

A History of the Yavneh Day School of Cincinnati, Ohio

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Dedication:

This thesis is the story of a labor of love for three generations of Jews in Cincinnati. I dedicate this thesis the founders and builders of Yavneh who gave of themselves and of their souls to provide the best possible education for the Jewish children of Cincinnati.

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Thesis Digest:

For fifty years the Yavneh Day School has been a part of the Cincinnati Jewish community. The school began as a kindergarten in the Talmud Torah building in Avondale and now occupies a large, fully modern building in Kenwood. Through these fifty years the school faced great challenges with a mixture of success and failure. The history of Yavneh is the story of a battle for existence through merger attempts with the Orthodox Cincinnati Hebrew Day School (formerly Chofetz Chaim), a continuous stream of financial difficulties, administrative turnovers, and changes in location.

Despite these difficulties, Yavneh achieved a pattern of growth and general consistency in its educational program. This thesis looks at the institutional development of Yavneh focusing on the challenges that Yavneh faced and the growth it achieved during the fifty years since its founding.

Chapter One looks at the development of Jewish day school education in the United States up through the 1960's to show how Yavneh was a part of a general national expansion of day schools in the immediate post-World War II era. Additionally, this chapter looks at the development of Jewish education in Cincinnati. In particular, day school education and the Talmud Torah system of Cincinnati are explored along with the formation of the Chofetz Chaim school.

Chapter Two looks at the earliest years of The Yavneh Day School along with the people and organizations that paved the way for the creation of Yavneh. This chapter details the original founding of Yavneh and its early struggle for existence. In particular, this chapter looks at how Yavneh survived when the Jewish Federation of Cincinnati cut

off Yavneh's allocation of funds, and how the school survived this most difficult time, including an attempt to coerce a merger between the school and Chofetz Chaim.

Chapter Three is a look at the middle years of Yavneh, from the late 1960's to the late 1980's. These years were first dominated by ongoing merger talks with Cincinnati Hebrew Day School that were then followed by difficulties in finding a location until the purchase of the current building in Kenwood. After the purchase of the building, Yavneh entered a period of instability in the administration after the 1981 departure of George Lebovitz. The instability in the administration coincided with a decline in enrollment and major problems with finances.

Chapter Four looks at the most recent years of Yavneh, which were characterized by stability in the administration, growth and capital expansion. Yavneh's finances also stabilized during this time period, as the board led aggressive fund raising and financial restructuring programs. Additionally, because of growth in enrollment, Yavneh needed to expand its building several times during this period.

Through the entire history of Yavneh several themes stood out as shaping the school. Among these were: the merger talks with Chofetz Chaim/Cincinnati Hebrew Day, a struggle to find stability in the areas of administration, finances and building facility, and finding a comfortable balance between secular and Jewish studies.

CHAPTER ONE

The History of Jewish Day Schools in America Through the Post-World War II Era

and

Jewish Education in Cincinnati Until the Founding of Yavneh

"The study of Torah is equal to all" – Talmud Shabbat 127a

Introduction:

From ancient days education has been central to the Jewish people. Before modern times the notion of education for Jews was practically synonymous with Jewish education. Even great Jewish scholars who possessed secular knowledge, such as Moses ben Maimon, saw the study of the sciences as crucial in the understanding of the Torah and of God. In the European shtetls and ghettos a young boy would begin his study of Torah at an early age. Those who could afford to do so, devoted themselves to scholarship for their entire lives. The questions of should or even how a child be educated in Jewish subjects were rarely, if ever, a topic of debate. The only question was within individual families: for how long could a family afford to educate their child?¹

The period of European enlightenment, along with the emancipation of Jews in Europe and their virtual automatic emancipation in America brought different questions to the topic of Jewish education. The necessity of obtaining a Jewish education was questioned as the secular schools (first colleges, then lower schools) became open to Jews for the first time. Moses Medelssohn and his followers called into question, although never rejected, the importance of a particular Jewish education in their writings on "Natural Religion."²

As the 19th Century continued, the rise of the public school system in the United States offered a free, supposedly secular education to anyone who wanted it. As will be

¹ See Ben-Sasson, H. H., *A History of the Jewish People*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA, 1976, especially pp. 716-723 and Maimonide's *Mishneh Torah*, Laws of Torah Study, for more information on philosophies and practices of Medieval Jewish Education.

² More on the educational ideas of the *Maskilim* can be found in Ben-Sasson, pp. 782-789 and in Meyer, Michael A., *The Origins of the Modern Jew*, Wayne State University Press, Detroit, MI, 1967

shown below, American Jews for the most part, were eager to become a part of the general society and these public schools appeared to provide access for their children, if not for themselves. Jewish leaders also lent their support to the public school system. Isidor Busch, in 1851, saw the public schools as the only way to educate children, saying: "Support as much as you can the public school system lend no help whatsoever to sectarian institutions."³ The desire to blend into American culture raised concerns about Jewish education in America. Those questions ranged from the necessity of Jewish education, to how much and when, and how to incorporate it with the secular education that would eventually be mandated by law.

It is into a culture of these issues and questions, which still persist today, that the Yavneh Day School of Cincinnati came into being in 1952. Yavneh was founded by a group of parents who desired a strong secular and Jewish education for their children. To understand where Yavneh came from, why it came into being at the time that it did, and why it has survived for 50 years, it is important to review the history of Jewish Education in America leading up to the foundation of Yavneh. This chapter will survey this history, focusing on day schools and on the period closest to and surrounding the founding of Yavneh along with looking at the particular situation in Cincinnati that led to the creation of the Yavneh Jewish Day School.

Early American Jewish Education:

³ As quoted in Hersh, Elizabeth B., *The Rise of the Jewish Day School in the United States Since World War II*, Rabbinic Thesis, Hebrew Union College – Jewish Institute of Religion, 1993, 22

When the first Jewish community arrived in New Amsterdam in 1654⁴, communal circumstances were different than they had been in Europe. The New World culture would offer much more social, economic and political opportunities to Jews than they found in the Old World. In general in America during the colonial days and the early days of the Republic private tutors were the method of general education for any children whose parents could afford it. For the most part Jewish education was no exception to this rule.⁵ As the Jewish population grew slowly in what would become the United States, a couple of attempts were made at starting schools during this early period of American history.

Shearith Israel in New York opened a school in 1731, at which the Hazzan taught both Jewish and secular subjects. This school would prove successful, remaining open through at least the rest of the eighteenth century, closing only during the British occupation and for a short time thereafter.⁶ In 1808 Shearith Israel would open a second school that would become an afternoon Talmud Torah in 1821. Also in colonial times there is evidence of a school in Newport Rhode Island around 1759, and, after independence, in 1782, a school opened in Philadelphia. Both of these schools were short lived.⁷

One of the difficulties in early American Jewish education was the relative isolation in which American Jews lived as compared to their European counterparts. Many Jews did live in cities and affiliated with a congregation, but there was no coercion to do so. Even in these cities, as seen above, it was difficult to organize a Jewish school. In the countryside, where Jews were often isolated from anyone else, especially other Jews,

⁴ Meyer, Michael A., *Response to Modernity*, Wayne State University Press, Detroit, 1988, 228

⁵ Hersh, Elizabeth, 3

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid., 4-5

passing on a sense of Jewish identity was nearly impossible. Therefore, outside of the major cities there was no organized Jewish Education.⁸

Beginning in the 1840's the Jewish population of the United States began to grow in unprecedented numbers, rising from 40,000 in 1840 to 250,000 in 1880⁹. This dramatic increase in Jewish population naturally led to changes in Jewish education. Isaac Leiser, a prominent orthodox rabbi in Philadelphia, opened the first Sunday school for Jewish children in 1851, based on the Christian model.¹⁰ This followed his three earlier attempts at creating a day school in Philadelphia. These attempts included an unsuccessful one in 1841 to set up a system of Orthodox Jewish day schools.¹¹ Leiser would continue to be a strong advocate for separate schools, at least on a part time basis, for Jews during this time period. His reasoning was based on his idea that Jews would be at best a "tolerated minority" in America.¹²

Support for day schools was difficult to come by in this period. At a 1855 conference of Rabbis in Cleveland (attended by the likes of both Isaac Mayer Wise and Leiser) one found very mixed opinions on the topic. No real resolution on the topic came from this conference with its mostly of Reform minded rabbis,¹³ although some expressed concern about the Christian influence in public schools. Only Rabbi Bernard Felsenthal of Chicago spoke more vigorously in favor of Jewish day schools. He argued

⁸ Stern, Malcom H., "The 1820's: American Jewry Comes of Age," Sarna Jonathan D. ed., *The American Jewish Experience*, Holmes and Meier Publishers, Inc., New York, 1986, 31-2

⁹ Hersh, 8

¹⁰ Meyer, Michael A., "America: The Reform Movement's Land of Promise," Sarna, ed., 60

¹¹ Hersh 14-15

¹² Hersh, 23

¹³ Meyer, 243

that supplementary schools would not be sufficient to ensure the continuation of Jewish tradition and identity,¹⁴

The fear of Christianity's promotion through the public schools was real. But in 1869 those who used this argument to support Jewish day schools were dealt a blow when the Cincinnati Board of Education decided to ban bible reading in public schools. After contentious battles in the lower courts, The Ohio State Supreme Court eventually upheld the board's decision.¹⁵

Even with the resistance to Jewish day schools from within the community and a community increasingly apathetic to Jewish education, the antebellum and post Civil War periods saw several day schools arise, although all were gone by the end of the 1870's.¹⁶ The Jewish community, lacking the overarching structures of the public schools and of the Catholic system, gave greater support to supplementary education.¹⁷ A scattering of schools in communities such as Chicago, Eaton, PA, Detroit and New York, among others, rose and fell in this period. Virtually every school that lasted for some years was affiliated with a congregation. The Talmud Torah and Hebrew Institute in New York City seem to be the sole exception.¹⁸

Early Attempts at Jewish Day Schools in Cincinnati:

In Cincinnati, too, several attempts were made to open day schools. K.K. Benei Israel (now commonly known as Rockdale Temple) was the first attempt. It tried to turn

¹⁴ Hersh 24-5

¹⁵ Ibid. , 26; see also, Brumberg, Stephan F., "The Cincinnati Bible War (1869-173) and its Impact on the Education of the City's Protestants, Catholics and Jews," Presented at the History of Education Society Annual Meeting, October 18 to 21, 2001, Yale University.

¹⁶ Ibid. , 9- 11

¹⁷ Ibid. , 28

¹⁸ Ibid. , 16- 18,20

its supplementary schools into a 6-day a week school in 1845. This was not at all successful. Shortly thereafter, in 1846, the Cincinnati Hebrew Institute – not affiliated with any congregation – opened, shutting its doors after only 1 year.¹⁹ Other attempts at day schools by K.K. Benei Yeshurun (now commonly known as the Wise Temple), Benei Israel again, and Ahavat Achim were initially successful but all these schools had become supplementary only by the end of the Civil war.²⁰

After the court decisions affirming the ban on Bible reading in Cincinnati's public schools the Jews of Cincinnati became increasingly dedicated to the public schools. The ability to send their children to public schools without fear of Christian religious indoctrination appeared to Jews as a route into the mainstream of American society.

The Era of Immigration and the Inter-War Period:

In 1880 the best estimates show around 40,000 to 50,000 Jewish children in the United States. Only about 15,000 of them received some type of Jewish education.²¹ The face of American Judaism, however, was on the verge of change. As stated above, about a quarter million Jews were in America in 1880. Beginning in 1880 and continuing for several decades (ending, for the most part, with the Johnson-Reed immigration act of 1924)²² about 2 million Jews entered the United States, mostly from Eastern Europe.²³ Quite naturally this led to a dramatic increase in the demand for and ability to provide for Jewish education. Alvin Schiff, a prominent Orthodox educator, calls this time period the

¹⁹ Perlow, Rabbi Bernard D., *History of the Bureau of Jewish Education of Cincinnati, Ohio*, Masters of Education Thesis, Teacher's college of the University of Cincinnati, 1949, 21, 24

²⁰ Ibid., 22 -24

²¹ Grinstien, Hyman B., "In the course of the Nineteenth Century," Pilch, Judah, ed., *A History of Jewish Education*, American Association for Jewish Education, New York, 1969, 45

²² Archdeacon, Thomas J., *Becoming American: an Ethnic History*, The Free Press, New York, 1983, Pp. 172,183

²³ Howe, Irving, *World of Our Fathers*, Schocken Books, Inc., New York, 1976, preface xix.

era of "Pioneer *Yeshivot*." This era is the first period of Jewish education in America to play a major role in defining what the American Jewish day school would eventually look like.²⁴ While many immigrants favored public education, some desired a more intense Jewish education than the supplementary schools could provide. The immigrants of this group began schools known as *Yeshivot K'tanot*.²⁵

These *Yeshivot K'tanot* were less bi-cultural than the earlier attempts at day schools. They tended to focus on Jewish subjects, and some were completely anti-assimilationist. Two such schools served as the benchmark of day school success. Eitz Chayim and Yeshivat Rabbi Yitzchak Elchanan would merge to form a Rabbinic School and would eventually become known as Yeshiva University.²⁶

Besides day schools, the concept of the Talmud Torah School also grew at this time, becoming increasingly popular after the turn of the 20th century. These schools were often inconsistent, however, both in terms of retaining students and in terms of steady operation.²⁷ In response to this inconsistency in Jewish education and in response to reports from the police that Jews made up about half of the criminal class in the city, the Jews of New York City founded the Bureau of Education of the Jewish Community in 1910. This particular solution came about, in part, on the recommendation of Dr. Samson Benderly.²⁸

This bureau marked the first time that a major Jewish community in America officially developed an administrative structure to oversee and supervise the system of Jew-

²⁴ Schiff, Alvin I., *The Jewish Day School in America*, Jewish Education Committee Press, New York, 1966, 20

²⁵ Hersh, 35

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 36

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 38-9

²⁸ Ben-Horin, Meyer, "From the Turn of the Century to the Late Thirties," Pilch, ed., 71

ish education in the community. In 1912, Dr. Benderly, often considered the "father of Modern Jewish Education in America," issued a report in which he urged the standardization of the Talmud Torah system.²⁹ The Bureau, led by Benderly, would also start a board of licensing for Jewish teachers. This board would be dissolved after about three years, to reappear in a new form in 1929.³⁰

Benderly, with all of his dedication to the Talmud Torah system of New York, was not a supporter of day schools. It was his contention that day schools would lead to the isolation of Jews and would be "fatal" to the hopes for the Jew to achieve freedom in the United States. In 1927 he stated that the day school is no solution to the problem of children attending 2 schools, just as the once a week Sunday School was also not a good solution.³¹ Although Benderly did not offer a solution to the problem himself he seemed to consider the Talmud Torah system as the best way to provide a Jewish education for children in America.

As the Jewish day school movement grew, others became vocal in their opposition. The prominent Jewish lawyer, Louis Marshall, very much opposed the idea of a Jewish day school. The irony in this situation is that in 1925, Marshall argued a case in front of the U.S. Supreme Court; *Pierce v. Society of Sisters*, on behalf of those advocating private schools.³² Marshall, however, did not see this as an appropriate route for Jews. In response to the founding of Yeshiva College he expressed fears that, "It is destined to failure and is sure to do much harm to the best interests of Jews in America.... It

²⁹ Ibid. , 72-3

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Schiff, *JDSA*, 206

³² Ibid. , 126

converts the Jew into a self-created alien."³³ Somewhat earlier the *American Israelite* was critical of Rabbi Isaac Elchanan Theological Seminary (RIETS), calling it an anachronism and a waste of money.³⁴

Despite such opposition from influential Jewish figures and publications, the cause of the Jewish day school pushed on. It was helped by a couple of Supreme Court decisions – including the case cited above – in the mid 1920's that affirmed the right of parents to use private and parochial schools as an alternative to mandatory public education.³⁵ New York, being the population center of Jewish America was in the lead in terms of number of schools and students enrolled. At the end of World War I New York had four Jewish Day Schools and 1,000 students. By 1935 there were 16 schools with 4,500 students enrolled in them.³⁶

Cincinnati Before World War II:

The focus of Jewish education in Cincinnati, outside of the Reform Movement's congregational religious schools, was the Talmud Torah. Prior to the founding of the Talmud Torah, and continuing until World War One, a number of afternoon Cheder schools, based on the autocratic old-world style of Jewish learning, could be found in Cincinnati. Additionally Jewish socialists and Zionists made some attempts at opening schools based on their ideologies, but all of these were short lived.³⁷

The Talmud Torah of Cincinnati began in 1887 as an afternoon and Sunday morning school. The Talmud Torah grew rapidly in its early days, getting it's own facility in

³³ As quoted in Schiff, *JDSA*, p.203

³⁴ Ibid. , 204

³⁵ Ibid. , 126

³⁶ Ben Horin, 83

³⁷ Perlow, 28-32

1892, and dedicating another new building in the West End 1916.³⁸ Originally an orthodox school, it brought the Zionists on board in 1902 and their presence encouraged more modern teaching methods.³⁹

In 1917, with the arrival of Dr. Abraham Simon as the new principal, the Talmud Torah became even more of a modern institution. The Zionists were included more fully, and Simon implemented a more modern curriculum, which included Hebrew, Jewish folk culture and English teaching in the lower grades. Additionally, under Simon, girls were admitted for the first time and tuition was abolished.⁴⁰ Simon's tenure was short lived. There was great opposition to the Talmud Torah being a free school,⁴¹ and others did not like Simon's educational reforms. This opposition combined with the declining Jewish population in the West End led to the end of Simon's tenure.⁴²

After 1921, with tuition reinstated, the Talmud Torah would continue to grow, adding new branches in Price Hill and Newport, KY. 1924 saw the Bureau of Jewish Education of Cincinnati form in order to take over operation of the Talmud Torah. It is due to the success of Dr. Benderly with the Bureau in New York, that the Cincinnati community decided to try this model for giving its children a Jewish education.⁴³

Also in 1924, the Talmud Torah opened a branch in Avondale, following the Jewish Community's move toward the northern areas of the city. In 1927 this new branch would take over from the West End branch as the headquarters of the Talmud Torah. At

³⁸ Ibid. , 33-5

³⁹ Michael Ann Deborah, "CCHS: A Survey", 1972, located in the American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati, OH, Histories Collection, 3, 6 and Sarna, Jonathan D., and Klein, Nancy H., *The Jews of Cincinnati*, Center for the Study of the American Jewish Experience, Cincinnati, OH, 1989, p. 68

⁴⁰ Perlow, 35

⁴¹ Through its history the Talmud Torah went back and forth between being a free and pay school. Tuition was always waived for poor students. See Perlow p.36

⁴² Perlow, 36

⁴³ Ibid. , 90

this time the Talmud Torah system had 425 students in its system.⁴⁴ The number of students would grow to a peak of 515 in 1940, despite some setbacks in enrollment at the time of the onset and deepening of the Great Depression.⁴⁵

During the interwar period in Cincinnati one attempt was made at forming a Jewish Day School. In 1926, there was an attempt to create a Gan Yeladim, it was short lived, abandoned due to lack of support from the community.⁴⁶ This attempt was made by the Labor Zionist organization of Cincinnati, led by Joseph Gootman. An important note to this attempt is that one of the students enrolled was Gootman's daughter, Shulamit (Sham) Gootman (later Sham Eden), who herself would send her son to be in the first class at Yavneh.⁴⁷

"The Era of Great Expansion":

By the end of the 1930's the number of Jewish Day Schools in America had grown considerably from the beginning of the century. In 1940 there were 35 day schools (mostly *Yeshivot K'tanot*) in North America in 7 different states and Canadian provinces. This was to prove to be only a beginning for the Jewish Day School movement. The "Era of Great Expansion" (as named by Schiff) was about to begin. By 1952, the year of Yavneh's founding, this number would be dwarfed by the 160 day schools in 28 states and provinces. This number too, would nearly double by 1963, with 304 day schools.⁴⁸ The growth in enrollment (7,700 to 65,400) far outpaced that of the Jewish

⁴⁴ Ibid. , 92

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Michael, Ann Deborah, "History of Yavneh" 1972, located in the American Jewish Archives Cincinnati, OH, Histories Collection, 1

⁴⁷ Eden, Sham - Interview 10/24/01

⁴⁸ Schiff, *JDSA*, Chart, 49

supplementary schools. This growth rate also outpaced the growth rates of Catholic parochial schools and the public schools.⁴⁹

Along with the massive growth in numbers of Jewish day schools, came a massive growth in diversity of day schools in terms of both location and type of school. While schools were concentrated in New York at the beginning of this period, there are 117 different communities with some type of Jewish day school by the end of the period.⁵⁰ Suburban schools helped some in this era of growth, growing from 339 students in 1951 to 2,427 students by 1964. The city schools added the main force of the growth with an additional 15,000 students during the same time period (approximately doubling in that time).⁵¹ But the trend was beginning to move toward suburban Jewish day schools.

