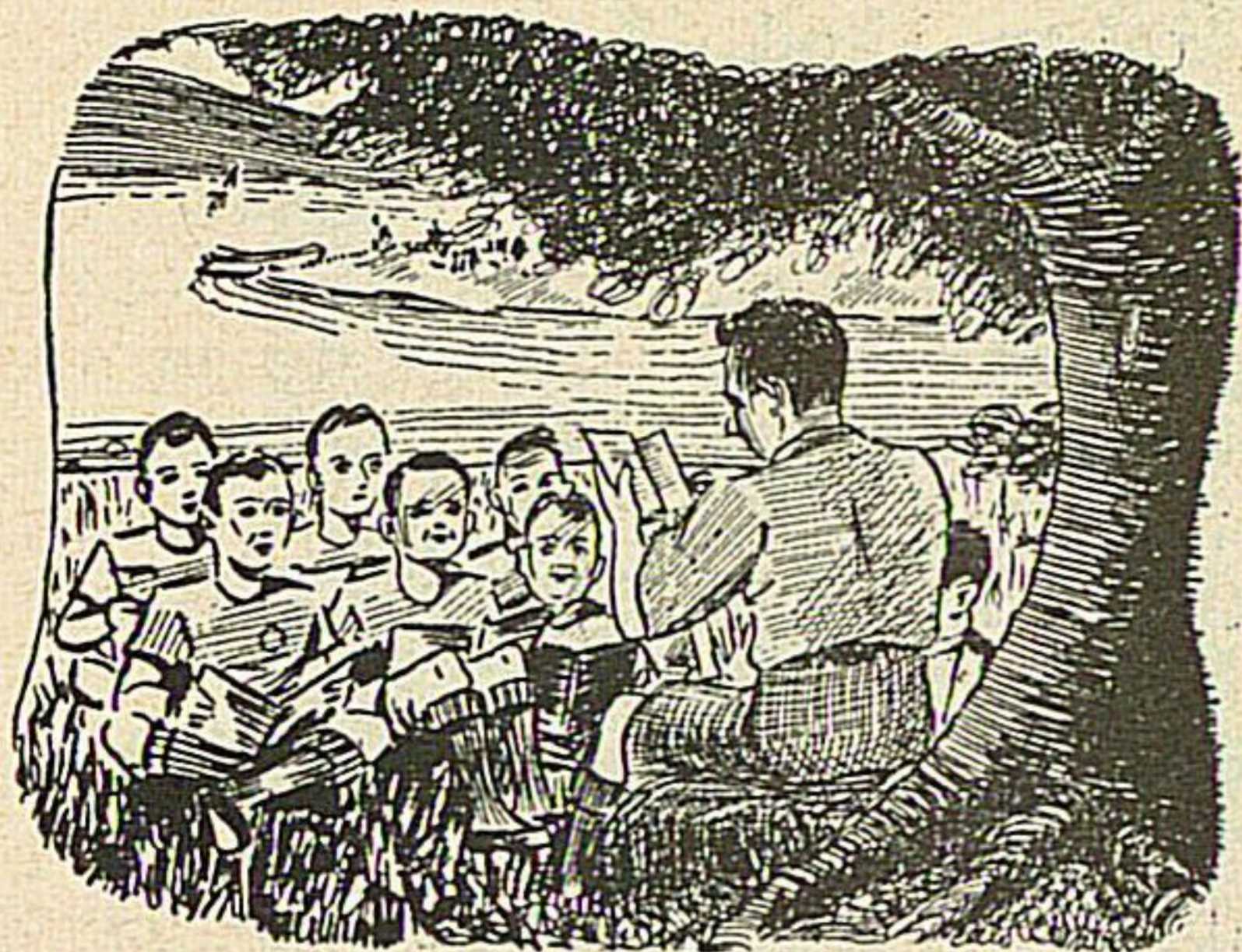


What's With Jewish Education In Pittsburgh?

(EDITOR'S NOTE: The following is the first of seven articles detailing the preliminary reports of the Self Study on Jewish Education which was carried out during the past Spring.)

By WILLIAM H. MAZEFSKY



"Who is responsible for what kind of Jewish education in Pittsburgh?"

That was the poser which again and again road blocked the community-wide Self Study Committee on Jewish Education during its comprehensive and detailed exploration of local educational resources last spring.

The Self Study Committee carrying out its fact finding through sub-committees of devoted lay people affiliated with local Jewish educational centers came up with some explosive facts.

They found, for instance, glaring weaknesses in Jewish training of Sunday School teachers. The sub-committee reporting on Curricula and Standards of Performance went on to say that "most of the schools have no clearly conceived objectives, and . . . the curricula of most schools is disorganized."

The Committee on School facts reported that "in light of the

minimum standards set by the American Association of Jewish Education . . . facilities are in most instances inadequate . . . and Jewish education (in Pittsburgh) per se is handicapped."

The Committee on School facts found that "the proportion enrolled in the more intensive type of Jewish schools in Pittsburgh . . . is less than half in the country as a whole."

The preliminary report of the Parent Attitudes Committee reported a basic dissatisfaction and lack of knowledge on the part of parents in regard to the program offered their youngsters by schools, and further uncovered a profound weakness in Jewish background and culture in the parents themselves.

