

What's What With Jewish Education In Pittsburgh?

(EDITOR'S NOTE: The following is the fifth 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

The heart and soul of any modern educational system is its curriculum and standards of performance.

And the preliminary report of the Committee on Curricula and Standards of Performance of the Self Study on Jewish Education, which was chaired by Dr. J. M. Rogoff and Rabbi Dr. Herman Hailperin, approached its evaluation of the local system with a deep sense of objectivity and genuine concern.

In sharp terms and pulling no punches the report stated that the "critical examination of the curricula of the Pittsburgh schools as revealed by this Study clearly indicated that while most of the schools have objectives, they are in too many instances limited in scope or incapable of implementation in view of present limitations. The curricula of most schools are disorganized."

Backing up the report of the School Facts Committee (reviewed in an earlier article) which raised serious questions about age-grading, the Rogoff-Hailperin Committee charged that the "Courses of studies at many of the schools in Bible, history, the Hebrew language, etc. manifest a lack of continuity and gradation, and cast doubt upon the progress achieved in the subjects taught in the different grades. Too often text books are used haphazardly and with little regard for the suitability for the ages of the children."

Highlighting the grounds covered by the Committee on Personnel and Teachers' Training (also reported earlier in this

series), the Curricula and Standards group indicates that "In most cases the methods used in teaching the subjects are unscientific and wasteful. As a consequence, while differing widely among the separate schools, are, on the whole, very low."

Analyzing the conditions which are responsible, the committee reports that "In most instances schools have no control over the conditions which determine effectiveness of the program . . . These conditions are (1) Lack of qualified staff (2) Protracted tardis the organization of the period of registration which reclasses at the beginning of the year (3) Inadequate school facilities (4) Frequent absenteeism (5) Poor grading of classes (6) The relatively short period of time the child stays in the Hebrew school (7) Lack of use of properly graded materials (8) The dropping out of children after Bar Mitzvah age (9) Lack of effective supervision (10) The very small number of children of high school age in either the Sunday or Hebrew School (11) Ineffective administration of the schools."

Need for Standards

The committee strongly recommended "the urgent need for setting up standards for the proper administration of the schools and the effective carrying out of the objectives of the curricula." The group urged that the standards "be related to such matters as (1) a definite city-wide registration date (2) minimum age for the admission into the schools (3) The proper age-grading of the children (4)

Regular annual promotions (5)
The establishment of regulations
regarding the public celebration
of Bar Mitzvah (6) Definite re-
quirements for graduation (7)
The provision of opportunities for
Jewish education for children of
high school age (8) Certification
of teachers.

“In order to carry out these standards,” the Committee on Curricula and Standards of Performance concluded, “It is necessary to set up a community agency for Jewish education which shall carry on a campaign of interpreting the aims and objectives of Jewish education and its place in the general pattern of American Jewish life. This central agency, shall, as one of its functions, set up a professional council which shall periodically evaluate the curricula of the various schools.”

(Next week: “The Horse and Buggy Age”).