Within this "Era of Great Expansion," there was also growth in the types of day schools. Judah Pilch categorizes these schools into 4 main categories: Traditional Talmudic (which dominated the earlier periods), Modern Hebraic, Integrated, and Hebrew-English Private. The Traditional Talmudic Day School was the *Yeshiva K'tanah*, stressing traditional Jewish learning and emphasizing general secular education only to the extent mandated by the state. The Modern Hebraic Day School spent some time dealing with traditional Jewish learning, but also focused on Modern Hebrew, literature and culture, along with giving equal time to secular studies. The Integrated day school offered secular and Jewish studies mixed through the day with the goal of showing the mutual relationship of both areas of study. The integrated method of teaching would be a major issue of debate within the day school movement and will be discussed further below. The

⁴⁹ Ibid. , 50

⁵⁰ Ibid. , 53

⁵¹ Ibid. , 54

Hebrew-English Private day school was primarily a secular private school where Jewish topics would be taught somewhere in the range of five to eight hours per week. This final type of school was one way of solving the two-school (public + supplementary) problem for parents who didn't necessarily want a Jewish day school.⁵²

Further breaking down the types of schools is Alvin Schiff. He divides the Traditional Talmudic School into 2 types, Hasidic and *Yeshivot K'tanot*. The former minimizes anything that is not a traditional topic, while the latter seeks to make its students into observant Jews *and* good American citizens.⁵³ Schiff also divides the Modern Hebrew day school into two categories, Schools with National-Cultural interests and Liberal Day Schools. The former is interested in culture, language and Israel, not with any traditional Jewish studies, which are taught as "folk ways." The latter, while emphasizing culture and Zionism, also taught a pluralistic Judaism in terms of observance without demanding any particular level of observance from its students.⁵⁴

The reasons for so many types of Jewish day schools at this time lie in both historical events and the motivations of parents for sending their children to Jewish day schools. Historically the Holocaust and the foundation of Israel played significant roles. The new immigrants, mainly the Hasidic Jews, in the late 1930s demanded such schools for their children. The Holocaust also spurred forward Jewish Education based on issues of Jewish continuity and survival, Israel being a major component of this in many schools. Complementing the above considerations, the culture in America was becoming more permissive of pluralism, shedding the melting pot mentality of the early part of the

⁵² Pilch, "From the Early Forties to the Mid-Sixties," Pilch, ed., 142-3

⁵³ Schiff, 80-90

⁵⁴ Ibid., 90-1

century. This made Jewish schools more acceptable just as it made Christian parochial schools more acceptable.⁵⁵

Attitudes of parents toward day schools also began to change at this time. As the weaknesses of the Talmud Torah system became more apparent, other options were sought. This was an even more important factor in the growth of day schools than the complexity of working with two school systems.⁵⁶ A 1960 study in Los Angeles showed the diversity of the types of Jews who would send their child to day schools. While 77% of the respondents considered themselves orthodox, only 51% classified themselves as Kashrut observant and 60% as observant of Shabbat (in some way, not necessarily *Halachic*).⁵⁷

Schiff identifies five major types of parents that sent their children to an orthodox oriented, Mid-western day school about which a study was conducted. There are those parents who agree with the views of the school and want to pass those views to their children. There are parents who want a stronger Jewish background for their children than they themselves had. The third group is parents that want the cultural aspects of Judaism passed down to their children, but don't necessarily agree with the teaching of Jewish observance. Then there are parents who came from Eastern Europe who, although they themselves were declining in their Jewish interest, they wanted their children to experience some of what they had as children. The final group is composed of parents who

⁵⁵ Pilch, 140

⁵⁶ Ibid., 141

⁵⁷ Schiff, *JDSA*, 103

wanted to keep home and school life separate but despite this, still chose to send their child to a Jewish day school.⁵⁸

It is during this period too, that official umbrella organizations are set up for the day schools. Torah Umesorah organization was founded in 1944 in order to assist those schools that followed an orthodox program and to encourage the creation and growth of new orthodox schools. The National Council of Beth Jacob schools (modeled after a system of girls schools in Poland) also began at this time. Labor Zionists followed suit organizing some schools around the country and the Conservative movement launched the Solomon Schechter school system in the 1950's.⁵⁹ Of all of these only the Solomon Schechter schools were under any type of tight national control. The Conservative movement managed to start 8 schools in the US and Canada by 1962 and 10 other previously established schools joined the Schechter system.⁶⁰

Despite the growth in both number and variety of schools, opposition to Jewish day schools still existed. The American Council for Judaism, which was set up as the "last stand" of those in the Reform movement that remained non- or anti-Zionist during World War II and shortly thereafter,⁶¹ vigorously opposed the spread of day schools. In 1956 it used an article about day school growth to try to attempt to scare people about the "real" purposes of day schools trying to portray them as separatist, anti-American, radical Zionist and missionary in terms of promoting *Aliyah* to Israel.⁶² This may have had some effect on deterring smaller towns from starting day schools, but the head of Torah

⁵⁸ Ibid., 104 -- Schiff is careful to note that this one study only supplies examples of reasons parents send their children to a Jewish day school, but that other reasons and motivations exist along with those mentioned.

⁵⁹ Pilch, 140

⁶⁰ Schiff, *JDSA*, 63

⁶¹ Meyer, 326

⁶² Schiff, *JDSA*, 204

Umesorah at the time felt that the anti-day school campaign helped spark even more interest in the movement. This position by the American Council for Judaism proved to be out of step with the mainstream of Reform Judaism, just as it was on the issue of Zionism, as in 1960 some groups of Reform Jews began to discuss the desirability of organizing day schools within the movement.⁶³

The rise of these new types of non-traditional Jewish day schools led to the necessity of creating a new curriculum that included traditional Jewish studies, modern Jewish studies and culture, and secular studies. While the Yeshivot K'tanot kept a sharp separation between secular and Jewish studies, more liberal and progressive schools had to decide whether to integrate the program or to keep the Jewish and Secular studies as separate parts of the day. Those favoring an integrated program argued that the system was more economical as fewer teachers would be needed. Integrated studies would promote cooperation between the Jewish and Secular Departments, and the approach would teach the children that there was no real separation between the Jewish and the secular. Additionally, subjects like history or literature could be taught in a unified way making no major distinction between what is Jewish and non-Jewish in those areas.⁶⁴ The other subjects, such as math or Hebrew language, would be taught in a similar manner at either an integrated or non-integrated school, but the course of the day would re-enforce the idea of integration with a student having, for example, first period math, second period Hebrew, third period English, and so on.⁶⁵

Those who preferred keeping the two areas of learning distinct saw several disadvantages to integration. They would argue that integration took away preparation time

⁶³ Pilch, 140

⁶⁴ Schiff, *JDSA*, 122

⁶⁵ Pilch 143

for the teachers (who would have to spend more time in class), would restrict options for students in terms of class placement,⁶⁶ and limited the ability of Hebrew teachers to earn extra income by working in a local afternoon Hebrew school or Talmud Torah.⁶⁷ Others contended that an integrated program eliminated the possibility of creating a pervasive Hebraic or Jewish atmosphere at any time in the day. They further argued that there should be a distinction made between the Jewish and the secular. Additionally, others made (scientifically unfounded) claims that because students are more alert in the morning it is a better time to teach them Hebrew.⁶⁸

Besides the debate between an integrated or non-integrated school day, most educators did agree that experiential education was important. Daily minyans, holiday and Shabbat celebrations, and Jewish expressions through the arts were some of the most common forms of experiential education.⁶⁹ These experiences were rarely, if ever, controversial, but one experiential issue that did cause a divide between, and at times within schools, was how to teach Hebrew. On one side of this debate were those who favored *Ivrit b'Ivrit*, Hebrew language taught in Hebrew as a form of immersion for the students. Those favoring this method argued that it was more natural and that it reduced the need for phonetic drills. Its proponents insisted that *Ivrit b'Ivrit* helped the children develop a new skill with the added benefits of building bonds with the State of Israel and the creation of a positive Hebrew atmosphere.⁷⁰

⁶⁶ For example a new student might enter a school at 4th grade (in terms of general schooling), but with only the Hebrew and Jewish knowledge of the particular school's 3rd grade. In an integrated system, the student would have to be placed in one or the other, while in a separate system the same student could spend the morning in Jewish Study with the 3rd grade and the afternoon in secular studies with the 4th grade.

⁶⁷ Schiff, *JDSA*, 122-3

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 108

⁷⁰ Ibid., 110

The opponents of *Ivrit b'Ivrit* included traditionalists who did not want to see the "holy tongue" used in anything but prayer and the teaching of traditional Jewish topics. It also included those who opposed it on pedagogic reasons. These opponents claimed that *Ivrit b'Ivrit* wasted class time and put too much emphasis on Hebrew as a subject due to the potential for difficulty in communication between student and teacher. Additionally, in schools where a goal was to teach Jewish values, it is important that the student hears those values in his or her native language, so that they will understand the values from an early age. All these arguments were re-enforced by the shortage of teachers around the mid-twentieth century who were qualified to teach *Ivrit b'Ivrit*.⁷¹

In a more general sense day school curricula, regardless of integration or method of Hebrew instruction, were rather similar in terms of the way they progressed through the Jewish topics.⁷² The typical school would first teach Hebrew phonetics, applying that to the Torah and then the later books of the Bible, eventually moving to commentaries then Mishnah, Talmud and later codes. How rapidly a student advanced and how much time a student spent on these traditional topics depended on how traditional in orientation a school was. The more traditional the school the faster students moved through these topics and the more material they covered. Liberal schools would not always include Mishnah and Talmud on their curricula. The subject of Jewish ethical values was given an emphasis in the early years and in the upper grades would be integrated with Jewish law in the more traditional schools. History was taught in some detail with the most common breaks between years of study being the destruction of each temple, the cru-

⁷¹ Ibid. , 111

⁷² For general studies schools would usually use curricula given to them by the state or local board of Education – Schiff, *JDSA*, 121

sades, the Haskalah, and then, in more liberal schools, modern Jewish history was taught.⁷³

The Decline Of The Talmud Torah and the Rise of Chofetz Chaim:

During this era of expansion for day schools, Cincinnati saw some major changes in the Jewish education of its children. The Talmud Torah System, having reached its peak in 1940, began a rapid decline and had only 253 students at 3 locations by the spring of 1947.⁷⁴ At this time the viability of the Talmud Torah would be dealt a strong blow. The rabbi of Adath Israel, Louis Feinberg, a strong supporter of the Talmud Torah retired. In his place came Rabbi Fishel Goldfeder who supported the Conservative Movement's recommendation that each congregation should have its own supplementary school.⁷⁵ Additionally, to help serve people in the Bond Hill neighborhood where the Talmud Torah had not been successful, an independent group formed the Bond Hill Hebrew Institute.⁷⁶ The Talmud Torah would merge in 1954 with the Beth Am Nursery school after dedicating a building in Roselawn in 1953. Eventually The Talmud Torah would become part of the Cincinnati Community Hebrew Schools (CCHS) serving Ohav Shalom, Golf Manor and, after 1965, Northern Hills Synagogues.⁷⁷

The first successful attempt at a sustained Jewish day school in Cincinnati during the twentieth century was the Chofetz Chayim Day School (today known as Cincinnati Hebrew Day). Based on the Constitution of Chofetz Chayim it was set up in the model of

⁷³ The information for this paragraph is taken from Schiff's collection of sample curricula on pages 111-120

⁷⁴ Perlow, 94 – the three locations still operating at this time were Avondale (215 Students), Price Hill (25) and Newport, KY (12).

⁷⁵ Michael, CCHS, 10

⁷⁶ Perlow, 97

⁷⁷ Michael, CCHS 11

a *Yeshiva K'tana*. It was an Orthodox school and the head of the school, Rabbi Eliezer Silver, was the leader of the Orthodox Jewish community in Cincinnati. The Jewish studies teachers were expected to follow orthodoxy and could be dismissed for breaking with orthodoxy in any way. The school also sought to hire Orthodox teachers for the secular subjects. The secular studies were to be based on the state dictated program, but were not to contradict Orthodox Judaism in any way. The Hebrew studies were placed under the supervision of the Rav of the *Va'ad Ha'ir* (community council) who, at the time, was Eliezer Silver. The school was open to all Jews in Cincinnati, although it was mainly the Orthodox who sent their children with some support coming from the Zionist community.⁷⁸ Funding for the school came from a one-cent kosher meat tax.⁷⁹

The school met with early success. In a letter inviting people to an open house in 1950 the directors of the school bragged that, "ours is the only Jewish Day school in Cincinnati." An earlier fundraising letter had expressed confidence in the school's secular program and spoke of its teachers who were "*Yirath Shamayim*" (God fearing) along with being "excellent pedagogues."⁸⁰ The size of the school grew to 150, 99 boys and 51 girls, spread (unevenly) between kindergarten and the 6th grade in 1952.⁸¹

Conclusion:

By the 1950's the Jewish day school movement had become a viable system for Jewish education in America. The growth rate of Jewish day schools in the decade fol-

⁷⁸ Constitution of Chofetz Chayim Day School of Cincinnati, Gootman Collection

⁷⁹ Michael, Yavneh, 1

⁸⁰ Letters to Joseph Gootman, located in Joseph Gootman collection of the American Jewish Archives, Box 1, folder 5.

⁸¹ Minutes of Board meeting, 11/12/52, Joseph Gootman collection, Box 1, folder 5

lowing 1948 was 131.2%, paralleling the growth of Jewish education in general.⁸² Despite the fact that no mention of day schools were made report on Jewish education from 1940 in a 1960 convention of the Jewish Education Committee of New York,⁸³ day schools were a reality in virtually every sizable Jewish community by the 1950's. While there were attempts to create Jewish day schools in the early and mid-nineteenth century, it was not until the influx of immigration around the turn of the twentieth century that there was a critical mass of Jews to allow for the growth of Jewish day schools. Additionally as fears of isolation of the Jewish community through day schools subsided, and events in Europe and the Middle East unfolded in the 1930's and 40's, the movement grew stronger. Despite multiple setbacks, those who desired the strongest Jewish education for their children had no real alternative to day schools:

The failure of all other forms of Jewish education to provide intensive Jewish schooling left those initially indifferent to this form of education with no alternative to accept the day school albeit with great reluctance.⁸⁴

Cincinnati, just as other cities, experienced early failure at creating a sustained day school. In 1947 a group of Jewish leaders succeeded in forming the first permanent Jewish day school in Cincinnati in the twentieth century. However, this would not satisfy the needs of the entire community due to its Orthodox affiliation. Ultimately the weakness of Talmud Torah system in Cincinnati and the ideological disagreements with Chofetz Chayim would lead to the creation of a second Jewish day school in Cincinnati — one that aspired to serve the needs of those who were seeking a strong Jewish education without the presence of a strictly Orthodox atmosphere: The Yavneh Day School.

⁸² Dushkin, Alexander M., and Engelman, Uriah Z., *Jewish Education in the United States (Vol. 1)*, The American Association for Jewish Education, New York, 1915, p.63

⁸³ Schiff, *JDSA*, 207

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 208

CHAPTER TWO

Formation and Survival: 1952 to the Late 1960's

Introduction:

The formation of the Yavneh Jewish Day School of Cincinnati (hereafter: Yavneh) in 1952 is the result of a combination of factors. As written in the previous chapter, those dissatisfied with Chofetz Chayim, the Talmud Torah system or both, sought an alternative form of Jewish education. This vacuum of Jewish education in the city was not enough to create a new school on its own. It took a group of dedicated and committed individuals to come together to form Yavneh.

The Early Founders:

As the period of open immigration into the United States came to a close, Cincinnati was a Jewish community largely dominated by the more affluent descendants of German Jewish immigrants, which had segregated itself from the Eastern European community.¹ Because of the strong anti-Zionism preached by many in this group, the arriving Zionists turned to each other for community. It is this community that would be the center of support for Yavneh. At the center of this group of Zionist intellectuals were a handful of people: Joseph Gootman, Samuel Schmidt, Sol Richmond and Ben-Tzion Doll.

Joseph Gootman, like many of other Zionists, did not belong to any synagogue but was deeply committed to Jewish learning. His daughter, Sham Eden, recalls him saying, "one cannot be an apikoros without having a thorough knowledge of Jewish sources."² In 1911, Gootman attended a meeting the *Ivriah*, which was an underground

¹ Sarna, Jonathan D. and Klein, Nancy H., *The Jews of Cincinnati*, Center for the Study of the American Jewish Experience, Cincinnati, 1989

² Interview with Sham Eden 10/24/01

Zionist and Modern Hebrew speaking group at the Hebrew Union College.³ Gootman would continue as a part of this group along with continuing his own independent Labor Zionist group that he began in 1914. Gootman was also behind the creation of the Jewish Day school in 1927 that only lasted one year.⁴

Gootman also had difficulty with the anti-Zionist and assimilationist positions of the Jewish leadership in the City of Cincinnati. Along with Sol Richmond, Albert Goldman, Moshe Kushnir, and Ben Tzion Doll, he formed the Yiddish Ethical Society: Yavneh. The goal of this society was to provide a forum for the discussion of Zionism, discuss issues of concern to European immigrants, and to serve as a pseudo-religious group. The name Yavneh was chosen for this group because of the talmudic tale of Rabbi Eliezer Ben Yehuda asking the Roman commander to "Give me Yavneh and it's sages."⁵ This group (both ancient and modern) understood education as the key to Jewish survival.⁶

Gootman's partners were also devout Zionists. Ben Tzion Doll joined with Gootman in 1914 to establish the Labor Zionist organization in Cincinnati. They would recruit others while sitting in a candy store owned by Gootman's aunt. Samuel M. Schmidt, who had lost an arm in a factory accident at age 16, had served in the Jewish Medical Unit of the Jewish Legion in World War One. After arriving in Cincinnati he would join with the Labor Zionist organizations. In 1927 Schmidt started a local newspaper, *Every Friday*, as an alternative to the *American Israelite*, which many saw as an

³ This group was underground due to the College's official anti-Zionist stand, for more on the anti-Zionist stand of the College in this time see, Meyer, Michael A., *Hebrew Union College – Jewish Institute of Religion: A Centennial History 1875-1975*, revised edition, Hebrew Union College Press, 1992

⁴ Interview with Sham Eden 10/24/01

⁵ Babylonian Talmud, Gittin 56b

⁶ Video on the Yiddish Ethical Society, located in Eden Collection

anti-Zionist paper.⁷ Sol Richmond, referred to by Sham Eden as, "the greatest scholar of all (in this group)," was a very successful businessman and, before the Second World War, was the chairman of a scholarship fund to send local youth to Palestine for a year's study.⁸

With the above four men serving as the center, The Yiddish Ethical Society existed until shortly after World War II. In 1948, in a letter written by Gootman, he states, "Yavna (sic) has no dues paying membership now and is practically dissolved."⁹ Demand for an organization like the society of Yavneh waned since many members, including Gootman had joined synagogues and the Labor Zionist groups continued to prosper.¹⁰

This group of Zionists supported the formation of the Chofetz Chaim Day School in 1948. However, they would quickly find themselves disappointed with Chofetz Chaim and Rabbi Eliezer Silver, the director. While the original agreements called for certified teachers and *Ivrit b'ivrit*, this was not the case at Chofetz Chaim. These Zionist supporters of Chofetz Chaim were further disturbed when the school refused to permit the singing of Hatikvah.¹¹

The Formation of Yavneh Day School:

Cincinnati, in 1952, was fertile ground for a new Jewish Day school that recognized Zionist values. Additionally, parents were seeking a school that was, "dedicated to the ideology of compromise among the denominations," a true community school, not an

⁷ Interview with Sham Eden 10/24/01

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Letter to "Mr. Sievers" from Joseph Gootman, Jan 15, 1948, located in Mss. Collection 268, box 4 folder 3, American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati

¹⁰ Interview with Sham Eden, 10/24/01

¹¹ Ibid., 11/14/01

orthodox school.¹² At this same time, Gootman's daughter, Sham, returned from Israel with her husband Nachum Eden and their 5-year-old son, Avidon.

Nachum Eden left Poland at the age of 17 and arrived in Cleveland in the late 1930's. He stayed only a short time there before going off to the war as a translator, but in this short time he had established himself within the Zionist organizations of the area. After the war he remained in Europe long enough to confirm that he had lost most of his family and hometown in the Holocaust. He had married Sham Gootman during the war and then the two of them left Ohio to live in Palestine beginning in 1947.¹³

When the Edens returned to Cincinnati, Gootman wanted to know where they planned to send their son to school. Nachum visited Chofetz Chaim but afterward he was convinced that it was not a place he wanted to send his son. Eden's son's lack of English ability also made sending him to the public school and Talmud Torah an unattractive idea. Gootman then got on the phone and started making some calls. Before too long, Gootman had found 17 other students to start a kindergarten class. They decided that the school would be named Yavneh, after the ancient Yavneh, Yiddish Ethical Society, and in memory of the childhood school Nachum had attended (which was destroyed in the Holocaust).¹⁴ In the autumn of 1952, with Ida Drury as the teacher, Yavneh began its first kindergarten.¹⁵

In these early days Yavneh was located in the basement of the Avondale Talmud Torah building and drew students, in a large part, from the established Talmud Torah

¹² History of Yavneh in "Friends of Yavneh" newsletter, 1987, located at Eden home.

¹³ Interview with Nachum Eden 8/30/01

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Bernstein, Miriam, "Yavneh Enriches Cincinnati Jewish Life for 39 years," Program for "Yavneh Celebrates: A 39th Anniversary Gala", May 26, 1991, Yavneh Collection. According to Ophra Weisberg, Ida Drury was a local woman with some Jewish knowledge but no Hebrew ability and would teach for only a few years.

nursery school. Yavneh also depended heavily on advertising, word of mouth and personal meetings with parents of prospective students. Perhaps in anticipation of the concerns that parents might have, one advertising brochure, for the 1954-55 school year, emphasized the quality of the secular education that a child would receive at Yavneh. The copy includes a complimentary quote from the supervisor of Cincinnati Public Schools, and the statement: "The Yavneh Foundation School follows the curriculum of the Cincinnati Public Schools."¹⁶

In order to separate itself from the public schools, this ad emphasizes the small class size, and notes that the progress of the first grade class was above that of the public schools. The role that Judaism played in the school is also emphasized in the brochure. There are pictures of classes celebrating Purim and Passover and the ad copy makes it clear that each child "receives a complete, well integrated, well-rounded General and Jewish Education." There is nothing in the brochure that suggests a Zionist ideology.¹⁷

This advertising brochure gave an interesting look at both what was important to Yavneh and what was important to the parents of the children they were attempting to recruit. The ad copy, by favoring the secular educational aspects appeals to parents that were most concerned with making sure that their child received an excellent secular education. The pictures, by being Jewish in theme, appealed to those who might have worried that Jewish topics were not as important at Yavneh as they were at Chofetz Chaim. More notably, the lack of any mention of Zionism was likely an intentional omission in hopes of recruiting more children from the Reform community, which tended to be less Zionist than other parts of the community.

