

# Why My Kids Are Going Back to Jewish Day School

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**S**OMETHING TO CONSIDER, when parents do not elect to send their children to a Jewish Day School. This article, when applied to our school, presents an interesting and very personal perspective of what Mizel JCDS gives to our students. For the sake of your children and our Jewish community, CHOOSE MIZEL.

For four years, my children attended Community Day School, Pittsburgh's independent Jewish day school located in Squirrel Hill, the city's historically Jewish neighborhood. The school's mission is to "educate *Menschen*: young people who are academically strong who grow to be good people, knowledgeable Jews, contributing citizens of the people of Israel, the United States, and our world." Essentially, CDS promises not only a rigorous secular education—it promises to partner with me to raise my children.

Last summer, however, we moved out to the suburbs. We moved for the top-ranked (and free!) public schools, the trees, the space, and the quiet. I knew that moving away from the heart of Pittsburgh's Jewish community and leaving the school that started the day with *tefillah* (prayer), taught Hebrew alongside English, and infused Jewish studies into all aspects of education meant that I would need to ratchet up my Jewish mothering.

So, I resolved to do just that. We would have Shabbat dinner with homemade challah on Friday nights without exception. We would become active members of the synagogue and attend services. We would celebrate "small" holidays in addition to the more widely observed Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. I would speak Hebrew to the kids. They would attend Hebrew school twice a week.

In my mind, I assured myself that I could make up for what my kids would be missing. As with so many other aspects of parenting, I thought I could provide everything they needed. After all, how



could I not be qualified to raise Jewish children?

I am the granddaughter of Holocaust survivors and the daughter of Israelis. Hebrew was my first language. I attended Gratz College's Jewish Community High School. I taught Hebrew and religious school for six years. I've been to Israel countless times. During college, I belonged to a Jewish sorority; I was a USY advisor, and an intern for Chabad. I had a traditional Jewish wedding. As a professor, I am the advisor for my law school's Jewish Law Student Association. Surely, I would be capable of raising three Jewish children, providing them with a Jewish education, and instilling in them a love of Jewish values, community, and Israel even without their Jewish Day School as a partner.

Our move to the suburbs went well, and I was steadfast in my commitment to raise my children Jewishly. We joined the local synagogue and actively participated in family services. The kids attended religious school, where I substitute taught. We continued our tradition of Friday night dinners as often as our schedules allowed. All in all, I worked hard to ensure that my children continued to receive a Jewish upbringing.

Meanwhile, our experience with the public schools was positive. The academics were rigorous, the families were welcoming, and the teachers and administrators were amazingly talented. My children were learning their secular subjects well.

But we live in an age when "personal space" rules make it a violation for a kindergartener to kiss a friend, and where educators are forced to prioritize standardized testing over deep learning and critical thinking. Moreover, constitutional limitations, liability issues, and testing requirements prevent our public schools from partnering with parents to raise children. And despite homemade challah on Friday nights, and despite attending Shabbat services and Hebrew school, that is what is missing from our lives. The true gift of a Jewish day school is elusive. It is in the air. It is the energy, the families, the songs, the food, the "menschiness." It is the Yiddishkeit.

It is the sudden change in lesson plans to make time for students to discuss, process, and reflect upon news of a natural disaster or war from a Tikkun Olam, values-driven perspective. It is the [singing], dancing, and laughter during Kabbalat Shabbat. It is knowing that my children's teachers and