

# THE JEWISH ADVOCATE

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## Another View



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### Jewish prep school myth

Opinion makers and philanthropists of the next generation are starting school at Andover, Exeter, Cambridge School of Weston, Winsor, Dana Hall and many other New England secular private schools. Many are Jewish. Yet few in the Jewish world have considered whether they have the resources for their Jewish journey. Some think these teens have all they need at their fingertips; others simply don't know. Why should the

Jewish world bother with prep schools?

For one, Jewish teens attend prep schools in significant numbers. While there is no formal accounting, New England's most prestigious schools report 10 percent or higher Jewish student enrollment. These young people are future Jewish and secular leaders. We need look no further than to Gann Academy head Rabbi Marc Baker, alumnus of Andover; historian Bryan Mark Rigg, alumnus of Exeter; and The Samuel Bronfman Foundation managing director Adam Bronfman, alumnus of Taft. We ignore prep school teens at our Jewish peril.

Yet these same students are under intense pressure, with enormous academic expectations to enter the finest universities and veiled social pressure to fit into the mainstream. For most there is hardly time for Jewish activity outside school. Some will participate in youth groups, Prozdor, Telem and other worthy supplementary programs. Most don't, and students at boarding schools lack the opportunity. For many more, there is hardly desire. Can private schools foster the development of their students' Jewish identity?

Fortunately the answer increasingly is yes. Many schools are responding to a call from students and sometimes parents to promote a Jewish connection at school. They have help from The Curriculum Initiative, more commonly known as TCI, which supports Jewish programming and Jewish life at private schools.

Take Andover, for example. The

school provides a rabbi and TCI staff member to work twice weekly with the Jewish Student Union. They provide Shabbat services, discussions of issues through a Jewish lens, Jewish film festivals, Torah discussions and a heavy dose of Jewish community. An annual Jewish culture weekend draws the majority of the student body, building respect for the Jewish culture among all, and awakening Jewish pride among Jewish students who don't otherwise engage as Jews. Several years ago, Andover hosted TCI's Jewbilee, the premiere annual weekend retreat for Jewish independent school teens. Last year a small contingent of Andover students attended the AIPAC policy conference.

The ideal mix of program opportunities is a Jewish club, celebrations of holidays and Shabbat, events and presentations that allow Jewish students to share Jewish ideas and traditions with their peers and off-campus intensive programming opportunities. Many private schools in New England provide some or all of these opportunities. But still, more should be done. These teens are an important component of our Jewish future, and we must not ignore them.

*Eileen Gress is executive director of TCI, which collaborates with independent high schools to strengthen Jewish student identity and nurture school communities' appreciation for Jewish ideas, culture and traditions. She can be reached at [egress@tcionline.org](mailto:egress@tcionline.org).*