¹⁶ Recruiting Advertisement, 1954, in Eden Collection

¹⁷ Ibid.

A 1956 document gave advice and instruction for individuals who would call and meet with the parents of Yavneh prospects. This handbook asked recruiters to explain that Hebrew is taught in a "Modern, American way." It again stressed the small class sizes as a benefit to students. Using a different angle than the 1954 advertising brochure, the 1956 recruiting manual advised recruiters to pitch the 3:30 ending time, which gives children plenty of time for afternoon play. This is to be contrasted with the public school-Talmud Torah combination, which left children without free time in the afternoons. The handbook also discussed the cost of the school, emphasizing its value, on an hour-by-hour basis as compared to the Talmud Torah. The possibility of tuition assistance is discussed in this handbook. This tuition assistance came from those who could make full tuition payments, additional donations, and the Jewish Federation of Cincinnati, which gave the school some limited funding in its earliest days.¹⁸

Neither the 1954 advertisement nor the 1956 handbook made any reference to a Zionist program for the school, though such a flavor was certainly present. Lee Shai Wiessbach, a student in the first kindergarten class, remembered that it was clear to the students that some sort of "particular program was going on."¹⁹

In 1953, Wiessbach's mother, Miriam, was hired as the first grade teacher for the expanding school. She would continue as a teacher at Yavneh until 1974.²⁰ The school would continue to expand for the next two years. In 1954, Yavneh, while adding a second grade, brought in a teacher from Israel for the first time. The teacher was Aya Weisman, a woman with whom the Edens had been friendly during their years in Israel.²¹

¹⁸ Guide for calling Yavneh Prospects, 1956, in Eden Collection

¹⁹ Interview with Lee Shai Weissbach, 10/1/01

²⁰ Ibid, see also chapter 3 for the circumstances surrounding Weissbach's departure.

²¹ Interview with Sham Eden, 11/14/01

The expansion of Yavneh came to a temporary halt after the third grade was added for the 1955-56 school year. This pause in expansion was due to the fact the Yavneh had pledged that the school would not go past the third grade in return for an annual funding stipend from the Cincinnati Jewish Federation.²²

Yavneh did have additional support beside those mentioned above. One key supporter came from the Reform Movement and the Hebrew Union College (which was, in general, ambivalent toward the day school movement). Dr. Ezra Spicehandler had lived in and fought for Israel in the 1948 war of independence. Spicehandler sent his daughters to Yavneh beginning in 1953, when he returned to Cincinnati. He, being a part of the center of the Reform movement, had no desire to send his children to Chofetz Chaim, although, according to Spicehandler, a few HUC professors did so.²³

From the Conservative Movement, Rabbi Fishel Goldfeder, who had replaced Rabbi Louis Fineberg in 1951 as the rabbi of Cincinnati's Adath Israel Congregation, was extremely supportive of the school. Goldfeder's support was especially important because of his position in the community. The Talmud Torah was weakened greatly when Goldfeder pulled the congregation's children from it. Goldfeder who, in the words of Spicehandler, was "rah, rah, JTS²⁴," did this because of the Conservative Movement's push toward synagogue religious schools. But, because there was not yet a day school system in the movement, Goldfeder was willing to support Yavneh, and he sent his own children to it, along with several from his congregation.²⁵

²² Interview with Miriam Bernstein, 9/10/01

²³ Interview with Ezra Spicehandler, 10/15/01

²⁴ Jewish Theological Seminary, the Rabbinic school of the conservative movement in New York City

²⁵ Interview with Ezra Spicehandler, 10/15/01, it is important to note that support for Yavneh was focused at Adath Israel in part because of Goldfeder, but also as a result of most of the members of the defunct Yiddish Ethical Society joining Adath Israel, thus making it a natural base for Yavneh support. The Solomon Schechter Schools of the Conservative Movement began in 1957, Schiff, *JDSA*, 62-63

Years of Survival and Growth:

The leaders and founders of Yavneh were eager to have the school go further than just the third grade. They found the ability to do so in a roundabout way. The Jewish Federation cut off funding for Yavneh for the 1957-58 school year. The first priority for Yavneh was to raise the money it needed to survive the next school year. At this very time, support came from a new source: Morris Weintraub.

Weintraub had already been active in the Labor Zionist community. He and his wife, a non-Jew, enrolled their daughter in the Talmud Torah and they sent their son to Yavneh. A resident of Newport, Kentucky, Weintraub was the speaker of the Kentucky State Legislature. He wielded considerable political influence around Northern Kentucky. According to Nachum Eden, when Yavneh supporters were debating about how they would continue operations for the 1957-58 school year, and expand the school to yet another grade without the Federation's funding, it was Weintraub who made the major push to continue.²⁶

Besides rallying the others, Weintraub took two concrete steps at that time to ensure the immediate future of Yavneh. First, he took the initiative in creating the Yavneh Day School Association, which would be a board of directors for the school, primarily controlling budget and fundraising. A formal document creating the association and describing its role was signed on Aug. 20, 1958. The signatories of this document were: Morris Weintraub, Ezra Spicehandler, Sol Richmond, Fishel Goldfeder and Joseph Gootman.²⁷

²⁶ Interview with Nachum Eden, 8/30/01

²⁷ Articles of Incorporation, 8/20/58, located in Yavneh Collection

The association held its first official meeting on October 5, 1958. 49 people were invited and 18 people attended the meeting. All present were named as trustees, and on the nomination of Ezra Spicehandler, Morris Weintraub was elected as the first president of the association. Sol Richmond was named treasurer and Nachum Eden served with Frank Lerman as the head of the publicity committee.²⁸

Before this meeting occurred, Weintraub took another important step for Yavneh. The school needed money to continue operation and to expand to a fourth grade.²⁹ The school also wanted to move its operations to the new Talmud Torah building in Roselawn, on Summit Road. At that time, many of the casinos in Northern Kentucky were owned by Jews. Weintraub used his political connections with these casino owners in order to raise money for Yavneh. He succeeded in raising between five and ten thousand dollars for each school year, enough to keep Yavneh functioning and expanding.³⁰

In 1958-59, the first year that Yavneh operated under the association, Yavneh had 51 students in grades kindergarten to four. This same year also marked the first year in the Roselawn Talmud Torah building. There was no third grade in 1958-59 due to poor enrollment in the second grade the year before.³¹ The kindergarten (with 12 students), first grade (17) and second grade (15) were strong in their numbers, similar to the number

²⁸ Minutes of the Yavneh Day School Association, Board of Directors, 10/5/58

²⁹ Since Yavneh had no more Jewish Welfare board funding, it could expand without any type of reprisal

³⁰ Interview with Nachum Eden, 8/30/01

³¹ Newspaper Article, *Every Friday*, May 31, 1957. This article discusses the difficulty of Yavneh to form a second grade for the next year, highlighting the story of Gerson Ginzberg who's twins were to make up 40% of the second grade class in the coming year. According to both Nachum and Sham Eden, the major reason for low enrollment was that the board had inadvertently forgotten to enroll students for 1956. This caused most of the kindergarten from 1955-56 to go to public schools.

of kindergarteners in Yavneh's first class, indicating a steady enrollment in the lowest grades. The fourth grade, which was a part of Yavneh for the first time, had 9 students.³²

At this same time, Ezra Spicehandler proposed a system that would help the fund-raising efforts. He suggested a multi-level pledge class system that would encourage giving. The top level would be the endowment level of \$1,000. the second level would be \$300 (scholarship), and lower amounts of \$150 (1/2 Scholarship) or \$100 (one hundred club) would receive recognition along with the higher levels.³³

Another key figure in the early days of Yavneh was Dr. Moses Zalesky, who ran the Bureau of Jewish Education in Cincinnati from 1945-1970.³⁴ Zalesky worked as a volunteer to assist Yavneh. He also served as director of the school from 1967-69 without compensation.³⁵ In 1959 Zalesky, administered exams to the 4th grade students on Hebrew and Chumash. In a letter to Rabbi Goldfeder, who was chair of the education committee, Zalesky pointed out that 6 of the 7 students passed the Hebrew portion of the exam, which was the intermediate level of the National Hebrew Achievement Test of the American Association for Jewish Education. On the Chumash portion of the exam (which Zalesky wrote specifically for this purpose), only 4 of the 7 students passed (all 4 girls, none of the boys). The teacher was asked to spend more time on Chumash, and a second exam would be given later.³⁶

³² Minutes of the Yavneh Day School Association, Board of Directors, 10/5/58; Two of the nine fourth graders would join the second grade for the Judaic studies portion of the day.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Sarna and Klein, 162

³⁵ "Yavneh Celebrates: 40 years" program for the 40th anniversary dinner, 1992

³⁶ Letter from Dr. Moses Zalesky to Rabbi Fishel Goldfeder, march, 27 1959, located in Mss. Collection 268, box 4 folder 3, American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati

Yavneh continued its early growth into the 1960's. Funds were procured for the addition of a second floor to the Talmud Torah building which allowed for the addition of a fifth grade in the fall of 1960 and a sixth grade in the fall of 1961.³⁷ The second floor did not cover the entire area of the building, so a playground was added on what remained of the first floor roof. This proved to be a poor idea. In a musical revue/parody of Yavneh's history performed at Yavneh's Annual Dinner in 1967, this playground was referred to as, "dear Yavneh's famous goof." Fences made the project more expensive, it was difficult for the children to play ball up there. The board also hoped to rent the roof for parties. They never did so because of the ugliness of the (necessary) fences.³⁸

The First Merger Attempt:

Yavneh's future at this point in time was not yet secure. Chofetz Chaim, despite its merger with Yeshiva Eitz Chaim in 1959, was facing great difficulty. With Jewish residents leaving Avondale, the school faced possible closure.³⁹ Desperate to save his school, Rabbi Eliezer Silver tried to force a merger with Yavneh. Silver, in a letter dated August 2, 1959, summoned Weintraub, whom he calls "one of the leaders of the so-called Yavneh Day School, Cincinnati," to a "*Din Torah*" (a rabbinical court of arbitration) in front of Orthodox rabbis from outside of Cincinnati. Silver accused Yavneh of trying to destroy the Chofetz Chaim Day School. The *Din Torah*, according to Silver, would determine Yavneh's right to exist as a separate Jewish day school. The letter ends on a conciliatory note with an offer from Silver to accept all Yavneh children into a combined

³⁷ Bernstein

³⁸ A Musical Revue of Yavneh's History, written by the PTA, 1967, located in Eden Collection

³⁹ Sarna and Klein, 161

school. Weintraub was instructed to procure a rabbi as an advocate and to submit the rabbi's name to Silver by August 20.⁴⁰

Weintraub's response was much softer in tone than the letter from Silver. He acknowledged the receipt of the letter, and reminded Silver of a conversation they had on the 13th of August during which Weintraub insisted that the purpose of Yavneh was not at all to harm Chofetz Chaim. The Yavneh Association existed, Weintraub wrote, to protect the children left, "high and dry" after Yavneh lost its Federation funding. Weintraub also reminded Silver that he, Weintraub, was not the sole founder of Yavneh. He would need to consult with the others before taking any action and due to summer vacations he would not be able to comply with the August 20 deadline. Despite the tone of Silver's letter to Weintraub, Weintraub signed his letter, "Your friend, as ever."⁴¹

The attempt by Silver to eliminate Yavneh or force a merger between the two schools, eventually turned into an attempt to negotiate a merger. According to correspondence from Weintraub to Meyer Goldberg (president of Chofetz Chaim) and Jerome Hershon (Yavneh Principal, 1961-67), a committee met on December 4, 1961, to try to work out details of a merger between the two schools. A major sticking point in the negotiations was who would be the director of such a school. Yavneh, apparently satisfied with Hershon's work to this point, wanted to retain him as director. The representatives of Chofetz Chaim also approved of Hershon. They added, however, that any future director must, after board recommendation, be approved by Rabbi Silver or his successor (as appointed by the *Va'ad Hoir*).⁴²

⁴⁰ Letter from Rabbi Eliezer Silver to Morris Weintraub, 8/2/59, located in Eden Collection

⁴¹ Letter, Moses Weintraub to Rabbi Eliezer Silver, 8/19/59, located in Eden Collection

⁴² See the Proposed Merger Conditions in Appendix B

Yavneh's representatives were not favorable to this compromise. Replying on Goldberg's behalf, Chofetz Chaim Principal, Edward Jacobs, replied sternly that if this point were not to be included in the merger plan, then there was no reason to discuss the merger any further. Weintraub instructed Hershon to organize a Yavneh committee meeting to discuss things further, but stated, "It would appear that negotiations will be at an end if both Chofetz Chaim and Yavneh each refuse to recede from their respective positions." The day after the Yavneh Committee meeting Weintraub informed Goldberg that Yavneh would not bend on this issue and it would begin making preparations for the 1962-63 school year on its own.⁴³

As the merger negotiations went on in the fall of 1961, Yavneh experienced a financial crisis. Weintraub, in a letter to many of the founders of Yavneh, informed the recipients that the funds for Yavneh were deplorable. Money had to be borrowed in order to make the October payroll, and the November payroll was coming close to being due. Contributions were less than one quarter of the previous year, and there was one additional grade to fund. Weintraub called a meeting to discuss the situation. To emphasize the dire situation of Yavneh handwritten on the top of the letter, in large print: "Save our School."⁴⁴

The help Yavneh needed came at the same time that negotiations with Chofetz Chaim fell apart. On February 21, 1962, articles were drawn up for the merger of Yavneh with Beth Am and the Talmud Torah. The merged entity would be called, The Cincinnati Community Hebrew Schools (CCHS). Each division of CCHS would have its

⁴³ Letters, Morris Weintraub to Meyer Goldberg, 2/12/62, Morris Weintraub to Jerome Hershon, 2/13/62, and Morris Weintraub to Meyer Goldberg, 2/19/62, located in Mss. Collection 268, box 4 folder 3, American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati

⁴⁴ Letter from Morris Wientraub to committee, 11/20/61

own board of directors and parent association. CCHS would also have its own board and executive committee. The CHHS looked to raise \$10,000 a year for the next 5 years and to raise money through tuition, membership fees, special events and some various other means. Additional funds would come from a request to the Jewish Federation to increase its allocation to the combined schools.

Building an Identity and Philosophy:

Yavneh, on stronger financial ground due to the formation of the CCHS, was now free to concern itself with the development of an educational identity in the 1960's. One tangible sign of this identity was the establishment of a graduation ceremony for the recently added sixth grade. June 5, 1963 was the school's first graduation ceremony. The ceremony, conducted at Roselawn Public School, included remarks from the Jewish Federation, the Bureau of Jewish Education and valedictory speeches by two of the graduates, one in Hebrew and one in English.⁴⁵

Eight students were in the graduating class. This number would remain more or less steady through the 60's going as high as 11 in 1968 and as low as 6 in 1966. The 1968 graduation also shows the link of the students to Jewish history and the Modern State of Israel. As part of the program for the 1968 graduation, there was a symposium on "Decisive Events in Jewish History," led by the students. The events were The Exodus and Ten Commandments, the original Yavneh, the Rebirth of Israel, and the Six Day War (which had been fought 1 year earlier). Additionally, a Yavneh School song was written, printed and distributed at the ceremony. This song (sung in Hebrew with transliteration and English translation provided) heavily emphasized the students' relationship

⁴⁵ Graduation Programs and lists of Graduates 1963-69, located in Eden Collection

with the land of Israel, the original Yavneh and the modern State of Israel, with mention of America as a "cradle of freedom."⁴⁶

During this time period Jerome Hershon, Principal of Yavneh, laid out the educational philosophy of the school. According to Hershon, Jewish education is a "religio-cultural" education. This meant that more than just ideas and facts would be taught to the children, but that an active transmission of a culture and tradition must include teaching about how to be active in Jewish life. The purpose of Yavneh, according to Hershon, was to teach about Judaism, but also to develop in the students a sense of loyalty and commitment to Judaism.⁴⁷

According to this document, Yavneh had 7 essential areas in which it organized the vast body of Jewish knowledge: Jewish community life; Torah, Jewish social studies; Jewish ideas, customs, laws, and institutions (what is generally called religion); Jewish singing and arts; Israel; and Hebrew. The goal of this curriculum was to have every student that graduated Yavneh possess good knowledge of all the above subject areas. In addition to the knowledge in these areas, Yavneh sought to teach these areas in order to form a sense of Jewish consciousness in the students. Answering charges that Jewish day schools kept Jewish children segregated from others in the neighborhood, Hershon said that public schools in Jewish neighborhoods are nearly as segregated as Yavneh, and that permanent friends are rarely made before high school, so there was no long term detriment created by sending children to Yavneh. There was, however, the positive effect of creating a sense of security as the children tried to build their Jewish identity. Yavneh's

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Hershon, Jerome, "Educational Philosophy of the Yavneh Day School," located in Eden Collection; the exact date of this document is unclear, but it is clearly written once a sixth grade had been established and sometime during the tenure of Hershon as principal, 1961-1967.

Jewish environment helped to separate the students from the confusion of the Christian holiday propaganda that saturated public schools and by giving them an attachment to a Jewish set of holidays instead.⁴⁸

In addition to defining itself, Yavneh sought to spread its appeal more widely. Stanley Chyet, a professor at HUC-JIR and Yavneh parent, wrote an editorial in *The American Israelite* defending Yavneh from its critics on the left. Chyet's goal in the article was to dispel the notion that Yavneh was an Orthodox school. He understood that by sending his son to Yavneh he was expressing his liberal Jewish sympathies because, through Yavneh, he was offering his son an opportunity to explore Jewish tradition, language, and literature, without instilling one particular view upon him. Chyet insisted that the only "enclave" of Judaism to which Yavneh is loyal to is that of a positive relationship between America and world Jewry. Chyet considered the school's practice of requiring head coverings for boys and kashrut in the cafeteria "amenities" that helped to make Yavneh accessible to as many Jews as possible. Chyet's final point was that the small class sizes at Yavneh helped his son prepare for the public junior high school in a way superior to that of the public elementary schools.⁴⁹

Conclusion:

By the time of Yavneh's "Bar Mitzvah" celebration in 1965, the school had established itself and its educational philosophy. The school was secure enough in its enrollment that an advertisement in the *Israelite* for the 1965-66 school year stated that only children with, "proper academic backgrounds" would be accepted to the upper grades (3-

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Chyet, Stanley, "Why Yavneh?" *The American Israelite*, 1964 (date unknown)

6). It added that Dr. Zalesky was anticipating a record enrollment.⁵⁰ Additionally, Yavneh began to gain a sense of its own history. A 1966 picture in the *Israelite* carried the title, "Founders of Yavneh will be honored February 13." These founders included Rabbi Goldfeder, Nachum Eden, Joseph Gootman, Morris Weintraub, Sol Richmond, Albert Goldman⁵¹ and others.⁵²

Yavneh was not without its problems in the mid-1960's. There was consistent pressure from the Jewish Federation to merge with Chofetz Chaim. Financial pressures kept teacher's salaries low, inhibiting Yavneh's ability to hire the best teachers. Like many Jewish day schools at this same time, Yavneh was on a pattern of growth that would necessitate a full time principal and other administrative professionals which would add further strain on the budget.⁵³

Yavneh, through its first decade and a half had grown from a kindergarten in a rented room to a full elementary school, well established in the community. Despite the financial difficulties, the school was in its best financial shape ever. Yavneh's future was by no means guaranteed, however. More challenges would face Yavneh in the coming years. More merger attempts with Chofetz Chaim, and difficulty in finding a new location as the school grew laid ahead. Nevertheless, 15 years after its founding, the accomplishments of Yavneh well reflected the visions of its founders. Yavneh had created a place where children were able to explore their Judaism, build their own Jewish identity and, at the same time receive a solid secular education. The challenges of creating a

⁵⁰ *American Israelite*, 4/15/1965

⁵¹ Albert Goldman was instrumental in providing early grass-roots support for Yavneh and served as the first president of the CCHS. According to Sham Eden and Miriam Bernstein, Goldman has more descendants (grandchildren and great grandchildren) that attended or are attending Yavneh than any other single individual.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 1966 (date unknown)

⁵³ Schiff, *JDSA*, 249

school had passed. What lay ahead were the challenges of running and maintaining an educationally thriving, and rapidly growing school.

CHAPTER THREE

Growth and Instability: The late 1960's to the late 1980's

Introduction:

The 1960's were the end point in what Schiff called the "Era of Great Expansion" for Jewish day schools. Writing in the middle of this era in 1966, Schiff correctly predicted that growth in Jewish day schools would continue.¹ However, the rate of growth did slow considerably during the years 1964-1984 from the years preceding 1964. In 1964, just under 60,000 students attended Jewish day schools.² The number more than doubled by 1984, into an estimated 130,000 students in Jewish day schools.³

The reasons behind the growth in Jewish day schools during these two decades are distinct to this particular time period. No longer did Jews understand public schools as the only avenue into the American mainstream and upper-class. Jews saw that the private schools were an equal, or in many cases better way to the top of society for their children. The growth in Jewish day schools in this time period is paralleled by an increase in Jewish enrollment in non-Jewish private schools.⁴

Other factors also contributed to the growth of the Jewish day school movement in this period. One such factor is the increasing acceptability of ethno-centrism in the 1970's and 80's. Parents were no longer as worried about particularism and group identification as parents in the immediate post-war years were. Additionally the Conservative Movement's Solomon Schechter Schools could be found in virtually every large and medium size metropolitan area by the late 1980's.⁵ This system, while focused on only one

¹ Schiff, *JDSA*, 249

² *Ibid.*, 72, from 1942 to 1964 the growth rate was about 600%, loc. cit.

