

What's With Jewish Education In Pittsburgh?

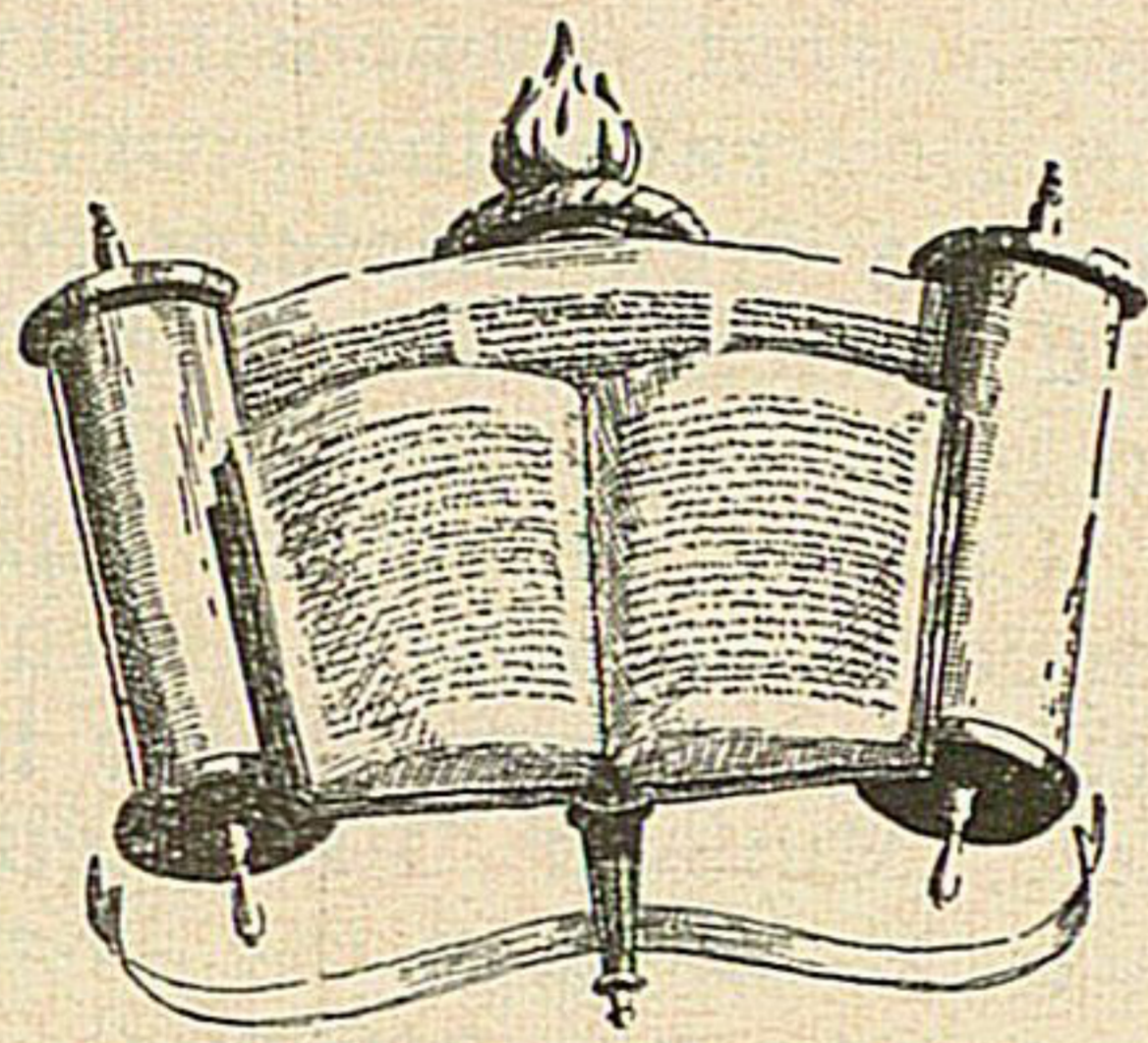
(EDITOR'S NOTE: The following is the second in a series of seven articles detailing the preliminary reports of the Self-Study on Jewish Education which was carried out during the past spring.)