Similar findings, set forth in cold and analytical detail by each of the eight sub-committees of the Self Study Group, highlighted an inherent weakness in the Pittsburgh Jewish educational system and touched off a series of hard-hitting recommendations by the Committee on Community Responsibility and Relationships calling for the establishment of a Pittsburgh Board of Jewish Education with the financial assistance of United Jewish Fund.

Background for the dramatic report of the Self Study Committee has been a growing awareness on the part of a growing number in our Jewish Community of the weakness of existing educational facilities. This ferment and turmoil and questioning has cut across American Jewish life during the past few years with increasing intensity.

Destruction vs. Development

The destruction of the Jewish communities of Europe by Hitler and the establishment of the State of Israel necessarily have had profound effects on every aspect of Jewish life—particularly in the field of Jewish education.

The scourge of Hitler eliminated

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a vital reservoir of educational leaders, scholars, and rabbis from Poland, Russia, Germany and other European communities which acted as a continuing well spring of Jewish education and culture from which we in America benefited.

Even before Hitler, immigration had been diminishing while, on the other hand, American Jews have grown more homogeneous. There still are great differences of opinion, divergent ideologies and religious attitudes, but there is a growing basic similarity of outlook among American Jews and particularly among American Jewish youth.

While we can no longer look to Europe for cultural leadership, the establishment of the state of Israel promises new pathways that present a real challenge to the Jewish educator in America: — How to combine the millennial historic tradition of the people and the new values being created daily in Israel with the evolving communal and cultural expressions of American Jewry?

In American Jewish community after community, people have been raising basic questions about the structure of the Jewish educational systems, its weaknesses, its curricula, its standards, its objectives, its approach, its financing.

Pittsburgh, where the problem of overall Jewish education has been simmering for some time, stepped up to the firing line last March.

Under the auspices of the United Jewish Fund a Self Study Committee on Jewish Education was organized with more than thirty participating organizations. Judge Benjamin Lencher, veteran communal leader, accepted the difficult chairmanship of the committee.

Dr. Uriah Z. Engelman of the American Association for Jewish Education and Mr. David Bonder of the National Jewish Welfare Board were appointed to serve as

expert consultants to the Self Study Committee. Fact finding and interviewing, however, was the task of the more than 200 members of the Committee.

"Development of Objective Insight"

The local study group was organized so that the recommendations and the conclusions would be developed by the people who conducted the study and who represented the forces most interested and concerned with the overall problem of Jewish education in this community.

The volunteer probers understood that the Self Study was in itself a development of objective insight and that those who participated in getting the facts and evaluating the findings would be in a position to make recommendations purely on the disclosure of existing conditions.

It was recognized that the Study could well flounder before it was started because of the divergent variety of religious and cultural groups that make up the local Jewish educational scene. But, it was also recognized—and this was the force that enabled the Study Committee to forge ahead—that while the several types of school may differ from each other in form, content and operation, they nevertheless have many elements in common in so far as aims and standards are concerned.

The Study, respecting as inviolate the cultural and religious programs of the multi-Pittsburgh school system, directed its quest solely for information and with no intent to interfere with the several ideologies involved.

The basic work of the Self Study was undertaken by the following committees:

Comittee on Jewish School Population and School Facts: Gathered information about the numbers of Jewish children in Pittsburgh, the number attending Jewish schools, years in school, the age gradings in the classes,

age of admission to school, rules of promotion, graduation, the rate absenteeism, drop-outs.

Committee on School Buildings and Equipment: Collect data on the school buildings, the physical surroundings, the classroom equipment, availability of audio-visual materials, library facilities.

Committee on Finances: Evaluated the budgets of the schools, the sources of income and the categories of expense. Also concerned itself with the problem whether congregations or organizations are in a position to maintain schools on a satisfactory scholastic level with their own resources. (This report to be completed this Fall).

Committee on Personnel and Teacher Training: Studied the present situation with regard to Jewish teachers in the community, their number, their training, general and Jewish, their professional competence, experience, salaries; dealt with the entire problem of teacher training as well as with in-service training for teachers to keep them abreast of the latest developments in the field of Jewish and general education, dealt with the need of developing of a Teachers' Code, which would include an adequate salary scale, provisions for insurance, pensions.

Committee on Curriculum and Standards of Performance: It was not the purpose of this committee to pass judgment on the ideological premises of the different curricula of the different schools. The aim of this committee was twofold: (1) To evaluate the curricula of the schools in the light of their achievements. Do the schools carry out the objectives set up by the curricula? And if not, why not? (2) To evaluate the curricula in the light of the changes that have taken place in the Jewish and the general American community.

Committee on Community Relationships and Responsibilities: Discussed what is involved in the concept of community responsibility for Jewish education. This committee dealt with the concepts of community responsibility and relationships in the light of Jewish historic tradition and contemporary expressions.

Committee on Adult Education: To investigate the extent of adult educational programs sponsored by any of the schools, the YM & WHA, the organizations, etc. Concerned itself with the whole problem of parent education. (This report to be completed this Fall).

Committee on Parent Attitudes: Studied the attitudes of parents to Jewish education in General and the problem of parent-child relationship in making effective the instruction received.

(To Be Continued)