³ Schiff, "Jewish Education in the United States, Three Comments," Himmelfarb, Harold S. and DellaPergola, Sergio, eds., *Jewish Education Worldwide: Cross Cultural Perspectives*, University Press of America, Lanham, MD, 1989, 123-4

⁴ Zeldin, Michael Z., "Jewish Education in the United States: Three Comments," Himmelfarb and DellaPergola, 129-30

⁵ Schiff, *Contemporary Jewish Education*, Rossel Books, Dallas, TX, 1988, p 280-1

movement, helped to legitimize Jewish day school education as a valid route of education for all Jewish children.

Yavneh, too, would benefit from this period of growth, although instability in location, followed by instability in the administration would hamper Yavneh's ability to exceed the general trend. By the late 1960's, Yavneh was solidly established as a part of the Cincinnati Jewish community even if the school was still on somewhat unstable financial grounds. At this time Morris Weintraub, a man who had been serving as president of Yavneh since the middle 1950's, retired from his life's work in politics and, simultaneously, resigned his position as the president of Yavneh. The school was also in the midst of renewed merger talks with Cincinnati Hebrew Day (formerly Chofetz Chaim). During these years, Yavneh experienced a turbulent period of time that would see three different educational directors from 1967-1972.

Merger Talks:

The merger talks between Cincinnati Hebrew Day and Yavneh were spurred on by the Jewish Federation's insistence that combining the two schools would save a significant amount of money.⁶ Rabbis David Indich of Golf Manor Synagogue and Fishel Goldfeder of Adath Israel Synagogue put together a proposal that they hoped would be acceptable to the representatives of both schools. In this attempt at a merger many of the same issues that scuttled previous merger talks arose. *Ivrit b'ivrit* was still considered to be crucial from the Yavneh side (which included the Talmud Torah and the Beth Am Nursery School as the other parts of the CCHS). The proposed agreement made it clear that the director of a combined school need not be approved by any Orthodox body – an-

⁶ Ehgerman, Harvey, Past President's statement in 40th Anniversary Dinner program, in Yavneh Collection

other potential stumbling block in the merger talks. In the introduction of the proposed merger plan, the rabbis stated that each school must come closer to a central position if such a merger were to be achieved.⁷

Significant opposition to this merger did exist. Some within the Yavneh and CCHS community feared that a combined school, in order to be acceptable to the Orthodox, would have to enforce Orthodox ritual practice and ideology. Dr. Stanley Chyet, in a written statement asserts the centrality of pluralism to Yavneh's goals as a school:

Yavneh's broad cultural emphasis reflects a positive orientation to the Jewish religion at the same time that it excludes identification with or commitment to any specific institutional expression of Jewish religiosity. The beliefs and practices of the Jewish religion are taught, but not regarded as matters for indoctrination. Religious belief, the measure of traditionalism, the standard of ceremonial observance – these matters are left to the individual home and synagogue. Students are exposed to what has been historically the course of Jewish religious development, but they are not expected to conform to any particular religious norm or set of norms.⁸

Martin Grad, president of the CCHS at the time these of merger discussions took place, was very much against the merger. He, along with his wife Shoshana (Shoshie) Grad (who had been teaching at Yavneh since 1955), feared that the merger of the two schools would be a "sub-merger" of Yavneh. Grad called this time a horrible period when it looked like Yavneh may be lost. He, with others who shared his perspective, saw no way in which Yavneh could maintain the principles reflected in Chyet's statement while being merged with a particular Orthodox school.⁹

⁷ "Proposal of Rabbis Indich and Goldfeder," from the late 1960's (exact date unclear), located in Eden Collection

⁸ Chyet, Stanley, "Statement on the Yavneh Day School by the CCHS representatives on the Jewish Federation sub-committee on consolidation of the day schools," July 16, 1968

⁹ Interview with Martin and Shoshana Grad, 1/1/02

Ultimately this merger attempt would prove unsuccessful. In 1970, the merger committee of Yavneh issued a statement acknowledging that the ideological differences between the two schools were insurmountable. The original statement, written by Chyet, blamed the breakdown of the merger on Cincinnati Hebrew Day's unwillingness to agree to a two-track Jewish studies program.¹⁰ After considerable discussion, during which Rabbi Goldfeder tried to convince the board that talks should continue, the board re-wrote the statement to take what Dr. David Weisberg¹¹ called a more "public-relations minded" approach. The board eventually passed a resolution that blamed the breakdown simply on "profound ideological differences" between the two schools. The possibility of cooperation on other areas short of a merger, or even an eventual full merger remained in place.¹²

The merger talks died down at this point, but they would once more come up in a very serious way. In December of 1972, George Lebovitz, who had been hired as the Director of the School the previous summer was given permission by the board to resume merger talks with Cincinnati Hebrew Day.¹³ Lebovitz himself appeared to be a proponent of such a merger at this time. He saw the advantages of slightly larger classes (eliminating classes of only 6 or 7 children) as increasing social contact for the children. He also stressed the importance of the flexibility in curriculum and teaching style that one would find in a bigger school. A single, consolidated library, the addition of an afternoon kindergarten, and better utilization of teachers were also cited as advantages, financial

¹⁰ The two-track system would teach some basic Jewish concepts to all children together in the primary grades, and then allow the parents (around 3rd or 4th grade) to choose whether they wanted their child on a more orthodox oriented track, which would stress Talmud and other traditional sources, or on a more modern oriented track which would stress Hebrew language and literature. Both types of subjects would be taught on both tracks but each would emphasize one area or the other.

¹¹ Eggherman's eventual successor in the Presidency of the Yavneh board

¹² Minutes of Board Meeting, 3/11/1970

¹³ Minutes of Board Meeting, 12/18/1972

and otherwise, of the proposed merger. Lebovitz also proposed a dual track system of Jewish education similar to the type that Chyet had suggested were the cause of the breakdown of talks in 1970.¹⁴

These particular merger talks went much further than any previous talks had. As the talks with Hebrew Day continued, the Yavneh board looked for ways to find the ever-elusive middle ground between the two schools. One possibility was to affiliate the school with Yeshiva university, since a two-track school, as was proposed in the merger talks, would have not been allowed to stay under the more strict Orthodox *Torah u'Mesorah* organization for day schools.¹⁵

This merger attempt also found more general support in the community. A limited and conditional merger was approved by the general membership of Yavneh at the annual meeting in June of 1973. The recently established 7th and 8th grade program at Yavneh¹⁶ would be the subject of the experimental merger plan. These grades' secular studies were combined with that of Cincinnati Hebrew DaY on a 1-year trial basis. The board ratified this limited merger during their next meeting with more complete merger talks to continue.¹⁷

By the fall of 1973 merger talks were moving forward. The name of the new school would be the "Hebrew Academy of Cincinnati." Some people still expressed fear that the school would be seen as an Orthodox institution and the Yavneh concept of non-

¹⁴ Lebovitz

¹⁵ Minutes of Board Meeting, 2/26/1973

¹⁶ More on the development of this below

¹⁷ Minutes of Annual Meeting, 6/12/1973, Minutes of Board Meeting, 6/13/1973

denominationalism would be lost. Despite these concerns, on September 9, 1973 the board approved a motion to fully merge the two schools.¹⁸

Unfortunately for those who supported the merger, the talks completely collapsed by the end of March in 1974. Dr. David Weisberg, who had been a strong proponent of the merger, remembers that this final collapse of the talks was due to the same difficulties that had plagued the earlier attempts at a merger. People from the Yavneh side were adamant that the new school allow for the founding principles of Yavneh to continue, while those on the Hebrew Day side were equally adamant about the school being based in Orthodoxy.¹⁹ As in the two previous merger attempts, both sides found that their basic principles conflicted with each other's in a way that made a merger impossible. Cincinnati Hebrew Day was committed to teaching and advancing an Orthodox Jewish way of life, while Yavneh was completely opposed to advancing any one particular view of Judaism.

Despite the breakdown of the merger discussions in March of 1974, the 7th and 8th grade combined secular studies program did continue through the entire 1973-74 school year. The experiment met with marginal success. Both grades of both schools were together for the secular studies portion of the day and this did lead to the increased social contact that Lebovitz had advocated. In a report to the board Lebovitz said that continuing this program into the next year would mean splitting between the 7th and 8th grade. According to Lebovitz, this eliminated the benefit of increased social contact. Additionally, the monetary savings anticipated by such an arrangement had not materialized. Lebovitz discussed the issue with the parents of Yavneh's 7th and 8th graders. The

¹⁸ Minutes of Board Meeting, 9/9/1973

¹⁹ Interview with Dr. David Weisberg

parents expressed the additional concern that their children did not feel a full part of the Yavneh community.

Even though several parents were willing to continue sending their child to a combined program if such a program existed, the majority of the parents indicated that they would be just as happy if it were ended. Lebovitz also was concerned that the combined junior high caused difficulties in the planning of all school programs for the rest of Yavneh. Lebovitz recommended that the program not be continued and the board accepted his recommendation.²⁰

The dissolution of the combined 7th and 8th grade program marked the end of any merger talks between the two schools, although there would continue to be periodic cooperation between the schools in certain areas of agreement. The Federation no longer pushed for such a merger, and its special committee on the merger admitted that there would be irreconcilable ideological differences between the two schools, "now and forever."²¹

A Period of Change and Growth:

Within the time frame of the seemingly perpetual merger discussions, Yavneh proceeded to grow and to continue the education of the children much in the way that Jerome Hershon had laid out earlier. This occurred despite a rapid succession of educational directors at the end of the 60's and early 70's. After the retirement of Jerome Hershon in 1967, Moses Zalesky, director of The Bureau of Jewish education in Cincinnati, took on the additional duties of running Yavneh without accepting additional compensa-

²⁰ Lebovitz, George, "Report on the Combined Junior High," 3/26/1974

²¹ Bernstein, Miriam, from the 40th Anniversary Dinner Program a summary of the Presidency of Dr. Marcus Wigser, extracted from Board Minutes

tion as Yavneh was not in a financial position to afford to pay someone at that time.²² Emanuel Applebaum was hired as principal for the 1969-70 school year. Applebaum would oversee the expansion of the school into a 7th and 8th grade. Applebaum, however, resigned at the end of the 1971-72 school year to take a position elsewhere.²³ George Lebovitz would replace him and mark an age of stability for Yavneh (in terms of professional leadership). He remained at the school until the spring of 1981.

In 1970, Yavneh had 133 students spread somewhat evenly between the grades (although the student population was weighted toward the lower grades and pre-school). The fact that the school building was quickly becoming too small did not deter the board from trying to expand the length of a Yavneh education by adding a junior high program. This may have been spurred in part by Yavneh's original goals of being as large of a school as possible, but also by two other factors that were related. First, the pre-school was getting smaller, and this meant less income for the school. The reasons for the shrinking pre-school enrollment were thought to be the death of the very popular pre-school teacher, Billie Phillips, and a worsening financial situation in general. Also, the school, as it frequently had been before, was very much in need of extra funds. It was thought that a seventh grade, although it would have expenses, could help to make up for some other shortfalls in the budget. In theory this would be achieved because it was thought to be easier to raise funds with a new program beginning.²⁴

The 7th grade was set to start in the fall of 1971. It had 8 students registered as of May 11, 1971 and during the summer more students were sought out from other area

²² 40th anniversary Dinner program

²³ Minutes of Board Meeting, 1/19/1972

²⁴ Minutes of Board Meetings, 12/9/1970 and 2/24/1971

schools.²⁵ This effort was unsuccessful. As the 1971-72 school year began only six students remained registered for the 7th grade. Instead of helping the budget, this new grade became a strain on the budget. 6 students were not enough to make the 7th grade self-sufficient. The 7th grade did continue however, and an 8th grade was added the following school year.²⁶ Five students would graduate from the Yavneh 8th grade in 1973. Despite the small numbers of students enrolled in the junior high, the program would continue, and serve as a testing ground for the proposed merger with Cincinnati Hebrew Day as discussed above. In 1978 the program reached a high point: 12 students graduated.²⁷

Financial Difficulties:

The school's financial troubles continued through much of the 1970's. A rising budget deficit increased pressure on the school to raise additional funds. Budgetary reports show a deficit of \$407 at the end of the 1971-72 school year. Most of this deficit came from the 7th grade program. A very minor portion of it came from the evening high school program that CCHS had passed on to Yavneh. On the positive side of the ledger, Yavneh's pre-school to 6th grades were running at a surplus.²⁸ By 1977, however, the deficit had grown to \$74,000.²⁹

Several avenues of funding outside of tuition and solicited donations helped Yavneh earn just enough money to be able to continue its operations. The first was the Yavneh Association that Nachum Eden proposed in 1971. This association made it possible

²⁵ Minutes of Board Meetings 5/11/1971 and 4/24/1971

²⁶ Minutes of Board Meeting 12/15/1971

²⁷ Lists of graduating students 1970-1979, located in Eden Collection

²⁸ 1972 fiscal year financial statements, Walter Novikoff C.P.A.; the high school program had been a part of the Talmud Torah, but in the late 60's Yavneh took over the operations. According to the Board Minutes of 2/19/1972 the high school had only 2 students in it (since it had previously been restricted to those with a high Hebrew level) and was officially ended at the same board meeting.

²⁹ 1977 fiscal year statement, Walter Novikoff & Co. C.P.As.

for anyone in the community, not just parents, to support Yavneh for a minimum \$50 annual donation.³⁰ In the 1971-72 school year, this fund earned slightly over \$3,500. By 1977, however, this source of income was only earning slightly over \$1,600.³¹

Another institution that helped Yavneh make ends meet was the school's Parent-Teacher Association (PTA), which had been supportive of Yavneh from its earliest years. Through their annual donor dinners and other fundraising projects (which included sales of all types) the PTA was able to contribute several thousand dollars each year to Yavneh. The PTA also launched a gift shop. Initially organized by Shoshie Grad and Fradie Kramer, the gift shop became a source of Israeli art for sale in Cincinnati. Sham Eden, who made frequent trips to Israel, assisted by finding many of the products that the gift shop offered for sale. The gift shop advertised as "Cincinnati's ONLY Israel gift shop." By participating in the Cincinnati Gift Show in November of 1971 the visibility of the gift shop increased greatly.³² While the effect of the PTA fundraising efforts was not enormous, the group's major event, the Annual Donor Dinner, raised \$5,000 in 1971. In that same year, the gift shop grossed \$4,300.³³ These seemingly small amounts of money was significant to a budget that brought in \$117,544 at the end of the 1971-72 school year.³⁴

The Jewish Federation also helped Yavneh have enough money to keep operations intact. The financial statement of June 30, 1972 shows an allotment of \$41,150 from the Federation. Each year the President and Principal of Yavneh would prepare a

³⁰ Minutes of Board Meeting 2/24/1971

³¹ Financial statements, 1972 and 1977, Walter Novikoff & Co. C.P.As.

³² Various unidentified newspaper clippings located in Eden Collection. The Cincinnati Gift Show was an event in downtown Cincinnati at which the various ethnic groups in the city would display and sell cultural art.

³³ Minutes of Board Meetings 2/24/1971 and 12/15/1971

³⁴ Financial Report June 30, 1972, Walter Novikoff C.P.A.

statement explaining the worthiness of Yavneh to receive the allotment, a full budgetary disclosure and the request for the next year's allotment.³⁵ The requested amount often exceeded the actual amount that the Federation gave to Yavneh. For the 1973-74 school year Yavneh requested \$60,000, but received only \$45,150. The following year, 1974-75 Yavneh requested just under \$60,000 from the Federation, but received \$50,370, with a special additional allocation of just under \$4,000.³⁶

Location, Location, Location:

Complementing the financial difficulties of Yavneh was the problem of the building. Built in the early 1950's and expanded several times during the ensuing years, the Talmud Torah building was just too small for Yavneh by the early 1970's. As early as December of 1970 some of the problems and deficiencies were pointed out by teachers and board members. The auditorium was too crowded at assemblies, and classes of more than 15 students were too large for the teachers to handle effectively in the classrooms. Plans to add a 7th grade in the 1971-72 school year and an 8th grade for 1972-73, compounded the space problems. A review of the building was carried out by the Jewish Federation in late 1970. This report showed some minor structural deficiencies in the building. At this time the possibility of a new building was brought up, and the board agreed to develop a 3-year plan for obtaining a new building.³⁷

By the middle of the winter in 1972, it was apparent that Yavneh had to move or expand its current facility in order to handle the increasing number of students and

³⁵ This process continues today.

³⁶ Financial Report June 30, 1974 and 1975, and "Yavneh Day School Presentation to the Jewish Federation," 1974

³⁷ Minutes of Board Meeting 12/9/70

grades. At this time some of the local synagogues were building large new buildings in the Amberly area at Ridge Road and Galbraith. Both Adath Israel and Rockdale Temple would have a large enough school building to house Yavneh. Each wanted a similar amount of rent and the location was almost identical. Adath had some added advantages, such as a larger group of members who had children in Yavneh, a language lab, and space for offices. In both cases Yavneh would share the space with the synagogue's religious school.

A concern was voiced that the Roselawn community would see Yavneh's prospective move as to Amberly as an abandonment of Roselawn. Two ideas were advanced to help with this difficulty. The first was to have the parents of students vote on the move, as a sign that the full Yavneh community was behind the move and the second was to send a letter to the residents of Roselawn explaining the need for the move. The board rejected the idea of parent voting, but no other immediate action took place. The board voted to approve the move "in principle," to notify the parents, and to empower the executive committee to recommend a site to the board.³⁸

On March 15, 1972, the Board of Yavneh passed a motion to move the school and all of its operations to the new Rockdale Temple building contingent on reaching a final agreement with Rockdale. The Federation took no real position on the move although individuals within the Federation seemed open to the idea. This was important because of the partial ownership of the Summit Road building by the Federation. The move to Rockdale was not to be, however. The final negotiated rental rate from Rockdale was too high for Yavneh, and, according to Lynn Cohen (chair of the Yavneh Executive Committee), would have meant final financial ruin for the school. The board decided to make

³⁸ Minutes of Board Meeting 2/19/72

interior changes to the Summit road building, raise tuition to meet these costs, and to try to make due until an acceptable arrangement came along.³⁹

With the exception of some limited discussion on the possibility of taking up residence at the eventual new Isaac M. Wise Center of the Wise Temple (on the same block of Ridge Road as Rockdale),⁴⁰ there was little discussion of a move through all of 1973 as the ongoing merger negotiations with Cincinnati Hebrew Day put any type of facility decision on hold.

The issue of space and location resurfaced in the spring of 1974. The upcoming school year would begin with an impressively larger enrollment of 189 students. There was talk of limiting enrollment and using a waiting list. Lebovitz argued strenuously against this proposal, saying that it is counter to Jewish tradition to limit enrollment and deny admission to a student for reasons other than health and safety. If the number of students made it necessary to split the 1st and 2nd grades into two sections, the board decided that that is what would be done.⁴¹

The 1st and 2nd grade did need to be split into two sections, and the 5th grade would have 22 children. This required some shifting of class space as the 1974-75 school year began. This shifting was apparently not the best method for organizing the school as there was not enough space to accommodate a secular studies classroom and a Jewish studies classroom for each grade. By the second semester a new system was implemented in which the students remained where they were and the teachers moved. Despite

³⁹ Letter from Lynn Cohen, Chair of Executive Committee to Parents of Yavneh Students, June 28, 1972; Minutes of Board Meetings, 2/19/1972, 3/15/1972, 4/26/1972, and 6/22/1972

⁴⁰ Minutes from Board Meetings, 11/27/1972 and 12/27/1972

⁴¹ Minutes from Board Meeting 4/25/1974

the necessity for the teachers to share shelf and desk space and the lack a lunchroom, the revised arrangement was much preferred by the teachers.⁴²

By the end of the 1974-75 school year, it was obvious to the board that the schools current facility was completely inadequate unless massive reconstruction took place. The possibility and plausibility of adding on to the existing building was seriously considered. A three-story addition in the front was one idea that was under consideration with the purchase of the adjoining property behind the school so that the school could possibly expand in that direction, too.⁴³

The solution that was eventually agreed upon, however, was that the school would move. Possible options included Rockdale and Wise (which was scheduled for completion in December of 1975). Rabbi Indich of Golf Manor offered his building on an at-cost basis as a temporary solution. The leading candidate for a new site was Adath Israel. Representatives of Yavneh contacted Adath Israel in October of 1974.⁴⁴ Despite the early start to the school's search process, as of early April of 1975, there was no agreement reached with any congregation. A letter to the teachers from the president, Marcus Wigser, informed them that their contracts would have to be delayed because of the uncertainty of the situation for the next year.⁴⁵

Shortly thereafter an agreement was reached. Four days after Wigser sent his letter to the teachers, he informed the board that both Rockdale and Adath Israel had invited Yavneh to become a tenant.⁴⁶ Both options were considered and ultimately a deal with

⁴² Minutes from Board Meetings, 9/24/1974 and 1/28/1975, the teacher satisfaction was confirmed by Ophra Weisberg.

⁴³ Minutes from Board Meeting 9/24/1974

⁴⁴ Minutes from Board Meetings 10/22/1974 and 3/18/1975

⁴⁵ Letter from Dr. Marcus Wigser to the Teachers of Yavneh, 4/11/1975

⁴⁶ Letter from Dr. Marcus Wigser to Yavneh Board, 4/15/1975

Adath Israel was completed. On June 11, 1975 the board approved the move of all of Yavneh's operations to Adath Israel in Amberly. The old building was leased to the City of Cincinnati School Board for one year until zoning problems that complicated the sale of the building could be resolved.⁴⁷ The Summit Road building would eventually come into the hands of the Chabad Chasidic movement in Cincinnati.

