

JEWISH DAY SCHOOL ALUMNI ON CAMPUS

A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF ENGAGEMENT AND IDENTITY

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Center for Jewish Day Schools

Jewish day schools have long been celebrated for their role in nurturing Jewish identity fostering communal engagement, and instilling a strong connection to Jewish values and traditions.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Did You Know...

81%

of day school alumni on college campuses say Jewish identity is very important to them, compared to those who did not attend day school (35%)

2x

Day school alumni are more than twice as likely (81%) to say Jewish identity is very important to them compared to those who did not attend day school (35%)

56%

of Jewish day school alumni feel "very close" to the Jewish community right now, compared to 19% of Jewish college students who did not attend Jewish day school

4x

more Jewish college students who attended Jewish day school (61%) feel a strong connection to Israel, compared to those who didn't attend Jewish day school (16%)

77%

of Jewish day school alumni report feeling connected to Israel, compared to 38% of Jewish college students who did not attend day school

53%

of Jewish day school alumni attend Jewish events and programming once a week or more on campus, compared to just 23% of their peers who did not attend day school

2x

as many Jewish day school alumni engage in Jewish life on campus regularly



Jewish day schools have long been celebrated for their role in nurturing Jewish identity, fostering communal engagement, and instilling a strong connection to Jewish values and traditions.

Existing research (HaYidion’s Research Corner: [The Impact of a Jewish Day School Education](#)) underscores the **profound influence of day school education on alumni**. This report builds upon that foundation, leveraging new data to explore the campus experiences of Jewish college students who attended Jewish day schools, comparing them to those who did not.

In light of the heightened challenges facing Jewish students on college campuses, particularly following October 7th and its aftermath, this analysis is both timely and critical.

Drawing on the comprehensive three-year study led by Dr. Eitan Hersh in partnership with College Pulse and funded by the Jim Joseph Foundation, this report offers a secondary analysis of data focusing on key differences in identity, engagement, and connection to Jewish community and Israel among Jewish college students.

The findings reveal a compelling narrative: Compared to peers who did not attend Jewish day schools, **Jewish day school alumni consistently report stronger ties to their Jewish identity, a deeper connection to Israel, and greater participation in Jewish life on campus during their college years.**



This comparative analysis highlights the profound difference between those who attended Jewish day school and those who did not in relation to Jewish identity, connection to Israel, engagement in Jewish life on campus, and connection to community during college years.

These findings strongly suggest that Jewish day schools contribute to fostering a lifelong commitment to Jewish life and values. At a time when college campuses are often arenas of tension for Jewish students, this evidence provides a compelling case for Jewish day school education as a means of ensuring a vibrant committed Jewish future.

At a time when college campuses are attracting significant attention as battlegrounds for Jewish identity and Israel, students who attended a Jewish day school are distinguished from their peers.

OUR FINDINGS

Jewish day school alumni place more importance on their Jewish identity, feel a stronger connection to Israel, and report feeling closer to the Jewish community than Jewish college students who didn't attend Jewish day school.

They also attend Jewish events on campus more frequently.

On measures of engagement and identity, students who attended both Jewish day school and had an Orthodox family background reported the highest connection. Former day school attendees from Conservative, Reform, Reconstructionist, just Jewish and other backgrounds feel their Jewish identity is more important to them, have a greater connection to Israel and attend Jewish events on campus than do their Jewish peers who did not attend day school.