By WILLIAM MAZEFSKY

Pittsburgh is, primarily, a "Sunday School town!"

The Committee on School Facts of the Self Study Committee on Jewish Education reported that of the estimated 4700 Jewish children attending schools 70.7% are in Sunday School; 25.1% in weekday afternoon schools; and 4.2% attend All Day Schools.

At an early meeting of the School Facts group Dr. Uriah Z. Engelman pointed out that Pittsburgh is overwhelmingly a one-day Jewish education city, con-



trasting sharply with the findings of similar surveys conducted in other communities, notably Newark, Los Angeles and Baltimore where from 40% to 75% of Jewish children enrolled in schools attend week-day classes.

In its recommendations, the School Facts committee which was chaired by Mrs. Maurice Davis stated that "since the objectives of Jewish education even on an elementary level cannot be achieved through a school system, whose major characteristic is the one day a week school, the committee . . . recommends . . . that a promotion campaign on a community level be undertaken in order to increase the enrollment in the weekday afternoon school."

Age Group In School

The Davis Committee dealt at some length with their findings on (1) Ages of children attending Jewish Schools and (2) Age Grading.

It was found that the bulk of Sunday school enrollments (66.3%) were between the age of 8 and 13 and that there were no children in the Sunday School older than 16 years of age. In the weekday afternoon schools most of the children were in the 9 to 12 age groups with only eleven children 14 years of age or older.

Yet significantly, the curriculum of the Jewish School which normally includes the Bible (the Pentateuch and the Prophets), the Jewish religion, history, the Hebrew Language, Jewish music, the

arts, Jewish social problems, Israel, Jewish life and institution was basically beyond the intellectual range and background of children in elementary school.

The Committee of School Facts recommended "that steps be taken to strengthen, and if need be, to reorganize, the weekday afternoon schools, with a view that a significant proportion of the enrollees in elementary schools be carried over in the secondary schools."

The Davis Committee discovered age-grading in many schools that were "a very bad retarding influence on the normal, scholastic and social developments of the children."

It is, to cite an example of what is meant by age-grading, not unusual to find that the age group in the first grade of a school ranges from 7 to 11 years of age. The committee goes on to report that "in a well organized elementary school these children would be separated from one another by 4 or 5 grades."

Turning to recommendations, the School Facts Group urges ". . . proper school administrative practices and community sanctioned, be introduced in all schools; such as definite maximum admission age, definite registration date, and other measures which would normalize the age grading in the schools."

Urge More Opportunities for Girls

Other strong recommendations stemmed from consideration of the fact that far fewer girls receive an opportunity for adequate Jewish education, especially in the weekday afternoon congregational schools. This, according to the report of the School Facts Committee, reflects "the varying attitudes of Jewish parents to Jewish schools."

Afternoon congregational schools, it is found, are valued by most parents mainly for the ritualism and the synagogue traditions taught. Hence it is not surprising that less than 10% of the enrollment in these schools is made up of girls.

On the other hand, afternoon non-congregation schools are regarded by most parents as a religio-cultural institution and the enrollment of girls is considerably higher.

"The usefulness of the afternoon (congregational) school is at present limited in Pittsburgh because its program in most cases is based mainly on learning to read the Siddur and a smattering

of Humosh. Were the congregational school converted into cultural-religious (instead of remaining what they are—ritualistic schools) their appeal and effectiveness would . . . be greatly augmented . . . and of equal usefulness to both boys and girls.”

The report also urged that because today boys are enabled “to become publicly Bar Mitzvah, even though they had very little of Jewish training” that “minimum requirements be gradually revised upward until they will include at least three or four years attendance in a well organized weekday Hebrew School.”

Finally, the School Facts Committee urged sharpening of Administrative practices to eliminate absenteeism, to shorten periods of registration and to develop a uniform period for school attendance.

(Next Week: Report on
Teachers' Training)