The decision to move received great support from the Federation. Both Adath Israel Synagogue and Yavneh were also enthusiastic about the move. Adath Israel agreed to combine it's pre-school with Yavneh, the new school was called *Gan Yehudah* (Jewish Kindergarten). The whole agreement was a true partnership between Yavneh and Adath Israel as Yavneh was charged only for the additional expenses that Adath Israel faced due to Yavneh's presence. Adath Israel understood its role as providing a community service and did not seek to financially profit from the arrangement. For its part, Yavneh was thrilled to finally have the room to accommodate its growth of the past few years.⁴⁸

It became quickly apparent that the sharing agreement between Yavneh and Adath Israel was a temporary one at best. Despite Adath Israel's openness to Yavneh, the sharing of facilities, furniture, blackboards and bulletin boards with the Adath Israel afternoon and Sunday school was difficult. According to Ophra Weisberg, not all of the teachers in Adath Israel's supplementary school were willing to share desk and room space with Yavneh.⁴⁹ Before too long the search began for a new facility that would be a permanent home for Yavneh. George Lebovitz and Nachum Eden would lead the search.⁵⁰

⁴⁷ Minutes from Special Board Meeting, 6/11/1975

⁴⁸ "Yavneh-Adath Israel Pact Signed," American Israelite, 5/3/1975

⁴⁹ Interview with Ophra Weisberg

⁵⁰ Bernstein, "History of Yavneh" in the 39th Anniversary Dinner program

Nachum Eden recalled the events that led to the purchase of a building for Yavneh.⁵¹ George Lebovitz was informed that the Indian Hills School District was planning on selling their school on Montgomery Road. There would be an auction in the spring to determine the buyer. Yavneh only had a few thousand dollars with which to buy the building. At the auction the bids were very low, and in line with what Yavneh could afford to pay. The Indian Hills School Board, however, did not find the \$1,800 high bid to be acceptable and called the auction to intermission.

During the intermission a group of residents who lived near the building and were adamantly opposed to seeing a business go into the old school building, approached Eden and Lebovitz wanting to know if they represented a business. When they found out that Lebovitz and Eden represented Yavneh, they offered their support to Yavneh for it to purchase the building. Although the support from this group involved no financial help, it was an important indication that Yavneh would be welcomed in the new community. Failing to find anyone who could meet their minimum price, the Indian Hills School Board halted the auction for that day.

The re-scheduling of the auction turned out to be a fortunate occurrence for Yavneh. During the time between the two auctions, Eden and Lebovitz carried out a fundraising campaign to help start an endowment in order to purchase the building and fund the needed renovations. The most important fundraising was done by a single phone call. A few years earlier Sol Richmond, one of Yavneh's founders, had made *Aliyah* to Israel. Since Richmond had no children, he had willed his entire estate to Yavneh. Eden called Richmond in Israel and explained the situation, asking if Richmond could give some of

⁵¹ Nachum Eden's major role in the purchase of the new building was confirmed several others interviewed.

his money to Yavneh while he was still alive. Richmond agreed and made a donation in the amount of \$165,000.

With the money firmly in hand, at the second auction Yavneh bought the Indian Hill school building for \$33,500. The rest of the fundraising and Richmond donation was put into an endowment fund to try to secure Yavneh's financial future. Eden recalls also that some of that money was also needed to complete repairs and renovations on the building that had sat empty for almost two years.⁵²

The new building represented a major step for both Yavneh and the Jewish community of Cincinnati. For Yavneh, the new building was the most spacious and well equipped building the school had ever occupied. The school had a full gym, a good size ball field, a fully equipped science lab and, in a separate building, a kitchen and a cafeteria. The Jewish Federation also contributed to the building fund, which would underwrite the repairs that were needed. Additionally, the new building was the first building for Jewish purposes in the North-East Cincinnati area.⁵³ Prior to this move, Yavneh had followed the moves of other organizations. It followed the Talmud Torah from Avondale to Roselawn, and then followed Adath Israel and the Reform congregations into Amberly. Yavneh, by opening itself up to other organizations in the evening, was in position to become a Jewish presence in a part of the city that would soon attract Jews in larger numbers.

Alan Wolf, president of Yavneh from 1979-82 recalled that the building was definitely in need of repairs and painting before the 1978-79 school year could commence at

⁵² Interview with Nachum Eden 8/30/2001

⁵³ "Yavneh Day School Acquires New Home at 8401 Montgomery Road," American Israelite, 5/25/1978

the new site. Wolf also noted that major work would need to be done on the boiler room and the roof, along with electrical work in the lunchroom.⁵⁴

The school was ready for the *Mezzuah* dedication ceremony on June 25th of 1978. The ceremony was in honor of Sol Richmond, who had come back to visit Cincinnati for the ceremony. Shofars were given to the Jewish Federation for their support, and the students of Yavneh made Richmond an album of letters they wrote to him and named him Grandfather of all Yavneh students. The full school building was also named in honor of Richmond who stated that, "Yavneh was the best investment I ever made."⁵⁵

The formal dedication of the building took place on September 4, 1978. Shofars were blown as part of the ceremony of transferring the Torah Scrolls into the building and U.S. Representative Bill Gradison presented the school with a flag that had flown over the Capital building in Washington, D.C. Several areas of the building were named for individuals who had made contributions of time and money to Yavneh over the years: The Joseph and Batya Gootman Library, the Sue and Albert Goldman Recreation Hall (he had been a president of the CCHS and a founder of Yavneh) and the annex building was named for Gruna and Irv Shapiro, whose estate had made a considerable contribution to the new endowment fund.⁵⁶

Running the School:

Along with everything else going on for Yavneh in the 1970's, the educational program of the school continued to progress. George Lebovitz became director and Principal of the school for the 1972-73 school year. Lebovitz came in with some new ideas to

⁵⁴ Interview with Alan Wolf, 11/5/01

⁵⁵ Untitled article in American Israelite, 7/6/1975

⁵⁶ Program for the dedication ceremony of the Sol Richmond Building, 9/4/01

change the school and to update the curriculum. He developed a five-part curriculum for Jewish studies while continuing with the Ohio State Board of Education curriculum for general studies. Lebovitz's five-part curriculum for Jewish studies included:

- A. Bible Study – Emphasizing values and moral principles
- B. Jewish History – the full scope of history
- C. Jewish Religion – including teaching about God, social justice values, holidays, daily Jewish life and ritual.
- D. Jewish Literature – Rabbinic to contemporary
- E. Hebrew Language – effective communication skills and the ability to read and learn about all of the above categories in the Hebrew language⁵⁷

According to Shoshie Grad, who had been teaching at Yavneh since 1955, not all teachers welcomed the changes that Lebovitz brought to Yavneh. Lebovitz's plan did not include specific mention of the State of Israel and seemed to ignore the idea of *Ivrit b'ivrit*. Due to the fact that Grad felt Lebovitz was instituting unnecessary changes, she resigned from Yavneh in the spring of 1974. According to Grad's recollection, Miriam Weissbach, who had been teaching at Yavneh since the 1953-54 school year, also left at about the same time.⁵⁸

At about the same time, the board decided to adopt by-laws to assist in the running of the school and for making sure that the educational goals of the school remained constant. Ernest Elovic, member of the board, wrote the first draft of the by-laws and the

⁵⁷ Document briefly outlining Jewish Studies Curriculum, written by Lebovitz in 1972 or 1973, located in Yavneh Collection

⁵⁸ Interview with Martin and Shoshana Grad, 1/1/02; The timing of the resignation is verified by the minutes the Board Meeting of 4/25/1974. At this meeting the Board passed a resolution to try to find reconciliation with Grad. None was found. Lee Shai Weissbach, son of Miriam Weissbach also recalls his mother leaving the school around this time, but did not remember why.

board ratified a revised version on March 26, 1973. In terms of the educational philosophies of the school, *Ivrit b'Ivrit* was declared as the policy of the school Education although the conditional, "whenever possible" was appended to this statement. The principal goal of the school was similar to what the founders had envisioned: Yavneh would, "establish, maintain and operate a modern progressive day school, combining Jewish-religious instruction with a general studies program, to serve the needs of the Jewish community of Cincinnati at large..."⁵⁹

The by-laws also clarified the leadership structure of the school. It mandated the establishment of a board of trustees comprised of 24 people, no more than 12 of whom may be parents of students enrolled at the time of appointment. Each member of the board must also serve on one standing committee. The position of Principal was firmly established. The school's principal would function as an administrator and educational designer for the school. Additionally, the Principal was responsible for hiring all staff members and for the oversight of the physical plant.⁶⁰

With the position of principal solidified through the by-laws, Lebovitz was able to administrate the school effectively. While finances were a constant problem, Lebovitz was able to effectively administer teacher training, student discipline and innovations into the curriculum. One of the major changes that Lebovitz made in the school was the implementation of a non-graded Hebrew program. This program was started in the 1973-74 school year and continued at least through Lebovitz's time as principal. The 3rd and 4th grades were put together for the Jewish studies portion of the day and then divided by Hebrew ability without regard for the grade. The same was done for the 5th to 8th grades.

⁵⁹ By Laws of Yavneh Day School Inc.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

A major advantage to the program was that instead of trying to break up one grade of 15-20 students into groups, a larger pool of children made it possible to direct the students into groups of similar Hebraic levels. This programmatic change allowed for the students to fit into a class with others of their same Hebrew level, regardless of grade.⁶¹

In the new building, funding was once again a major problem as the endowment was quickly spent to cover budgetary shortfalls. Even with the revenue from tuition, donations, the Federation and the PTA, Yavneh was still not making ends meet. The major solution adopted was the creation of a bingo game to serve as a constant fund raising vehicle for the school. Two volunteers stepped up to run the game at the prompting of Lawrence Warm, President of Yavneh 1976-79. The first was Hy Ullner, a grandparent of Yavneh students who had some experience in the legalities and practicalities of running a successful bingo game. The second was Barbara Rabkin. Rabkin had recently enrolled her oldest son in the Yavneh pre-school. Ullner and Rabkin were willing to do what it took to help this fundraising effort. Yavneh rented an old bingo hall in Clifton and began running a weekly game.⁶²

Slowly the bingo revenues became a larger part of the Yavneh operating budget. While the budget totals and figures do not make it clear exactly how much the bingo was bringing in, by 1982 the total was large enough that a small group of Yavneh parents put together the money to buy a bingo hall in Norwood and lease it back to the school. This was done (instead of having the school buy the hall outright) because Ohio State law pro-

⁶¹ Minutes of Board Meeting 6/20/1974

⁶² 40th Anniversary Dinner Program, comments of Lawrence Warm, and Interview with Barbara Rabkin

hibited a building owner from running bingo game on its own property, but a tenant was permitted to do so.⁶³

One of the difficulties of running the bingo game successfully was getting parents to volunteer to run the games because of the time commitment it took and the difficult working conditions (volunteers would be standing up in a smoky room for most of the bingo session). Board minutes from the early 1980's show that this is a consistent problem. After the new building was obtained and the game was moved, bingo became a mandatory duty for parents of Yavneh students. Since it was illegal to pay parents to volunteer, Yavneh set up a system of charging a \$500 bingo fee along with tuition. The more a parent worked, the more of the bingo fee the family would have refunded. The fee was only applied to the oldest child at the school so that no family had to work more than any other. To implement this program Yavneh needed a special dispensation from the Attorney General's office of the State of Ohio to be exempt from laws against paying people to run the game. In addition, each parent was also responsible for organizing the bingo volunteers at least 1 time during the year. Games were played twice a week.⁶⁴

Extra Curricular Activities:

One of the major advantages of the new building was the chance to increase the amount of extra-curricular activities the Yavneh offered. Ophra Weisberg recalled that when Yavneh was still in the Talmud Torah building there were no after school or extra-curricular activities with the exception of activities offered at the Jewish Community Center (to which many students would walk after school). But these activities were never

⁶³ Ibid., history of Yavneh in the program

⁶⁴ Questions and Answers on the Bingo Program, located in Yavneh Collection

an official part of Yavneh in any way. Later, when Yavneh moved to Adath Israel Synagogue, there were still no extra-curricular activities or after school programs. As soon as Yavneh students would leave school for the day, the Adath Israel Hebrew school students would arrive for their classes.⁶⁵

Once Yavneh became settled in its own building, however, after school activities became a possibility. A school newsletter called, "*Ram Kol*" (a loud voice), first distributed in the spring of 1980 described some of the activities in which students were participating. 4th to 6th grade boys had the option of participating in a basketball league that would play other private schools. All students had the opportunity to participate in a wide variety of after school enrichment programs that covered everything from music, to recreational play, to academic enrichment activities.⁶⁶

The 1980's – Period of Uncertainty:

As turbulent as the 1970's were for Yavneh in terms of location and merger possibilities, the 1980's turned out to be a turbulent time for the leadership of Yavneh. In 1981 George Lebovitz left his position. A succession of principals followed him. Rabbi Jacob Bluground, an orthodox Rabbi ordained in Sfat,⁶⁷ served for only 1 year before being fired. Bluground attempted to make massive changes in the school's curriculum and alienated many of the teachers almost immediately upon his arrival. His firing led

⁶⁵ Interview with Ophra Weisberg, confirmed by Nachum and Sham Eden

⁶⁶ "*Ram Kol*" spring 1980

⁶⁷ "Yavneh Day School Names New Director," American Israelite, 1981

Bluground to sue the school for unlawful termination. Allegations were exchanged and ultimately Bluground dropped his lawsuit within the next year.⁶⁸

Following Bluground, Ray Solomon was promoted to Principal. Solomon had been a science teacher for many years in the Cincinnati Public schools and had served as director of Camp Livingston (owned by the Cincinnati Jewish community Center) and the Union Camp Institute (now Goldman Union Camp Institute). In 1979 he retired from the public schools and took a job as Assistant Principal under Lebovitz and then Bluground.⁶⁹ Solomon would serve alone in his position for the first two years and then Harris Goldstein came on as co-Principal in 1984. For the 1985-6 school year Solomon voluntarily stepped down to Associate Principal as he prepared for his final retirement in November of 1986.

Harris Goldstein and Ray Solomon, would oversee a period of 20% growth in the enrollment of Yavneh, although the Junior High Program would end after the 1983 graduation due to lack of students.⁷⁰ During this time, space once again became a problem. There was a need to renovate the kitchen and there was no space at all for storage. In the fall of 1985 Yavneh added on several classrooms and split some grades into additional sections in order to keep class size down.⁷¹ By the fall of 1986, Yavneh would experience the largest enrollment to date. 268 had enrolled as of August 20th and there were still several applications pending. This enrollment would exceed the years in which the junior high program was active. This large enrollment marked a recovery from lower

⁶⁸ These events were recalled by Nachum Eden, Sham Eden, Ophra Weisberg and Morton Rabkin – though the specific nature of Bluground's alleged shortcomings were not specified.

⁶⁹ Memo to Yavneh parents, 1979

⁷⁰ List of Graduating Classes 1980-83, located in Eden Collection

⁷¹ "Yavneh to Expand in Fall," American Israelite, 8/4/1984

figures that Yavneh had experienced in part due to the controversy surrounding Bluground.⁷²

The high enrollment prompted Yavneh to again attempt to initiate a junior high program. Barbara Rabkin with her husband Morton (who had been a board member since 1979) led a meeting of fifth grade parents in March of 1986 to see if the junior high program would be feasible. After the meeting, Morton Rabkin told the board that there was indeed interest among the parents and it was possible to mount a 7th grade within a couple of years.

During the tenure of Harris Goldstein, which would last through the spring of 1987, the school evaluated its curriculum and set out a new educational philosophy, which was very similar to the philosophy set down by Hershon in the 1960's. The curriculum restructuring was initiated by the president, Larry Neuman (1982-84), and overseen by Goldstein and Solomon. This philosophy stressed the Judaic studies program as the "raison d'etre" of the Yavneh Day School. Additionally, the new philosophy emphasized the idea of religious pluralism. The teaching and observance of traditional Jewish practice (most especially *kippot* and *kashrut*) was mandated while an openness multiplicity of ideologies and practices among the students was simultaneously emphasized. As for the specific skills and attitudes mentioned in the document, critical thinking and the ability to read, write and communicate in Hebrew were all top priorities along with familiarity with Jewish texts and American institutions.⁷³

1987 would serve as a turning point for Yavneh. Esther Feuerberg was named Assistant Principal under Goldstien – replacing Ray Solomon who had retired in Novem-

⁷² American Israelite, 9/4/1986

⁷³ Philosophy of Education, included in Board Minutes, 9/11/1985

ber of 1986. After the 1986-87 school year Goldstein departed in order to take a job elsewhere. Feuerberg remained in her position under the new principal, Rabbi Stanley Meisels an alumnus of the Hebrew Union College. He would serve for only a year. Feuerberg would replace him as principal in the fall of 1988.⁷⁴ Feuerberg's promotion would mark an end to the instability in the principal's office at Yavneh; she retained her post at the helm of the school through the spring of 2001.

As Ron Wise prepared to leave the presidency to his successor Morton Rabkin Yavneh was facing a difficult juncture. Ron Wise evaluated the difficulties in the school in his final board meeting as president. While the school broke even in 1986-87, the deficits dated back to 1981. Compounding this problem was that the coming year showed a significant drop in enrollment down from 270 to 229 (for the 1987-88 school year) with pre-school showing the biggest drop. This meant that significantly less revenue would be brought in the next year. The endowment fund was quickly being depleted down to almost nothing in order to cover the mounting deficits. The building was in need of more repairs and a strained relationship with the Federation had developed, making it more difficult to obtain the money. The tuition policy was in need of re-evaluation if the school was going to make ends meet. Additionally, the board had to re-evaluate its role vis a vis the administrations role in running the school.⁷⁵

Conclusion:

Yavneh had grown significantly from an overcrowded school in Roselawn of 130 children in 1970, to a school with large building in the suburbs that was overcrowded at

⁷⁴ 40th Anniversary Dinner Program, History of Yavneh

⁷⁵ Minutes of Board meeting, 8/5/1987

270 children in the 1986-87 academic year. The drop in enrollment (to 229) for the coming year was very much out of step with what was happening for Jewish day schools in general around this time, as the movement continued a pattern of steady growth.⁷⁶ The instability of the 1980's had coincided with the inability of the school to retain students. Since the departure of George Lebovitz in 1981, there had not been any sense consistent leadership at the top of the administration and the short tenure of Stan Meisels would not help matters.

Compounding Yavneh's difficulties, no permanent solution had been found for the financial pressures that arose during the 1980's. For the school to be able to survive many changes needed to be made. For example the dependence on bingo games needed to be reduced, and a means of building back the endowment fund would require that tough decisions be made. As the 1987-88 school year began, Yavneh was at a crossroads in its existence. It would need to find a way to stabilize its administration, finances and enrollment in order to continue into the next decade.

⁷⁶ See footnote 3

CHAPTER FOUR

Consolidation and Advance: The Late 1980's to the Present Day

Introduction:

As the 1980's drew to a close, Yavneh found itself in a difficult position. Financial difficulties were mounting. After George Lebovitz left the school in 1981, Yavneh had four different principals going into the 1987-88 school year. Outside of Yavneh, Jewish day schools in general were also facing challenges during the late 1980's.

One major challenge for day schools in general was that of funding. During the 1980's tuition increased greatly and tuition assistance lessened. Schools with buildings generally had large mortgage payments, making finances even tighter. The funding problem directly increased the difficulty of finding good, qualified teachers. Many of those entering professions at this time did not want the lower financial and social status that teaching would give them. Those who did enter teaching out of dedication to Jewish education were all too often unqualified teachers. This last difficulty was a problem especially in the Orthodox *Yeshiva* schools where the *Yeshiva* heads did not always see a need for professional teacher training.¹

Financial difficulties, because of their affect on tuition, directly impacted on enrollment. When tuition rates increased and tuition assistance decreased, then many families were unable or unwilling to send their children to the school for financial reasons. Additionally, lack of funds made programming for special needs children near impossible, further restricting the types of children that could attend these schools.²

Administration of schools was also a problem. According to Schiff, the shortage of qualified administrators may have been even a bigger problem than the teacher shortage. One of the major problems Schiff saw in the administration shortage was that too

¹ Schiff, Alvin I., *Contemporary Jewish Education*, Rossel Books, Dallas, TX, 1988. 129-130

² Hersh, 155

many administrators were learning on-the-job, and this type of learning came at the expense of the school. The inexperience of such administrators would often cause teachers to become dissatisfied and leave the school, exacerbating the teacher problem noted above.³

Despite these problems in 1988, Schiff saw that, "The romance between the Jewish community and the Jewish day schools has really just begin."⁴ He would prove to be quite right. The 1990's would see a great amount of growth in day schools, both in terms of number of schools and enrollment. Recent demographic studies showed a 25% increase in enrollment at non-Orthodox Jewish day schools during the 1990's. While there is still greater enrollment in the lower grades (6th and below) than in the upper grades (7th and above), the curve is flattening, with more students staying in Jewish day schools through at least the 8th grade.⁵

Yavneh's difficulties during the 1980's were shared by many day schools around the country. The subsequent success of Yavneh through the 1990's can be easily attributed to its success in overcoming some of the major problems that plagued day schools in general.