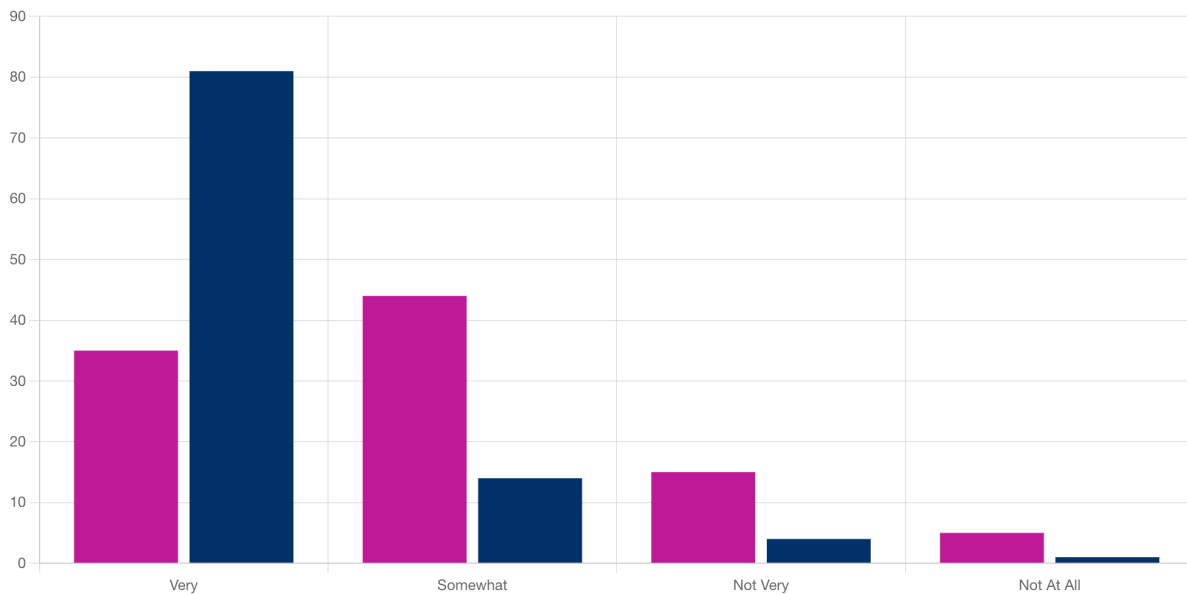
JEWISH IDENTITY

Jewish identity is more important to day school alumni than those that did not attend day school. Eighty-one percent of day school alumni report their Jewish identity is “very” important to them, compared to 35% of non day school alumni. Said differently, Jewish day school alumni are twice as likely to say their Jewish identity is “very” important to them than those who didn’t attend Jewish day school.

How important is your Jewish identity to you?

■ *Did Not Attend Jewish Day School*

■ *Attended Jewish Day School*



Very:

■ 35% ■ 81%

Somewhat:

■ 44% ■ 14%

Not Very:

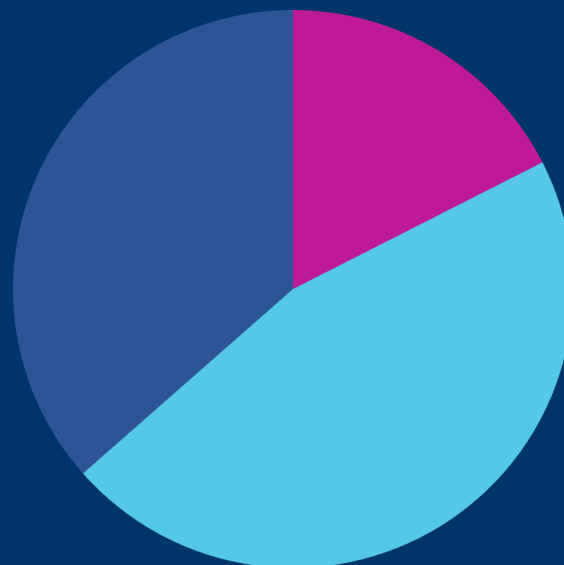
■ 15% ■ 4%

Not At All:

■ 5% ■ 1%

When examining the percentage of Jewish college students who consider their Jewish identity "very important," those from Orthodox family backgrounds report the highest levels, followed by students from other Jewish affiliations. A smaller proportion of students that didn't attend day school report Jewish identity being "very important" to them. Among students who attended Jewish day schools, 92% of those from Orthodox backgrounds consider their Jewish identity "very important," compared to 73% of those from Conservative, Reform, Reconstructionist, Just Jewish, or other affiliations and just 35% of those who did not attend day school.

% of Jewish college students that report their Jewish identity is "very" important to them



- Did Not Attend Day School: 35%
- Attended Day School and Grew Up Orthodox: 92%
- Attended Day School and Grew Up With Another Jewish Affiliation: 73%

