



Blog Article

# The Independent and Jewish Day School Alumni Experience: What the Research Tells Us

By [Dr. Harry Bloom](#), Senior Vice President of Client Solutions, [Measuring Success](#).

The alumni of independent schools are a vitally important resource for their alma maters. Their perspectives and testimony are important indicators of their schools' value. Alumni are potent ambassadors to prospective new families and donors and important potential sources of future financial support. Yet, many independent schools—Jewish and otherwise—do not regularly survey their alumni to gain an understanding of how to best capitalize on their feedback, referral power, and donor power.

When schools do seek feedback in a disciplined, thoughtful manner, the learning can be quite valuable. During the period 2012-2015, my firm, [Measuring Success](#), working in conjunction with the [Independent School Association of the Central States \(ISACS\)](#), created an alumni survey. It asked questions about the alums' perceptions of the quality of their school experiences, the impact of their school experiences on their future educational and professional trajectories, their preferred ways to engage with fellow alumni and their alma maters, and their interest in supporting their alma mater. We also created a Jewish day school version of the same survey which added questions about the Jewish component of the Jewish schools.

Three thousand alumni from six Midwestern non-Jewish independent schools were surveyed, as were twelve hundred alumni from four Jewish day schools located in the Midwest and Mid-Atlantic states. Three of the independent schools were Catholic parochial schools and three were non-denominational schools. Two of the four Jewish day schools were pluralistic, one Conservative and one Modern Orthodox. The surveyed schools—both non Jewish and Jewish – ranged from schools serving students from elementary through high school, to those serving middle/high school or high school only.

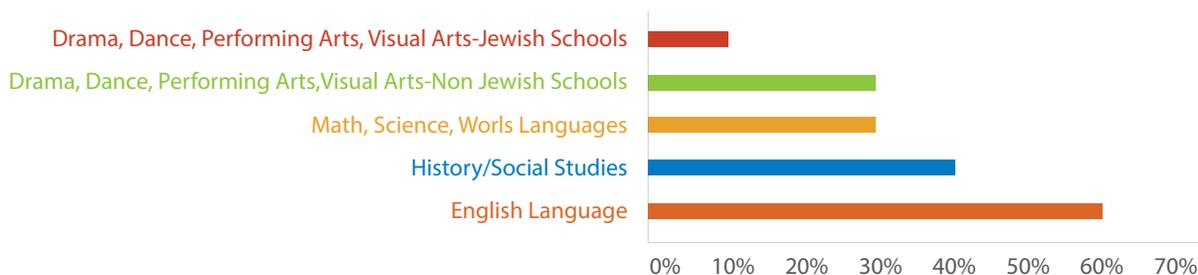
I will be reporting in this post about the alums' perceptions of how well they felt their alma maters prepared them academically and relative to imparting lifelong learning skills to them. In subsequent posts I will be

reporting on the survey findings that relate to alumni satisfaction with the social/emotional support they received; how the alumni want to connect to their alma maters; and about their desires to give back to their schools in the form of work, wisdom and wealth.

## Academic Preparation

Relative to their assessment of how well their schools prepared them academically, the non-Jewish and Jewish alumni were generally relatively equal. On the good news front, sixty percent of the alumni of both categories of schools felt “very prepared” in the English language. Then there was a significant dropoff to the next highest rated subjects which were history/social studies with forty percent of the alumni feeling “very prepared” in those subjects. In math and science and world languages only about thirty percent of alumni felt “very prepared.” This is obviously cause for some concern in a tech-driven global economy for which these are vitally important subjects. In the case of drama/dance/performing arts/visual arts (treated as a grouping of subjects), just over thirty percent of non-Jewish independent school alumni felt “very prepared,” versus ten percent for Jewish day schools.

### % of Independent School Alumni-Feeling “Very Prepared”



## Lifelong Learning Skills

As far as lifelong learning skills are concerned, both categories of schools received relatively high marks—fifty to sixty percent felt “very prepared” in the areas of imparting critical thinking skills, instilling a passion for learning, and enabling intellectual discourse and public expression of one’s opinion. Much lower rated was the skill of instilling innovation and entrepreneurship, with both categories of schools receiving a “very prepared” rating of about twenty-five percent—again, a cause of some concern. One lifelong learning skills area where there was a clear advantage for independent schools relative to Jewish day schools was in managing your time effectively, with fifty percent of independent school alumni feeling “very prepared” relative to about forty percent of Jewish day school alumni.

### % of Independent School Alumni-Feeling “Very Prepared”



## Implications

This research raises interesting implications for both non Jewish and Jewish independent schools. Clearly the subject areas of math, science, and world languages need to be strengthened so that alumni feel better prepared. Additionally, the instilling of entrepreneurial skills requires remediation. From the standpoint of the Jewish day schools, additional attention needs to be given to equipping students to manage their time more effectively and to strengthening the arts/music/drama subjects.

What might the payoff be from these efforts? For the non-Jewish independent schools, where about sixty percent of alumni are very likely to recommend their alma mater to a friend and fifty-five percent indicated they would very likely send their own child to their former school, there is a chance to build on a strong pattern of support. For the Jewish day schools where only about forty percent would be very likely to recommend their alma mater to a friend or to send their own child to their former school, the stakes are higher.

### % of Alumni Who Strongly Agree



**Doing a better job to understand alumni attitudes and preferences and to improve performance in the subject areas that matter most to them could mean the difference between a sustainable future and one marked by financial uncertainty.**

Stay tuned for my next post that will describe the findings of Measuring Success' alumni research on the topic of Jewish and non-Jewish independent school alumni satisfaction with the social/emotional support they receive.

Dr. Harry Bloom is the Senior Vice President of Client Solutions at Measuring Success, whose mission is to enable schools to harness the power of data analytics to increase enrollment, impact, and fundraising. Dr. Bloom and the Measuring Success team have worked with over 400 Jewish day schools and 500 independent schools, along with several dozen public and charter schools.

Need help with your alumni survey? [Contact](#) us today to learn about how your school can participate in Measuring Success' alumni survey.