Administrative Difficulties:

As Morton Rabkin assumed the presidency in the summer of 1987, administrative problems were still a major concern. After Harris Goldstien's departure in May of 1987, Esther Feuerberg oversaw the administration until a new principal was found. During the

³ Schiff, *CJE*, 131-132

⁴ *Ibid.*, 133

⁵ Wiener, Julie, "Census shows Jewish day schools are growing by leaps and bounds," Jewish Telegraphic Agency, website: jta.org, posted may 12, 2000

summer, Rabbi Stanley Meisels, a graduate of the Hebrew Union College – Jewish Institute of Religion was selected unanimously as the new principal of Yavneh.⁶

Immediately Meisels set out to assess the structural condition of the building, which was in need of some repair. In his report to the board in October of 1987, Meisels described some of the problem areas that had been worked on and still needed additional work. These areas included the gym, the need for a new science lab, and a problem with asbestos, which at that time was still within acceptable EPA levels.⁷

Meisels also worked on setting up a new curriculum for the school, especially in the older grades. In a letter to parents, printed in the Friends of Yavneh newsletter, he asked the question, “Are we teaching what needs to be taught with the proper learning objectives and are we teaching it at the right time?”⁸ During his year as principal, Meisels hoped to identify areas for improvement through observation and evaluation of teachers and review of the objectives of the school as they currently stood.⁹

Meisels would never have the opportunity to implement any major changes at Yavneh. On January 20, 1988, Meisels informed the board of his decision not to seek contract renewal for the following year.¹⁰ While there is no official statement as to why Meisels left, Ophra Weisberg recalls that he left his family (wife and children) in California when he took the Yavneh position and preferred to return to California to be with them rather than to bring them to Cincinnati.¹¹

⁶ “Yavneh School Names New Principal,” American Israelite,

⁷ Principal’s Report, Yavneh Board meeting, 10/22/1987

⁸ Friends of Yavneh Newsletter, January 1988

⁹ Principal’s Report, Yavneh Board meeting, 10/22/1987

¹⁰ Board Minutes, 1/20/1988

¹¹ Interview with Ophra Weisberg, 1/28/02

The board did not take a long time to determine who the new principal of the school would be. A letter from Morton Rabkin to the general Yavneh community on April 13, 1988 announced Meisels departure and that Esther Feuerberg would be named Principal of the school.¹² Feuerberg's tenure as principal (her title was changed to Head of School in 1997¹³) would last until the spring of 2001.

Financial Recovery:

Yavneh's financial situation remained precarious during the late 1980's and early 90's. During the autumn of 1987 the board discussed ideas of how to bring Yavneh to a state of financial stability. Morton Rabkin, upon assuming the presidency in the summer of 1987 told the board that Yavneh needed to be brought to a state of financial solvency. The ways in which this would happen were several. First, Rabkin wanted to make Yavneh more visible in the community. Rabkin insisted that increased visibility would benefit the school's fundraising efforts. Increased visibility would also lead to an increase in enrollment (especially with a drop from 270 students in the 1986-87 academic year to only 229 students in the 1987-88 academic year). Increased enrollment combined with Rabkin's second strategy of reasonable tuition increases was crucial to creating a state of financial solvency for the school. The third part of the plan was to make bingo into a program that would replenish the nearly empty endowment fund instead of funding the day-to-day needs of the school.¹⁴

¹² Letter located in Eden Collection

¹³ The title "Head of School" was created during an administrative restructuring in 1987 in addition to the Head of School there are now three principals serving under the head, they oversee the Elementary school (pre K-5), the Middle School (6-8) and the Judaic Studies Programs (all grades).

¹⁴ Board Minutes, July 1, 1987

Rabkin set out immediately to revive the school's finances. The school was, according to Rabkin, "as broke as you could get."¹⁵ One route of seeking immediate financial solvency was to get a loan from the Jewish Federation, which would be used for some of the needed repairs on the school. However, the Federation would not make such a loan until the school developed a plan to raise tuition so that it covered more of the expenses of the school.¹⁶ This demand by the Federation helped advance Rabkin's case for increased tuition. In order to meet this requirement the executive committee recommended a 7% increase in tuition for the 1987-88 school year. The board accepted the recommendation and also approved a cap on tuition assistance. Figures from previous years indicated that tuition assistance requests would not exceed the cap.¹⁷

Other routes of funding came from Dr. O. Daniel Fox, who was the fundraising chair at this time. Ideas advanced by Fox included an advertising book and an intensification of the fundraising efforts through the Friends of Yavneh program. In August of 1987 Fox estimated that Friends of Yavneh could potentially raise about \$50,000 in the short term, which would cover more than half of the deficit.¹⁸

Besides the increase of tuition and stronger fundraising efforts, Fox advanced the idea of a one-time surcharge of about \$600 on each family and an increase in the revenue from bingo operations.¹⁹ Neither of these ideas were ultimately implemented. Rabkin had already stated that one of his goals was to use bingo to restore the depleted endow-

¹⁵ Interview with Morton Rabkin, 11/9/01

¹⁶ According to the Board Minutes from 9/16/1987, tuition for 1987-88 covered about 59% of the school's expenses. With a 7% increase for the next year 63% of the schools expenses would be covered by tuition.

¹⁷ Executive committee report, 1/6/1987

¹⁸ Board Minutes, 8/5/1987

¹⁹ Ibid.

ment fund, which had been used to cover the mounting deficits, and the tuition increases would be enough of a financial hardship on the families.

Bingo, which had been creating significant revenue for the school for about 10 years by this time, became an issue of great importance. The Attorney General of Ohio declared illegal the system by which parents would pay off a "bingo surcharge" through working bingo. With no power to make parents support bingo, Rabkin wrote a letter to all parents asking for their voluntary commitment to the bingo program. If parents, through a response card included with the letter, stated that they would not support bingo, Rabkin warned that tuition would have to increase about 25% immediately in order to cover costs.²⁰

With a plan intact to slowly raise tuition and to divert more of the bingo money to enrich the endowment instead of having it support day-to-day funding, the school was heading in the right direction toward solving its financial problems. According to Rabkin, by 1992 dependence on bingo for the school's annual budget was around \$30,000 a year, significantly lower than the \$140,000 that went toward the annual budget when Rabkin became president of the board. Rabkin also succeeded in cutting administrative costs through more efficient procedures, allowing parents to pay tuition on a monthly basis (instead of semester basis) is a prime example of this. Additionally, Rabkin sought to create a culture in the administration that allowed the financial and business side of Yavneh to run more like a business.²¹

²⁰ Letter from Morton Rabkin to Yavneh Parents, Dec. 2, 1987

²¹ Interview with Morton Rabkin, 11/9/01; Rabkin's success in these areas were confirmed by others including Nachum and Sham Eden and David Weisberg. Additionally the Friends of Yavneh Newsletter, in reviewing Rabkin's presidency confirmed these accomplishments.

Reviewing Procedures:

With a financial recovery plan underway and stability in the administration, Rabin urged the board to look at the way in which the school had been run. He felt that the board took too active of a role in the running of the school and that the relationship between the board and the administration needed to be reviewed. In August of 1987 he asked Hirsh J. Cohen, a board member, to look at the by-laws of the school relating to this subject and to make recommendations for amending them.²² The changes in the by-laws that were enacted during June of 1988 were reflective of this desire to streamline the running of the school and to allow the administration to have more independence from the board in handling the school's day-to-day concerns.²³

During Meisel's last months as principal, he and Feuerberg had completed a review of the upper grades curriculum. The revisions included a new curriculum for the planned 7th and 8th grades. On the Judaic studies side, the revised curriculum stressed reading fluency and comprehension skills. One goal for the 7th grade was that the students be able to answer analytic questions and understand figurative language in Hebrew. Formal grammar studies (focusing on verbal conjugations) in Hebrew were also to begin in grade 5. 8th graders were to be able to participate in a Hebrew debate by the end of their studies. The general studies curricula were also updated in order to comply with state requirements. It was at this that time the decision to add computer skills for the 7th and 8th grade curriculum was instituted.²⁴

As for the junior high program, a 7th grade was brought back for the 1987-88 school year. In the spring of 1989, Yavneh held an 8th grade graduation for the first

²² Board Minutes 8/5/1987

²³ Memo To Board of Trustees from Hirsh J. Cohen re: Revision of Yavneh by-laws, June 6, 1988

²⁴ Curriculum Summary, distributed to Board April 27, 1988

time since 1983. The graduation ceremony differed little from what had been done in the past. In a program reminiscent of the first graduations in the 1960's, *Hatkivah* and the *Star Spangled Banner* were sung. Students delivered addresses in English and Hebrew. Only 6 students graduated in 1989. The reinstated junior high did not last long, however. By 1991, there was no 8th grade graduation, with the 6th and 7th grades holding a combined graduation ceremony.²⁵ The problem of attrition in the 7th and 8th grades continued to plague Yavneh as it had from the earliest days.

A Milestone Reached:

Despite the problems with establishing a permanent junior high school program, Yavneh was able to celebrate its 40th anniversary in 1992 in a mood of accomplishment. The School had not merely survived, but Yavneh was able to look back on four full decades of a combined Jewish and secular education as a community school for the Jews of Cincinnati. A gala dinner honoring all the founders, past presidents and administrators of Yavneh took place in the spring of 1992. In the dinner program and ad book, each past-president wrote a brief memoir of his time as president of Yavneh and his hopes for the future of Yavneh. In his comments, Morton Rabkin recollected that during his term as president and afterward, Yavneh was able to improve its financial situation through tuition increases, salary policies and scholarship policies. Dr. David Weisberg, looking to Yavneh's future, expressed the hope that a permanent 7th and 8th grade program and, someday, even a high school could be established at Yavneh. Alan Wolf praised the fund-raisers who, over the many years, had helped keep Yavneh afloat. In particular, he thanked Hy Ullner for running the bingo program for the past 10 years. Other past presi-

²⁵ Graduation programs in Eden Collection

dents echoed these sentiments as they recalled some of the events that occurred during their time as president.²⁶

Stability and Growth:

Through the 1990's, the school was able to keep financially afloat and the administration remained stable. This stability allowed the school to once again enter into a pattern of growth. Under Yavneh Presidents Edward Frankel and Mark Goldstein, Yavneh was once again able to mount a junior high program. In 1993 and 1994 the sixth grade graduation had twenty-three students and for the 1993-94 school year 7th grade was again instituted at Yavneh. The 1995 8th grade graduation boasted eleven graduates.²⁷ The eleven students that graduated in 1995 was a significant decline from the twenty-three that had graduated from the same class in the 6th grade.²⁸ The desire on the part of the Yavneh board to have a junior high outweighed the concerns over student attrition and the financial difficulties that small class sizes created.

In order to accommodate the increase in the number of students and the introduction of additional grade levels, Yavneh needed more space. Unlike in the past, this was not too much of a problem during this time. A letter from Ed Frankel and Esther Feuerberg in March of 1993 informed the public that Yavneh was only \$150,000 short of the \$1.93 million that was needed for the proposed additions. Because of growth in the endowment fund and a more aggressive approach to fundraising, as envisioned by board president, O. Daniel Fox, the funding goal was easily achieved.²⁹ Groundbreaking for a

²⁶ 40th anniversary Dinner program

²⁷ Graduation programs 1993-1995, located in Eden Collection

²⁸ The 11 graduated in 1995 would have been a part of the 23 member sixth grade graduation of 1993

²⁹ Letter from Frankel and Feuerberg, March 9, 1993, in Eden Collection

new section of classrooms, along with Eden hall, a multi-purpose lunchroom, was held in June of 1993. The dedication of the completed structure was in November of 1993.³⁰

Snapshot of Student Life:

The influx of students from the Soviet Union presented a challenge to Yavneh as well as a new cross-cultural opportunity for the students. The school hired an English as Second Language tutor in 1990 in order to allow the 30 new students to more rapidly integrate within the student body.³¹

Students were excelling in secular studies as indicated by two examples from the early 1990's: in 1991 Yavneh earned a "glowing report" on the state evaluation that examined every aspect of student life.³² In the spring of 1992, all seven of the 6th graders who took the Walnut Hills School entrance exam scored at least 255 points out of a possible 270 points with four 6th graders attaining a perfect score.³³

In Jewish studies, too, students evidently flourished. A mimeographed "Classroom News" from 1991³⁴ contained student writing in Hebrew about the Holocaust on the theme of *Am Yisrael Chai* and the theme of never forgetting. A new opportunity for Yavneh students during the 1990's was the Yavneh 8th grade trip to Israel, which first occurred in March of 1995. This 8th grade class spent 12 days in Israel visiting major sites, and spending a few days on a Kibbutz and a night in a Bedouin tent.³⁵ This trip was particularly significant in that it constituted the realization of the hopes and dreams of the

³⁰ Flyers promoting the events, located in Eden Collection.

³¹ Friends of Yavneh Newsletter, March 1990

³² Ibid. , March 1991

³³ Ibid. , August 1992

³⁴ Located in Eden Collection

³⁵ Program for trip located in Eden Collection

original founders of Yavneh. Spending some days on a kibbutz allowed the children to experience the philosophies and way of life that was an inspiration to many of Yavneh's founders. The experience of the trip to Israel also represented, in a near perfect form, the desire of the founders for experiential education. The trip has been an ongoing feature of the 8th grade since 1995, with all of the sixteen 8th graders in the class of 2002 intending to go on the trip as of this writing.³⁶

Further Expansion:

Space for both classes and storage had been a problem at Yavneh from the mid-1980's. The 1993 addition had eased some of the difficulties, but within only a couple of years, even the newly added classroom space had become inadequate. During the middle to late 1990's, three more expansion projects would bring Yavneh to its current size. A significant donation from the Boymel family (whose children attended Yavneh in the 1950's and 60's) allowed for the construction of a new synagogue chapel at Yavneh. The Boymel family synagogue, at the front entrance of the building, was completed and dedicated in time for the 1995-1996 school year.³⁷ Shortly thereafter, additional support from the Boymel family along with other gifts helped fund an addition and remodeling of the offices, teachers lounge, gift shop³⁸ and front lobby. This phase of the building expansion was completed in 1999.³⁹

Despite the construction that was completed in 1999, Yavneh still found itself short of space. Dr. Gary Kirsh, chair of the capital campaign reported to the board in

³⁶ According to Barbara Rabkin and Mitch Flatow

³⁷ Flyer for dedication ceremonies, in Eden Collection

³⁸ The gift shop that had been in the Talmud Torah building had closed shortly after the School moved to Adath Israel. At this time a new shop was opened by Miriam Bernstein and others.

³⁹ "Yavneh Dedication set for February 27," *American Israelite*, Feb. 11, 1999

March of 1999 that the Jewish Foundation⁴⁰ had offered Yavneh up to 4 million dollars in matching funds (\$2.50 for every dollar raised) for a new capital campaign. Kirsh was cautious about Yavneh's ability to raise the matching funds, but encouraged the board to not allow an opportunity such as this one to slip away.⁴¹

The Yavneh community did raise the money needed for the final phase of expansion. In April of 1999 Dr. Jeff Zipkin, president of the board, explained what the new construction would provide: 10 classrooms, a new music room, a second set of administrative offices, a middle school science lab, a new gym and a concession stand. Additionally, the new section of the building would feature it's own entrance and a student lounge for the middle school.⁴² This addition would make the middle school (which due to administrative restructuring discussed below included the 6th to 8th grades) a permanent part of Yavneh with its own identity.

In addition to soliciting donations, Yavneh appealed to a national foundation to secure a \$1 million loan, interest free. The Avi Chai Building loan program was established in 1997 order to help the day school movement thrive.⁴³ Yavneh was able to procure enough loan money to be able to fully fund its ambitious building plan.⁴⁴ In 1999 Yavneh hired Barbara Rabkin as the school's first Director of Development. She oversaw and coordinated funding efforts for this phase of construction. Her initial one-year term in this position was eventually extended indefinitely.⁴⁵ The new building was completed in time for the beginning of the 2001-2002 school year.

⁴⁰ The Jewish foundation was created in 1996 from the assets of the Jewish Hospital of Cincinnati; "Jewish Foundation offers Yavneh \$4 Million." *American Israelite*, march 4, 1999

⁴¹ Board Minutes 3/25/1999

⁴² Board Minutes 4/22/1999

⁴³ See peje.com

⁴⁴ Brochure from Avi Chai, "The Building Loan Program," 2001

⁴⁵ Board Minutes, 12/15/1999

Administrative Changes:

In addition to a physical expansion of Yavneh, the school's administration was also restructured. The restructuring created three principals, all of whom worked under the Head of School. Feuerberg was appointed to this new position. The three principals would oversee the middle school, the elementary school and the Judaic studies program.⁴⁶

This new administrative system called on each principal to focus on the specific duties that related to the school's educational program. The principals each concentrated on the curriculum for their particular area. They also handled student discipline and assisted teachers with problems they may have been having in the classroom. The Head of School coordinated activities between the three areas of the school, made decisions on hiring and firing of staff (in consultation with the appropriate principal), and oversaw the management of the office, kitchen, custodial and other miscellaneous staff.⁴⁷

Feuerberg's years as Principal and Head of School came to an end in the spring of 2001. She left in order to take a similar position in Arizona. Evidently, after 13 years as Principal and Head of School and more than 20 years on the school's faculty, Feuerberg felt that the time had come for her to seek other opportunities. During her time, Feuerberg oversaw significant expansion of the school both in terms of enrollment and physical growth. She was a continuous presence at Yavneh during a time of great change and turbulence. Obviously it is too early to evaluate properly Feuerberg's contributions to the

⁴⁶ This information is taken from interviews with Morton Rabkin 11/9/01, and Mitchell Flatow 8/30/01, along with personal observation of how the school currently works. Unfortunately the Board Minutes for the years 1990-1998 have been misplaced at Yavneh during the time of this writing.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

school.⁴⁸ In May of 2001 Mitch Flatow, who had been principal of the lower school was named Interim Head of School.⁴⁹

Curricular Changes:

Cory Chargo, a graduate of HUC's School of Education in New York, became the Judaic Studies Principal in 1999. Chargo developed a new curriculum for Judaic studies in August of 2001. In a departure from earlier curricula, Chargo's curriculum did not simply progress grade by grade. Instead various components of the Jewish Studies curriculum were identified as specific objectives for each grade. The areas covered were similar to those from earlier curricula: Bible, Hebrew Language, prayer, holidays, history, rabbinics and enrichment. Some areas were broken down further. Rabbinics, for example, which was taught only in the middle school, was broken down into Mishnah, Jewish morals and Ethics, and "Contemporary Issues and Ancient Solutions."⁵⁰ These sub-categories had been created with the hope of making the material more interesting and relevant to the students.

Conclusion:

During the 2001-2002 school year, there were 415 students at Yavneh spread somewhat evenly over all of the grades. The enrollment for 2001-2002 was the largest in Yavneh's fifty years. In December of 2001 the position of Head of School was offered to

⁴⁸ Further information about Feuerberg's tenure can be found in interviews with Miriam Bernstein, Morton Rabkin and Mitch Flatow.

⁴⁹ Board Minutes 5/23/2001

⁵⁰ "Curriculum Guide for Judaic Studies." 2001-2002.

and accepted by Mitch Flatow.⁵¹ The school faced some difficulties as he began his tenure. An ongoing challenge is the dearth of good teachers. In particular some in the administration and faculty have noted that it is very difficult to identify good Israeli teachers. Many of the teachers brought to Yavneh from Israel to teach Jewish studies for a two or three year period have trouble adjusting to American teaching styles and building relationships with the American students. In order to solve this problem, Flatow has begun to seek out ways to build relationships between Yavneh and some of the various schools of Jewish education, such as the Jewish Theological Seminary and Stern College. Through these relationships, Flatow hoped to find more long-term Judaic Studies teachers and rely less on teachers brought to Cincinnati from Israel for short periods of time.⁵²

The school once again faced a budget deficit. To prevent the problems caused by earlier budget deficits, Flatow and the board determined not to let this deficit grow. A decision was taken not to raid the endowment fund in order to cover the deficit. Morton Rabkin, as he did in the late 1980's, is in the early stages of developing a plan to balance Yavneh's budget.

Despite these difficulties, Yavneh can point to many achievements as it prepares to enter its next fifty years. Because of the recent expansion, Yavneh's Secular Studies Department is able to offer science in modern labs, run a computer lab, and teach several different foreign languages including Spanish and French that will be of great benefit to the students when they enter high school. The Jewish Studies Department continues to teach *I'vrit b'Ivrit* and students in the middle school have expressed enthusiasm over the

⁵¹ Board Minutes 12/19/2001

⁵² Interview with Mitch Flatow, 8/30/01

new curriculum.⁵³ In earl 2002 Yavneh found itself, both educationally and financially, in a position of strength that will enable it to look optimistically toward the next phase of its history.

⁵³ Interviews with Yavneh Students, December, 2000

CONCLUSION

Fifty years have now passed since Joseph Gootman found 17 five-year-old children to join his own grandson in a new Jewish kindergarten. From that group of 18 children and one teacher, who met in the basement of the Avondale Talmud Torah, the Yavneh Day School has grown to a school of over 400 children and a faculty of Judaic and secular studies teachers located in a fully modern building in Kenwood. The fifty years presented many challenges for the school, challenges that at times were met with failure, but more often with success.

The history of Yavneh is the story of how a group of dedicated individuals who were committed to the concept of a day school for the Cincinnati Jewish community, created and maintained that school over a half century. Several major themes dominate the history of Yavneh: periodic merger attempts with Chofetz Chaim/Cincinnati Hebrew Day, financial struggles, a search for stability both in terms of administration and facility. The history of Yavneh is also the story of the quest to find a balance between Jewish and secular studies that would prepare the students to succeed academically, while simultaneously furnishing them with a high level of Hebraic and Judaic learning.

The merger attempts with Chofetz Chaim/Cincinnati Hebrew Day presented a very direct threat to Yavneh's continued existence. The initial attempt at a merger (by way of the *Din Torah*) was a hostile move initiated by Rabbi Eliezer Silver to undermine or eliminate Yavneh in order to protect and secure his own school. Eventually cooperation ensued in the negotiations. Despite these efforts to achieve cooperation, all three major attempts at a merger between the schools ended in failure.

The question that hung over all of the merger attempts was whether Cincinnati could support two Jewish day schools. The move by the Federation to end Yavneh's an-

nual allocation in the late 1950's was a very strong statement that the Cincinnati Jewish community was not prepared to support two Jewish day schools. Even when Federation funding was restored to Yavneh through the CCHS, the Federation pressed the two schools to combine, apparently fearful that Cincinnati could not financially support both institutions.

For some on the Yavneh side of the merger talks, this failure was a good thing. Individuals such as Martin and Shoshie Grad feared that a combined school would rob Yavneh of its ability to teach Judaism in a way that did not advance a denominational agenda.¹ Eventually, issues such as who would be the director of the school, and in what way the Jewish subjects would be taught, proved to be significant obstacles that could not be overcome. Eventually even the Jewish Federation, which had the highest financial stake in the merger, had to admit that the schools were too different from each other to successfully combine.