CONNECTION TO ISRAEL

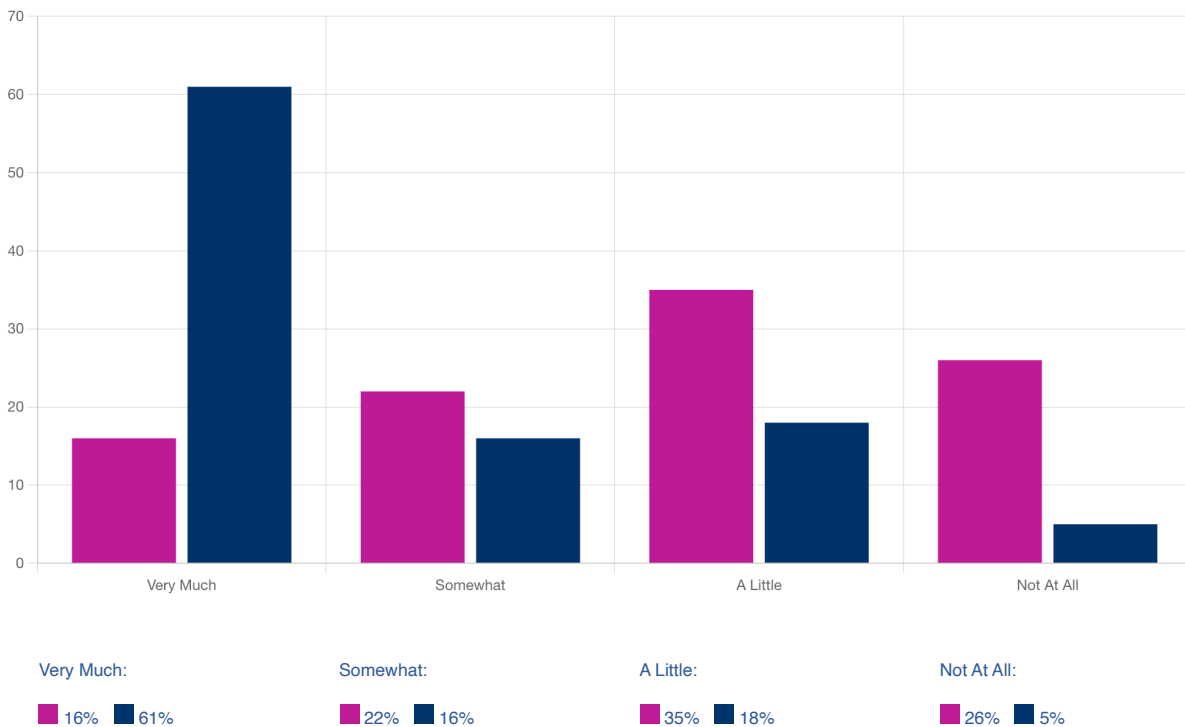
Jewish college students who attended Jewish day school are more likely to feel a strong connection to Israel, with 61% reporting this connection compared to just 16% of those who did not attend day school—nearly four times the rate.

When considering students who feel either "very much" or "somewhat" connected to Israel, 77% of Jewish day school alumni report this connection, compared to 38% of Jewish college students who did not attend day school.

To what extent do you feel a connection to Israel?

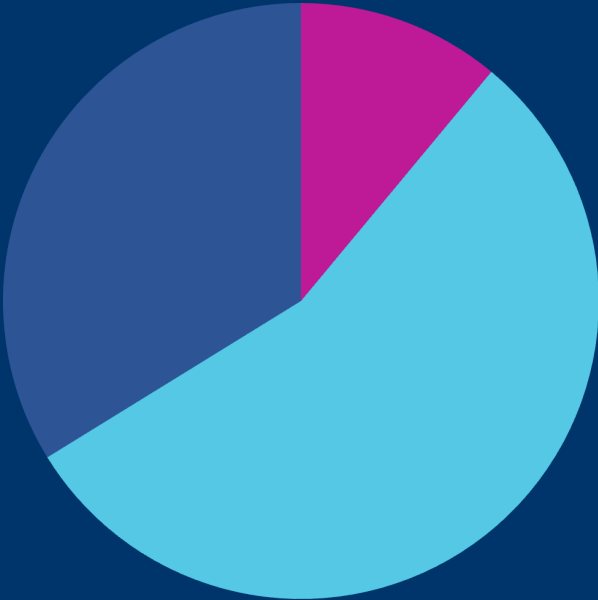
■ *Did Not Attend Jewish Day School*

■ *Attended Jewish Day School*



Among college students, 16% of those who did not attend a Jewish day school report feeling "very much" or a strong connection to Israel. In comparison, 49% of Jewish day school attendees from Conservative, Reform, Reconstructionist, Just Jewish, or other backgrounds, and 80% of those from Orthodox backgrounds, report a strong connection to Israel.