Yavneh faced financial struggles at nearly every point in its existence. The enthusiasm and political connections of Morris Weintraub led Yavneh through its first major crisis when the Federation decided not to give an allocation in 1957. Later, Yavneh reached stability through its partnership with the Talmud Torah and as a part of the CCHS. When Yavneh needed money for a new building another early supporter of the school, Sol Richmond, came forward with a major donation. Over the years the school's board developed creative solutions for funding such as bingo, the creation of endowment funds, and careful budgeting. These techniques allowed Yavneh to remain financially sound despite many years with budget deficits.

¹ Interview with Martin and Shoshie Grad, 1/1/02

Until the 1990's Yavneh had very few moments of stability, both in the administration and its facility. When one was stable the other was not. The administrative instability was most acute in the 1980s when six different principals led Yavneh. This instability coincided with a period of declining enrollments and the most serious financial crisis Yavneh faced since it lost its annual allocation from the Federation. The school's periods of administrative stability, most notably under the Principals George Lebovitz and Esther Feuerberg, were times of growth and better financial security. To the present day Yavneh faces a budget deficit, though it now has a secure endowment and perhaps more importantly, the school has a record of achieving its fund raising goals through and since the 1990's – including its most recent goal for the fall of 2001.²

The periods of stability in the administration were accompanied by demographic growth during these times. Growth in the student population led to the need for change in the physical plant of Yavneh. In 1957, only five years after its founding, Yavneh found itself too large to occupy the Avondale location and moved to the new Talmud Torah building in Roselawn. Almost immediately the school needed to expand that building and, by 1970, it was clear that the Roselawn building had become inadequate for the school. Yavneh managed to stay in the Talmud Torah Building until 1975, but then – finding it impossible to put any more students in the small building – it moved to the educational wing of Adath Israel Synagogue in Amberly.

The Yavneh/Adath Israel collaboration, while agreeable to both parties, could not last long. The challenges of being a tenant in someone else's school were many: it was impossible for Yavneh teachers to decorate classrooms, there was a lack of storage space for the teachers, and Yavneh was unable to offer any after school activities. These diffi-

² Interviews with Mitch Flatow, January 2002, and Barbara Rabkin, January 2002.

culties made it impossible for Yavneh to continue meeting at Adath Israel. In 1978 a new building was procured in Kenwood. This building still serves as the school's permanent home. Even after acquiring a building of its own, the school's growth soon made this facility inadequate. The administrative instability and declining enrollment of the 1980's kept Yavneh on a level plane during that era. Once growth in enrollment began again in the late 1980's, however, the school needed several renovations throughout the 1990's to keep pace with its needs. Today Yavneh has space to accommodate up to 550 students,³ which allows for significant growth from the current 415 students.

The primary fuel that drove all of the above challenges and changes was Yavneh's professed dedication to a good secular, Hebraic, and Jewish education for its students. *I'vrit b'Ivrit* has been the school's educational approach to Hebrew learning throughout its existence. This approach waned only during the years of George Lebovitz, but it is fully in force today as a look inside any Jewish studies classroom will show.⁴ The Jewish Studies curriculum has been under constant review by principals, especially during the terms of Jerome Hershon, George Lebovitz, Stanley Meisels, Esther Feuerberg, and Cory Chargo. The emphasis of subjects in the Judaic Studies Program has shifted over the years, but the balance between the Judaic Studies Department and the secular department has been a constant through Yavneh's entire existence. The Secular Studies Department consistently followed the curriculum of the State of Ohio public schools. The school's periodic reviews by the state, and student scores on tests such as the Walnut Hills Entrance Exam, show that Yavneh's students can achieve a high level of achievement in secular studies. The recent addition of science labs, a computer center, a

³ According to Mitch Flatow, interview, January 2002

⁴ In Ophra Weisberg's 1st grade Jewish studies room the only English to be found was the emergency procedures sign that is mandated by state law.

gym and a music room has dramatically increased the opportunities that Yavneh can offer its students.

Maintaining a 7th and 8th grade program has long been a challenge for Yavneh. Through most of the 1970's this program was successful in allowing students to remain at Yavneh through grade 8. However, with the instability of the 1980's in both administration and funding, the program was temporarily suspended. After a short lived attempt to launch a junior high in program in the early 1990's, the "middle school" (grades 6-8) program was again established in the mid-1990's, and continues until today. The recent construction, which included specific spaces for the middle school, reflects the desire of the board and the administration to continue this program on a permanent basis.⁵

None of these themes in the history of Yavneh happened in isolation. Administrative stability tended to coincide with growth in the student population and a more sound financial situation. Growth in the student population necessitated changes and renovation in the school building. Each phase of renovation updated the school in a way that allowed for more opportunities for the students. The financial difficulties were solved more easily during times of stable administration than at other times. Growth and a sense of stability under Lebovitz allowed Yavneh to establish itself permanently along side Cincinnati Hebrew Day as a community Jewish school for all the Jews of Cincinnati.

Yavneh was born out of a desire on the part of a group of Cincinnati Jews to be able to educate their children in a serious Jewish atmosphere that was not dominated by a specific approach to Jewish practice. It has become an important part of the Jewish community of Cincinnati. Regular mention in the *American Israelite* of Yavneh activi-

⁵ Interview with Mitch Flatow, January, 2002. Flatow said in the interview that any Jewish high school in Cincinnati would be completely independent from Yavneh, but would certainly depend on Yavneh as the major feeder school.

ties place the school on the same level, publicity-wise as any Jewish congregation or organization in the city. Jonathan Sarna, in his introduction to *The Jews of Cincinnati* calls the Plum Street Temple the central surviving symbol of 19th century Judaism in the city.⁶ It is possible that Yavneh, one day, may be a central symbol for 20th century Jewish life in Cincinnati. The school brings together many different groups of Jews in the city: Reform, Conservative, German, east-European, secular and even some Orthodox.

The growth of Yavneh over the past 50 years also fits with the trends of Jewish day schools nationally during this time. From the early 1960's to the late 1990's the enrollment in Jewish day schools approximately tripled nationally. While the increase in the population of Orthodox Jews has some effect on this, a large part of the gain comes from non-Orthodox schools. A possible reason for this is that baby boomers want to give their children the type of intensive Jewish education that they never received.⁷ This argument, advanced by Jack Wertheimer, is very similar to one of the reasons for the growth in Jewish day schools in the 1950's as cited by Schiff.⁸

The most recent growth in day schools was helped by many of the same factors that allowed Yavneh to grow in the late 1990's. Foundations such as Avi Chai, Partnership for Excellence in Jewish Education, and the Samis Foundation in Seattle have allowed day schools to benefit from a general increase in Jewish philanthropy aimed at Jewish education. Yavneh has benefited greatly from the financial largess that these groups provide.

⁶ Sarna and Klein, 18

⁷ Wertheimer, Jack, "Jewish Education in the United States: Recent Trends and Issues." *American Jewish Year Book* (Vol. 99). American Jewish Committee, New York, 1999. 52-54

⁸ Schiff, *JDSA*, 104

Yavneh has faced many challenges, but it was able to stay within the trends of growth in the day school movement. Day schools are looked at by many Jews as the most effective way of disseminating an intensive Jewish education to children that live in a world that encourages assimilation.⁹ Jonathan Sarna, in a recent article, called the Jewish day school movement one of the most important parts of a new chapter in American Jewish education. It is a chapter that contains not only innumerable possibilities but also vast uncertainty.¹⁰ Yavneh has been, and continues to be a part of this new chapter.

⁹ Hersh, 159

¹⁰ Sarna, Jonathan D., "American Jewish Education in Historical Perspective." *Journal of Jewish Education* 64 :1-2 (Winter-Spring, 1998), 18

Appendix A

List of Yavneh Presidents, Administrators, original Teachers and CCHS Presidents:¹

Yavneh Presidents:

Morris Weintraub	1956-1968
Harvey Egherman	1968-1971
David Weisberg	1971-1973
Marcus Wigser	1973-1976
Lawrence Warm	1976-1979
Alan Wolf	1979-1982
Larry Neuman	1982-1984
Ronald Wise	1984-1987
Morton Rabkin	1987-1990
O. Daniel Fox	1990-1992
Edward Frankel	1992-1994
Mark Goldstein	1994-1997
Jeffery Zipkin	1997-2000
Gary Kirsh	2000-present

Directors Principals and Heads of School of Yavneh:

Morris Kushnir	1958-1961
Jerome Hershon	1961-1967
Moses Zalesky	1967-1969 ²
Emmanuel Applebaum	1969-1972
George Lebovitz	1972-1981
Jacob Bluground	1981-1982
Ray Solomon	1982-1985
Harris Goldstein	1984-1987 ³
Stanley Meisels	1987-1988
Esther Feuerberg	1988-2001
Mitchell Flatow	2001-present

Presidents of the CCHS:⁴

Albert Goldman	1961-1963
Naftali Frankel	1963-1965
Frank Lerman	1965-1966
Martin Grad	1966-1968
Harvey Egherman	1968-1970

¹ The list is taken from the Yavneh 40th anniversary program, terms of presidents and administrators after 1992 are taken from various articles, board minutes and interviews.

² Zalesky also worked as the director of the Cincinnati Bureau of Jewish Education and took on the Yavneh duties without extra compensation.

³ During the 1984-85 school year Goldstein and Solomon were co-Principals.

⁴ The CCHS, Cincinnati Community Hebrew Schools, was the umbrella organization for the Talmud Torah, Beth Am Nursery School and Yavneh during the 1960's

First teachers at Yavneh:

Kindergarten:
Ida Drury

Jewish Studies:
Bracha Goldberg
Shoshie Grad
Miriam Weissbach
Aya Weisman
Yehudit Herskovitz
Ayala Levi

Secular Studies:
Beatrice Shallot
Esther Dorfman
Pearl Schwartz
Ira Steinman

Appendix B:

Key Documents in the History of Yavneh

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10. Jewish Studies Curriculum Overview, with a sample curricular area, 2001 - 116

**ARTICLES OF INCORPORATION OF YAVNEH DAY SCHOOL ASSOCIATION, INC.,
A Corporation Not for Profit.**

The undersigned, a majority of whom are citizens of the United States, desiring to form a Corporation, not for profit, under the General Corporation Act of Ohio, do hereby certify:

First. The name of said corporation shall be YAVNEH DAY SCHOOL ASSOCIATION, INC.

Second. The place in this state where the principal office of the corporation is to be located is Cincinnati, Hamilton County, Ohio.

Third. The purposes for which said corporation is formed are:

- a. To provide children with a combined intensive secular and Jewish religious education;
- b. To provide scholarships, funds and financial assistance to enable children to attend, regardless of financial or social status or ability;
- c. To raise funds to fully carry out the aims and purposes of the corporation;
- d. To acquire, hold, convey, lease, mortgage or dispose of all property, real or personal, necessary or expedient to accomplish its purposes;
- e. To borrow money and contract debts to accomplish its purposes;

Fourth. The following persons shall serve said corporation as trustees until the first annual meeting or other meetings called to elect trustees:

A History Of The Yavneh Day School

Y GAZHOLAPYON KOT GOL LACIIC

VERIFICATION OF INCORPORATION OF YAVNEH DAY SCHOOL 'INC'

Morris Weintraub	133 Kentucky Drive, So. Newport, Ky.
Sol Richmond	6332 Elm View Place, Cincinnati 16, Ohio
Ezra Spicehandler	5428 Laconia Ave., Cincinnati 37, Ohio
Fishel Goldfeder	788 E. Mitchell Ave., Cincinnati 20, Ohio
Joseph Gootman	1724 Northampton Dr., Cincinnati 37, Ohio

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, we have hereunto subscribed our names,
this 20th day of August, 1958.

Morris Weintraub
MORRIS WEINTRAUB

Sol Richmond
SOL RICHMOND

Ezra Spicehandler
EZRA SPICEHANDLER

Fishel Goldfeder
FISHEL GOLDFEDER

Joseph Gootman
JOSEPH GOOTMAN

Incorporators.

STATE OF OHIO)
COUNTY OF HAMILTON) ss:

Before me, the undersigned, a Notary Public, in and for said County, this 20th day of August, 1958, personally appeared the above named Morris Weintraub, Sol Richmond, Ezra Spicehandler, Fishel Goldfeder, and Joseph Gootman, who each severally acknowledged the signing of the foregoing Articles of Incorporation to be his free act and deed, for the uses and purposes therein mentioned.

Witness my hand and official seal on the day and year last aforesaid.

Charles Hyman
CHARLES HYMAN, NOTARY PUBLIC
State of Ohio

My Commission Expires: 2/8/59

A History Of The Yavneh Day School

PHONE: PLaza 1-5534

בית הספר הכולל יומי, חופי חיים' דסינסנטי, אהאיו

THE CHOFETZ CHAIM DAY SCHOOL OF CINCINNATI

CORNER READING ROAD AT SOUTH CRESCENT AVE.
CINCINNATI 29, OHIO

ADMINISTRATIVE BOARD:

PHILIP MOSKOWITZ
PRESIDENT AND CHAIRMAN OF BOARD

EDWARD A. JACOBS
FIRST VICE PRESIDENT

BENJAMIN N. RITTER
SECOND VICE PRESIDENT

ALBERT HARRIS
TREASURER

SIDNEY DEUTCH
SECRETARY

SAM SCHMIDT
EXECUTIVE V-PRES.

MILTON DAVIS

ABE DENNIS

MEYER GOLDBERG

BEN LEVINSON

MAURICE LOWENTHAL

EDWARD MALKIS

MORRIS MANDELL

HYMAN MOSKOWITZ

MAX MUNICH

RABBI ELIEZER SILVER,
FOUNDER

August 2, 1959

3145 5302
Silver

Mr. Morris Weintraub

One of the leaders of the so-called Yavneh Day School, Cincinnati
Finance Building
Newport, Ky.

My dear Mr. Weintraub:

I am compelled to send you a summons in the name of the orthodox Rabbis of Cincinnati and of the Board of Education of the Chofetz Chaim Day School to have a Din Torah "rabbinical trial" to decide if you have the right to lead the Yavneh as a separate Day School in opposition "Hasogath Gvul" to the Chofetz Chaim Day School which exists and is incorporated since twelve years and which the orthodox City recognizes as the best Hebrew School in town.

The Yavneh can help "Chas-vsholom to destroy or to minimize the Chofetz Chaim Day School.

We want to have a Din Torah before orthodox Rabbis from out of the city before the school starts. We are waiting for your answer accepting the Din Torah and appointing the name of a Rabbi of your side and we will let you know the name of the Rabbi of ours before August 20.

We are still ready to accept all the students and the Rabbis should unite us.

Sincerely,

Rabbi El. Silver

Rabbi El. Silver

A History Of The Yavneh Day School

Understandings reached by Committees from Chofetz Chaim and Yavneh, at meeting held Monday, December 4, 1961, in the Chofetz Chaim Auditorium. (Recorded by Mr. S.N. Ritter).

1. Mr. Hershon will be the first Director. Any future Director will be selected by the Board of Education and shall be acceptable to Rabbi Silver, or his successor approved by the Vaad Hoir.
2. Language of teaching. The teaching shall be on the basis of Hebrew by Hebrew through all the grades.
3. The teachers shall be Shomre Dath.
4. The teachers shall be recommended by the Director and selected for their educational abilities and approved by the Board of Education.
5. A Committee shall be appointed to visit one or more of the following schools or any other institution of learning, the Committee deems worthy to visit.
 1. Chofetz Chaim, Baltimore, Maryland
 2. Yeshiva Yaakov-Yosef, New York
 3. Hebrew Academy, Washington, D.C.
 4. Academy of Cleveland, Cleveland
 5. Yeshiva of Elizabeth, Elizabeth, N.J.
 6. Hebrew Academy of Miami Beach, Miami Beach, Florida.,in order to establish the pattern the new school is to follow.
6. The Board of Directors shall consist of 50% members from Chofetz Chaim and 50% members of Yavneh. The number of members shall be decided upon later.
7. The first Board of Education members shall be selected by Rabbi Silver or his successor approved by Vaad Hoir and Mr. Hershon for a term of two years.

The number of members shall be decided later.
8. It is agreed that the school have a full time principal, recommended by the Director and approved by the Board of Education.
9. Should the above be agreeable, a Committee from both institutions will be appointed to work out a suitable physical and budgetary arrangement in order that the amalgamation can be effective September, 1962.

10. All the above subject to approval by their respective Boards. ←

11. The name of the institution shall be Chofetz Chaim Yavneh Day School.

12. Rabbi Goldfeder, speaking for the Yavneh group, indicated that the conditions, in principle, outlined above are agreeable.

Dr. Spicehandler suggested that we try to finalize this merger by March, 1962.

The Chofetz Chaim group agreed with Rabbi Goldfeder's and Dr. Spicehandler's statements.

A History Of The Yavneh Day School

THE OBJECTIVES OF THE YAVNEH DAY SCHOOL

By Dr. Moses Zalesky,
Educational Director

1. Complete identification with the Jewish people regardless of geographical or ideological diversity
2. A knowledge and appreciation of Jewish tradition and observance of meaningful and inspiring religious practices in school, home and synagogue
3. A knowledge and appreciation of the Hebrew language to the extent of relatively free conversation, fluent reading with satisfactory comprehension and self-expression in grammatically and stylistically correct writing, using the Sephardic Dialect throughout
4. Meaningful, inspiring group participation in Jewish holiday and festival celebrations, for the development of positive Jewish attitudes and for the enhancement of the joy of Jewish living
5. Complete familiarity with the structure and content of the prayer-book and with the synagogue ritual
6. A thorough knowledge of the Humash and Early Prophets, including selections from the Rashi commentary, and a brief survey of the Latter Prophets and Writings
7. A brief survey of the highlights of Jewish History and the appreciation of their relevance to contemporary Jewish life
8. A familiarity with the structure and content of the Talmud (both Mishna and Gemara) and with its relevance to contemporary Jewish life.
9. A familiarity with the basic laws and customs of the Jewish religion
10. A living cultural bond with the State of Israel and personal commitment to its development and progress
11. An introduction to Modern Hebrew Literature
12. Training for Jewish community leadership, community responsibility and community cooperation, with particular emphasis on the Cincinnati Jewish community
13. A varied personal experience in the creative arts, with particular emphasis on Jewish content
14. A full understanding of the influence of the Bible and of Jewish prophetic ideals upon American Democracy
15. A positive, active involvement of the home and of the family in the Jewish educational experiences of the child.

October 7, 1964

YAVNEH DAY SCHOOL

MAJOR GOALS OF THE ENGLISH DEPARTMENT

1. To Develop and Maintain Physical and Mental Health
2. To Develop Competency in the Fundamental Tools of Learning
3. To Think Critically and Act Responsibly
4. To Respect, Understand, and Live Well With Others
5. To Develop Moral and Ethical Values
6. To Understand and to Cope with the Physical World
7. To Grow in Appreciation of the Arts and in Desire and Ability to Express Oneself Creatively Through Various Media
8. To Develop Interest and Skill in Worth-While Leisure Activities
9. To Develop Understanding of and Respect for the Cultural Heritage
10. To Appreciate the Duties, Responsibilities, and Privileges of Citizenship

October 7, 1964

A History Of The Yavneh Day School

Proposal of Rabbis Indich and Goldfeder

In the interest of Jewish Education, Achduth (Unity) and the well-being of the entire Jewish Community, we recommend that these guidelines should be followed in order to achieve a just and fair merger of the Yavneh and Chofetz Chaim Day Schools.

Realizing that in a merger situation each school must move a little closer to a "Central" position without sacrificing any principles, we have met and discussed, searched and counselled together, and find that a Hebrew Day School, serving the needs of all who seek an intensive Jewish Religious Education, could be achieved.

We feel that, if merger is realizable at all, it should be a total merger of the CCHS system (including both afternoon and day divisions) with the CHDS.

1. A merged traditional Hebrew Day School using the Manhattan Hebrew Day School, Flatbush Yeshiva, Hebrew Academy of Miami, or Central Queens Yeshiva Curriculum could be acceptable to all.
2. Ivrit B'Ivrit should be the policy of the merged Day School.
3. The educational director of the system must be a trained educator, thoroughly conversant with all aspects of the Jewish Heritage, and fluent in modern Hebrew.
4. The director and the teachers in the system must observe Jewish tradition and shall teach Judaism in a positive manner.
5. New Hebrew teachers should be graduates of an accredited Hebrew Teachers College and licensed by either Vaad Chinuch Charedie, Torah Umesorah, Jewish Agency or Jewish Education Committee, New York. (OR)
6. We recommend that teachers of whatever department, Hebrew or English, presently employed for five years or more should be retained in the system, provided they meet all other requisites.
7. Teachers in the English Department must be accredited and certified.
8. The English Department curriculum is to be based on the curriculum of the Cincinnati Public School system.
9. Kashrut shall be observed on institutional premises.

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10. Kippot -- Skullcaps -- are to be worn by male children on institutional premises.
11. Tefillah -- Prayer -- shall be based on the traditional Siddur.
12. The merged system would be called the United Community Hebrew Schools (UCHS), and the Day School would be called the Yavneh-Chofetz Chaim Day School.

The Board of Directors or Board of Education, should be so comprised as to make secure that the new merged school will follow the course upon which it embarks. If these few rules are followed in good faith, we are confident that merger can take place.

YAVNEH DAY SCHOOL

The Yavneh Day School was established nineteen years ago with two major goals: (1) To instill in the children of the Jewish community maximum knowledge, understanding and pride in their Jewish identity and (2) a deep respect for the principles of democracy on which our country was founded in order that they become useful, constructive and concerned citizens. It should be emphasized that these goals are closely related and mutually reinforcing.