% of Jewish college students that report a strong connection to Israel



- Did Not Attend Day School: 16%
- Attended Day School and Grew Up Orthodox: 80%
- Attended Day School and Grew Up With Another Jewish Affiliation: 49%

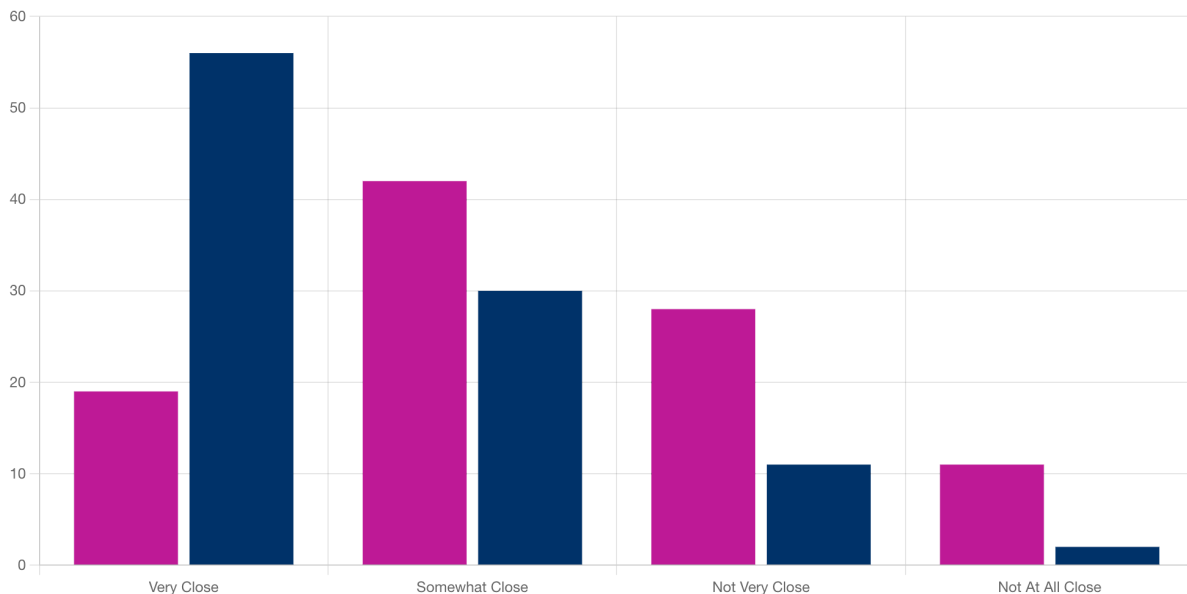
CONNECTION TO JEWISH COMMUNITY

Slightly more than half, 56% of Jewish day school alumni feel "very" or "somewhat" close to a Jewish community, compared to only 19% of Jewish college students who did not attend day school, who report feeling "not very" or "not at all" close to a Jewish community.

How close do you feel to a Jewish community right now?

■ *Did Not Attend Jewish Day School*

■ *Attended Jewish Day School*



Very Close:

■ 19% ■ 56%

Somewhat Close:

■ 42% ■ 30%

Not Very Close:

■ 28% ■ 11%

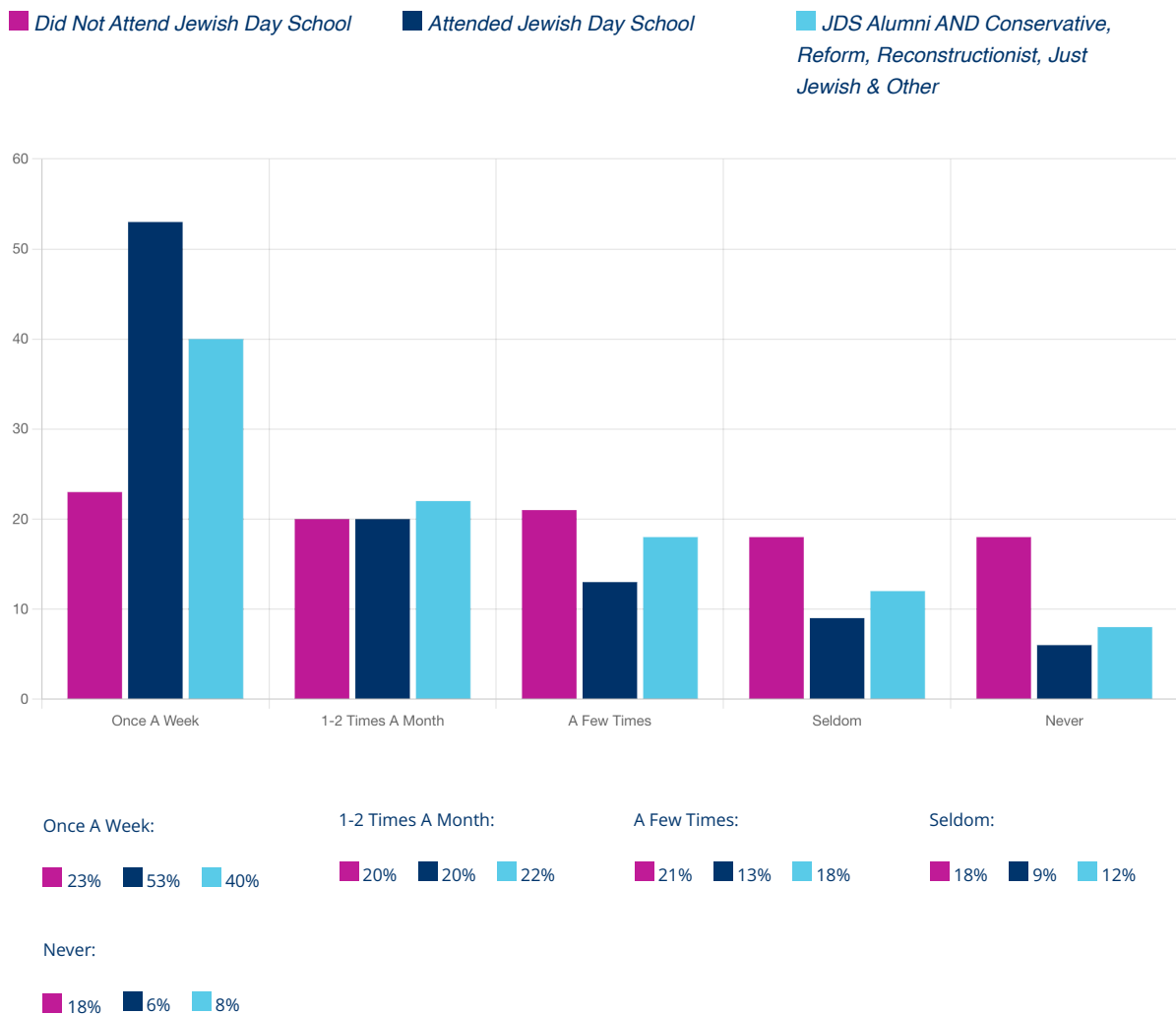
Not At All Close:

■ 11% ■ 2%

ENGAGEMENT IN JEWISH LIFE ON CAMPUS

Jewish day school alumni are more active in campus Jewish life, with 53% attending Jewish events, activities, and programs at least once a week, compared to just 23% of their peers who did not attend day school. Among students from Conservative, Reform, Reconstructionist, Just Jewish, or other backgrounds, 40% of day school alumni participate in these activities weekly, compared to 23% of those who did not attend day school.

How often do you attend Jewish events, activities and programs on campus?





Methodology

In September 2024, Dr. Eitan Hersh released a study entitled [“A Year of Campus Conflict and Growth: An Over-Time Study of the Impact of the Israel-Hamas War on College Students.”](#)

The study provides a comprehensive three-year analysis of Jewish and non-Jewish student experiences and perspectives on college campuses, both before and after October 7, 2023.

Datasets from this research project are publicly available. The original data collection employed a large-scale survey method over three surveys, gathering responses from a representative sample of students across multiple campuses.

This analysis reexamines the raw data from the third survey, which was conducted April-June of 2024, providing a secondary analysis comparing the campus experiences of Jewish college students who attended Jewish day schools with those who did not. Responses were analyzed by day school attendance and denominational affiliation.

The third survey of Dr. Hersh’s research which this analysis focuses on was completed by 1,006 Jewish and 1,516 non-Jewish college students.

Of the 1,006 Jewish college students, 220 (21%) attended Jewish day school, while the remaining 786 (79%) did not. Of 220 Jewish day school respondents, 90 respondents (41%) grew up Orthodox and 130 respondents grew up Conservative, Reform, Reconstructionist, just Jewish or other.

Respondents who did not identify as Jewish are not included in the analysis.

Respondents indicated whether they attended Jewish day school. They did not indicate how long they attended or for which grade levels. For clarity purposes, respondents that attended Jewish day school are referred to as Jewish day school alumni.

As Dr. Hersh states in the study, “because the true population characteristics of Jewish college students are unknown, we cannot determine whether one or more of our survey waves is representative or unrepresentative.” While that is important to take into account, “the study provides among the most detailed and comprehensive accounts to date of what happened on campuses during this school year from the perspective of students.” ([A Year of Campus Conflict and Growth](#)).

It is important to note that this analysis does not establish causation between attending Jewish day school and the outcomes reported. While familial religious background is examined in some of the analysis, other Jewish experiences aren't accounted for. Families who choose to enroll their children in Jewish day schools often demonstrate higher levels of engagement with Jewish communal life, which may independently influence these outcomes.

Resources

[*A Year of Campus Conflict and Growth: An Over-Time Study of the Impact of the Israel-Hamas War on U.S. College Students*](#)



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