The main curricular areas studied in the achievement of these goals may be briefly summarized:

- (1) A. Bible Study - Strong emphasis is placed on those values relevant to daily living which are derived from moral principles of the Bible.
- B. Jewish History - The history of the people of Israel from Bible days to the present.
- C. Jewish Religion - The first prerequisite is a strong belief in God as the Creator of the Universe and as a moral force in the pursuit of justice and mercy. Included are study of Jewish holidays, daily living and the customs that are observed as part of their heritage.
- D. Jewish Literature - including Rabbinic Literature through the ages down to contemporary writers.
- E. Hebrew Language - the ability effectively communicate in Hebrew enables the student to study all of the preceding subject matter in their original form.

In the secular area, the school follows the directives of the Ohio State Board of Education and is therefore an accredited school. A full curriculum including arts (reading, spelling, English), mathematics, social studies, science health, music, art and physical education is taught. Among the many topics in these areas are study of the local community, the state of Ohio and the history of the United States;

A History Of The Yavneh Day School

study of nature including the solar system, climatic regions of our country and the world and the various vegetation and crops that grow in them, natural resources and their economic, social and industrial benefits and uses; an appreciation of good literature; and many others.

Yavneh Day School contains a Pre-school, Kindergarten and Grades 1-8. Classes are conducted five days a week from 8:30 to 3:30.

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YAVNEH DAY SCHOOL EDUCATION COMMITTEE MEETING, MONDAY, DECEMBER 17th REPORT ON THE EDUCATIONAL ASPECTS OF THE PROPOSED MERGER BY GEORGE LEBOVITZ

Below are some of the main aspects that would be considered in the proposed merger. They are in brief outline form and thus do not necessarily represent a total detailed discussion of each point.

I. Social Contacts

1. Tiny unviable classes of 6 or 7 children would be eliminated.
2. A larger group of similar aged children would be available from which to choose friends.
3. The same children would not be together in the same classrooms year after year.
4. Some programs, such as gym, special projects, assembly could be held together by two classes of the same grade.

II. Greater Flexibility

1. Inter-class groupings would be made possible, particularly in areas such as reading, where children could move to a different room for skill grouping programs.
2. In Hebrew subjects a greater pool of students would make possible larger and at the same time more homogeneous groups.
3. Ability to offer more alternative programs and classes with each being a viable group.
4. Children who could not now be accommodated in regular classrooms could be provided for. For example, a special education class which is now financially and socially unfeasible.
5. Would allow for greater flexibility in teaching techniques; for example, team teaching.

III. Scholastic Level

This is a major concern to parents in both secular and Judaic studies. In the long run there is no reason to suppose that the merger would have any negative effects. If classes of viable size are maintained and the teacher is competent, there is no reason not to expect superior academic training in all subject areas.

IV. Better Utilization of resources

1. A central library and centralized audio, visual and other sources would go a long ways in eliminating waste and duplication.

Page 2.

2. A teacher in a class of six children is not a maximization of resources.
3. Allowing the teacher more time with individual students in cross-graded problems; for example, a teacher in a class may have reading group A and reading group B to which she allows 30 minutes each, with two classes of the same grade one teacher could spend the entire hour with the students on level A of both groups, while the other teacher could be with students at level B. This is a simplified example.
4. At present our pre-school and kindergarten rooms stand empty all afternoon. The additional enrollment engendered by a merger would make possible the option of afternoon kindergarten and/or pre-school programs.

V. Dual Tract System

Beginning at approximately 3rd or 4th grade, parents would have the option of choosing the type of Jewish education they wish for their children. One "track" would place a heavier emphasis on Talmud and Shulchanorach. The second "track" would have more time on Hebrew language and literature, Jewish History, etc. While children in both tracts would study all of the subjects named, and other subjects such as Torah, Prophets, etc. The time allotment would not be the same in the two tracts and thus one track would emphasize those subjects which were allotted more time. While this point is not necessarily an advantage or disadvantage in itself, it is important to point out that such an option would be available in the educational program.

Proposed: The Board of Directors of Yavneh Day School establishes the following as the "Philosophy of Education" of Yavneh Day School.

Philosophy of Education

Yavneh Day School is a private non-profit community school organized to provide a superior Judaic and General education for the children of Cincinnati. Each child is given the opportunity to achieve maximally in intellectual and creative pursuits, in General and Judaic studies. The school atmosphere is one in which the affirmation and applications of Jewish values are expressed joyously and meaningfully.

The Judaic Studies Program is the "raison d'etre" of Yavneh Day School, providing an enriched environment for learning Jewish traditions and Hebrew language and literature. Yavneh respects the religious orientation of students and teachers (i.e. Orthodox, Conservative, Reform, Reconstructionist, etc.) in the spirit of "K'lal Yisrael", affirmation of the unity of the Jewish people.

Traditional observances are standard procedure, while honoring the fact that diverse practices may be practiced in the home.

Yavneh education is not parochial, but relates to the society as a whole. The school strives to provide each child with the solid foundations necessary for becoming a well-educated and successful modern American Jew.

Yavneh's General Studies program equips each student with the skills, knowledge, attitudes and resources which will enable him/her to excel academically in post-Yavneh educational institutions.

Teachers are cognizant of the fact that children are individuals and learn by different methods and at different rates. Children are given the opportunity to progress at their own pace. Many children use textbooks and other materials from higher grade levels when appropriate. Supplementary text books, audio-visual materials, learning kits and instructional materials are utilized by teachers in meeting the needs of individual students.

Yavneh's Gootman Library also supplements the daily curriculum. Each class visits the library on a scheduled basis. The students are free to take out books or use reference materials at any time. Each class also receives boxes of books for supplementary reading from the Public Library of Cincinnati and Hamilton County. The video tape recorder and television unit housed in the Gootman Library-Media Center make available the best of educational cable television, pre-recorded video tapes, and Yavneh programs. children in need of additional academic support as well as enrichment.

The Morris Weintraub Computer Center provides basic computer literacy for all children, as well as special materials in both general and Judaic studies, utilizing some of the finest educational software available.

Knowledge-Skills-Attitudes Developed at Yavneh

KNOWLEDGE

The child will be able to understand and apply his/her knowledge in the following areas of study: Language arts, Hebrew, Math, Science, Bible, Social Studies, History, Humanities, Jewish Traditions, Israel, Prayer, Fine Arts, and Physical Education.

The child will acquire an awareness of the relationship of traditional studies and contemporary life.

SKILLS

The child will be able to read, compute, write and speak proficiently in English and Hebrew.

The child will be able to think clearly and ritically.

The child will be able to make effective use of reference materials and learning aides.

The child will be able to read and comprehend passages from the Bible, the prayerbook and other classical Jewish texts.

The child will become familiar with American institutions, community institutions and governments.

ATTITUDES

The child will continue to develop his/her concept of G-d.

The child will feel a sense of kindship with all Jews.

A History Of The Yavneh Day School

The child will feel content, proud and secure in his/her Jewish and American identification.

The child will experience excitement in the study of Torah and will desire to continue learning throughout his/her life.

The child will learn to value and strive for excellence.

The child will become aware of, and cherish, his/her American heritage.

The child will attempt to apply Jewish values in his/her daily life.

The child will acquire a strong sense of personal identity, self-worth, and self-confidence.

The child will develop an appreciation for the democratic process.

The child will respect diverse expressions of Jewish and American commitment, and be sensitive to others.

The child will want to support Jewish causes and participate in the religious and social life of the Jewish community.

The child will develop the capacity to accept constructive criticism.

The child will acquire an appreciation of art, music, and literature and come to value creative activity of various forms.

The child will feel deep concern for the welfare of all humankind.

The child will learn that the Judaic and General Studies are complementary to one another and are interrelated.

The child will be able to work cooperatively and responsibly in groups.

The child will be able to solve problems and test his/her ideas in practical ways.

The child will be able to use time independently and responsibly.

Proposed: The Board of Directors of Yavneh Day School
establish the following as its policy on admission to Yavneh
Day School:

Yavneh Day School admits Jewish students of any race,
color, national origin or ethnic background.

Already established as policy 1/9/85.

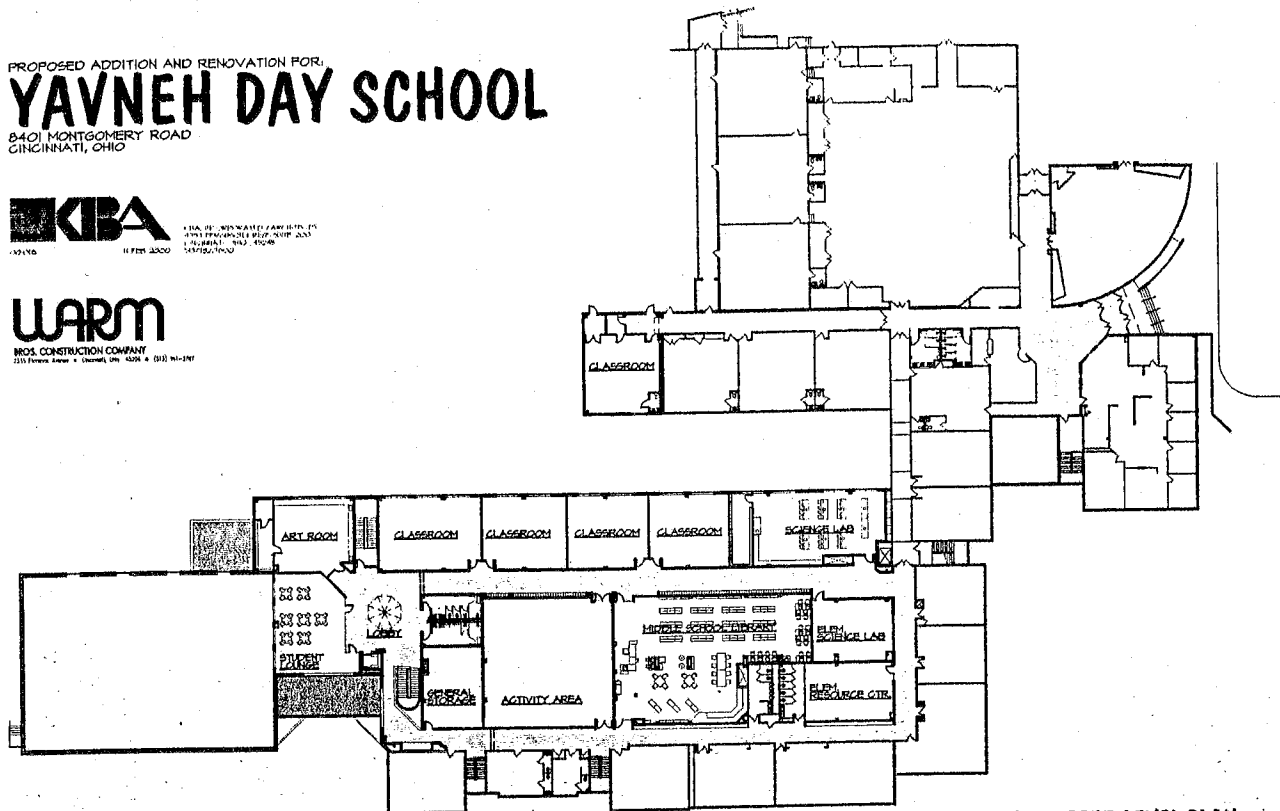
PROPOSED ADDITION AND RENOVATION FOR:
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 8401 MONTGOMERY ROAD
 CINCINNATI, OHIO



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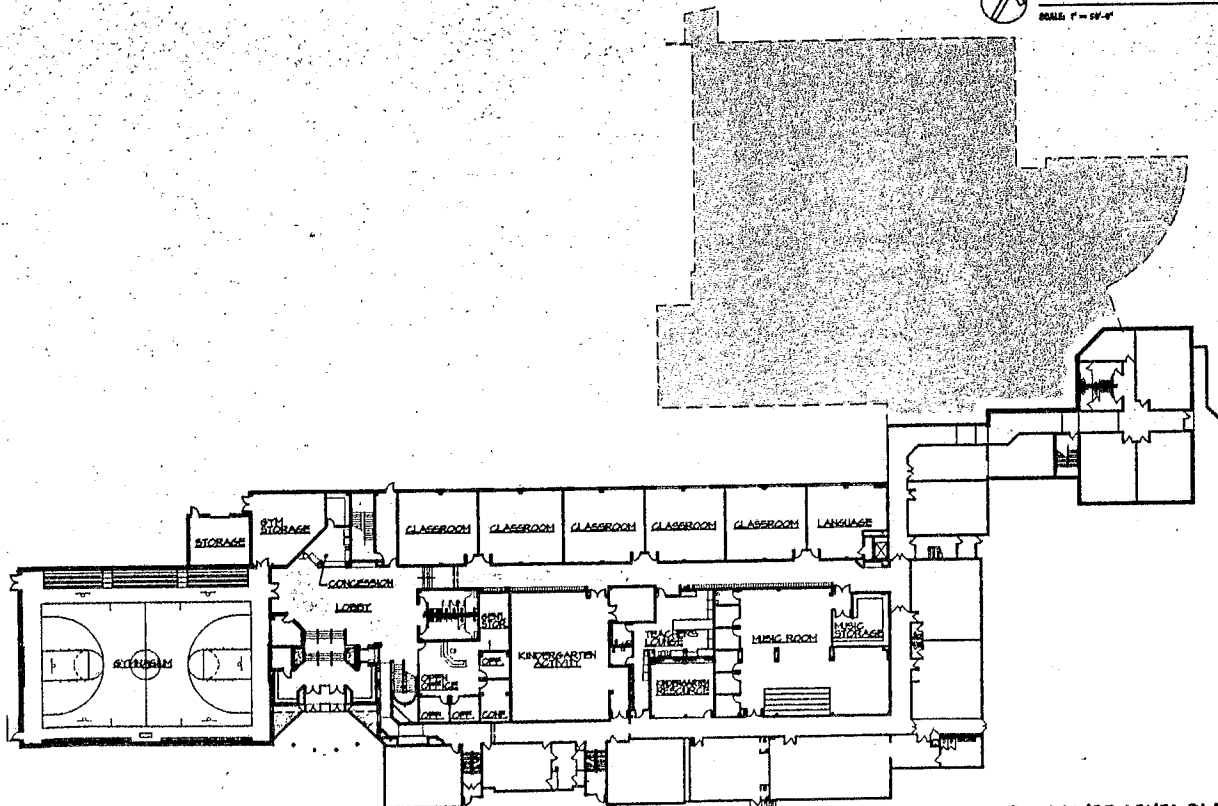


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UPPER LEVEL PLAN

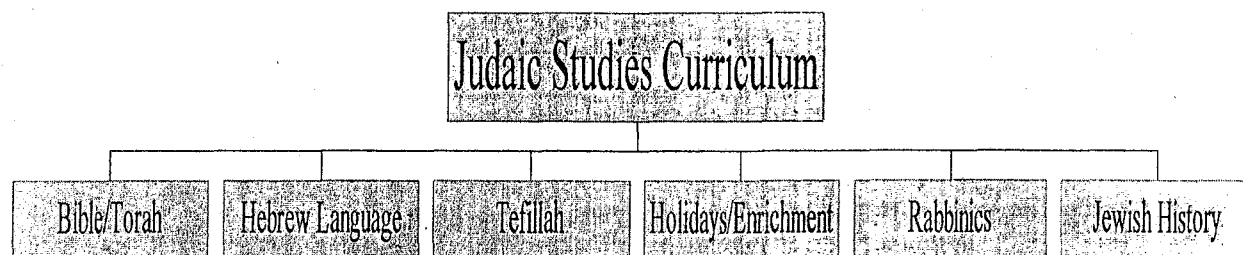
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LOWER LEVEL PLAN

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Yavneh's Curriculum Overview: Judaic Studies



Yavneh Day School offers a number of Judaic subjects for its students. Beginning in First grade, students experience Judaic Studies and General Studies classes on a daily basis. The core curriculum includes Bible and Torah Studies, Hebrew Language, *Tefillah* (Prayer) and Holidays. The remaining subjects are offered only in specific grades, as will be outlined below.

In pre-school and Kindergarten, each classroom has a dynamic Jewish cultural and academic environment. In addition to the consistent classroom teachers, a Hebrew/Judaic specialist provides specific Judaic content to each class. In the Preschool, each class has a specialist three times per week. In the Kindergarten, a specialist comes into each class daily.

Tefillah Objectives by Grade

Preschool: What's A Bracha?

1. Students will be able to recite and sing the blessings outlined on the checklist.
2. Students will understand the purposes of blessings and which blessings to recite at certain times.

Kindergarten: The Many Brachot we Make.

1. Students will be able to recite and sing the blessings outlined on the checklist.
2. Students will be able to understand the purposes of blessings and which blessings to recite at certain times.

First Grade: Shacharit and the Importance of the Synagogue.

1. Previous blessings will be reinforced.
2. Students will be introduced to the *Siddur* and be able to pray most of *Shacharit*.
3. Students will be able to decode prayers and blessings from the *Siddur*.
4. Students will explore the relationship between prayer and G-d.
5. Students will explore the components of a holy place, such as a synagogue.
6. Students will master *Bircat HaMazon*.

Second Grade: The Many Ways We Show Respect Through Prayer.

1. Previous knowledge of blessings and prayers will be reinforced.
2. Students will explore the rituals within the prayer service that demonstrate respect to G-d and others.
3. Students will learn the names and definitions of the different times people pray, including *Shaharit*, *Mincha*, *Ma'ariv*, special occasions, and before study.

Third Grade: Understanding Shaharit.

1. Previous blessings and prayers will be reinforced.
2. Students will learn the order and make-up of *Shaharit* and be able to map it out.
3. Students will learn the additional prayers that are a part of the *Shaharit* service as a way to prepare them for services in the following year.
4. Students will learn the structure of the *Havdalah* service and be able to recite it.

Fourth Grade: Understanding the Siddur and The Shema.

1. Previous blessings and prayers will be reinforced.
2. Students will compare and contrast *Siddur Mephorash* with *Siddur Shiloh* to understand page differentials, as well as address the challenges of no longer having English in the text.
3. Students will become accustomed to having a new *Siddur*.
4. Students will learn about the historical development of the *Siddur*.
5. Students will learn the structure and comprehend the meaning of the *Shema*, the *Ve'ahava*, and the blessings before and after.
6. Students will feel comfortable reciting the entire *Shema* and the blessings before and after.

Fifth Grade: Understanding the Torah Service.

1. Previous blessings and prayers will be reinforced.
2. Students will learn about the development and structure of the entire Torah Service.
3. Students will understand the meanings of all components of the Torah Service.
4. Students will learn how to chant Torah.
5. Students will learn about the concepts of *Keva* and *Kavannah* and how they apply to prayer.
6. Students will also study the structure, meaning, and components of *Bircat HaMazon*.

Sixth Grade: Comparing the Different Prayer Services and Understanding the *Amida*.

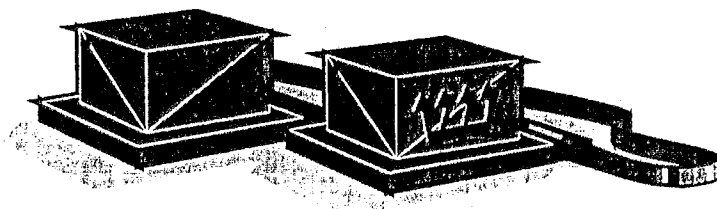
1. Previous blessings and prayers will be reinforced.
2. Students will compare the structures of the *Shaharit* with *Minha*, and *Ma'ariv*.
3. Students will learn *Haftarah Trop*.
4. Students will learn *Megillah Trop* and recite *Megillat Esther*.
5. Students will learn about the history and development of the *Amidah*.
6. Students will be able to understand the different components of the *Amidah* and the meanings of each blessing.
7. Students will take a leadership role in *Tefillah*.

Seventh Grade: The Historical Development of Prayer and Understanding *Hallel*.

1. Previous blessings and prayers will be reinforced.
2. Students will learn about the historical development of prayer in conjunction with the history curriculum.
3. Students will learn to develop and deliver *Divrei Torah*.
4. Students will learn about *Tefillin* and how to use them.
5. Students will be able to identify Temple rituals within prayers.
6. Students will be able to understand the structure and content of the *Hallel* service.
7. Students will take a leadership role in *Tefillah*.

Eighth Grade: The Shabbat Services.

1. Previous blessings and prayers will be reinforced.
2. Students will learn to develop and deliver *Divrei Torah*.
3. Students will learn the structure of the meanings of *Kabbalat HaShabbat* and *Shabbat* morning Service.
4. Students will create their own *Siddur* to bring to Israel.
5. Students will create and lead services for the Middle School *Shabbaton*.
6. Students will take a leadership role in *Tefillah*.



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Histories Collection: Deborah Ann Michael

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Interviews Conducted: (Tapes and transcripts or notes located at American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati, OH)

Nachum Eden – Founder of Yavneh Day School

Sham Eden – Founder of Yavneh Day School, organizer of Eden Collection

Ophra Weisberg – Teacher at Yavneh Day School

David Weisberg – Past President of Yavneh Day School

Lee-Shai Weissbach – Student in first Yavneh class and son of a former teacher at Yavneh Day School

Alan Wolf – Past President of Yavneh Day School

Mitchell Flatow – Head of School, Yavneh Day School

Barbara Rabkin – Director Of Development, Yavneh Day School

Morton Rabkin – Past President of Yavneh Day School

Shoshie and Martin Grad – Former Teacher at Yavneh Day School and founders of the school

Yavneh Students: Sarah Ganson, Tehila Wise, Teki Maddy, Meryl Shulman, Sharon Maliniak, Nuriya Neuman.

Cory Chargo – Principal for Judaic Studies, Yavneh Day School

Miriam Bernstein – Builder of Yavneh Day School and daughter of Yavneh founder

Ezra Spicehandler – Founder of Yavneh Day School

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