2009 March of the Living – Los Angeles Delegation

Report 1: Ethnography of the Journey

Submitted by Tobin Belzer PhD
September 2009

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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Background

The March of the Living is an annual, international program that brings Jewish teens from 60 countries to encounter two sites of fundamental importance to the Jewish people: Poland and Israel. The 2009 Los Angeles delegation of 136 teens was among the nearly 2,500 high school students from North America. Every year, along with Jewish educators, Holocaust survivors, and community leaders, participants spend a week visiting concentration camps and former sites of Jewish life and culture in Poland. On Yom HaShoah (Holocaust Remembrance Day), thousands of participants walk from Auschwitz to Birkenau in symbolic reference to the Nazi death marches that occurred near the end of World War II. A second march occurs a week later in Jerusalem. Participants walk from Jerusalem City Hall to the Kotel in celebration of Yom Ha'aztmaut (Israeli Independence Day). In Israel, delegations also commemorate Yom HaZikaron (Israeli Memorial Day), tour historical and religious sites and meet with Israelis.

The experience is meant to: foster students' attachment to Israel, help them make emotional associations between the Holocaust and Israel, encourage reflection about their lives and Jewish identities, and increase their sense of Jewish peoplehood.

Context

In 2008, the Los Angeles Bureau of Jewish Education received a three-year grant from the Jim Joseph Foundation to benefit the March of the Living program. The funds are supporting the expansion of recruitment efforts, the facilitation of alumni engagement, and a process of documentation and evaluation.

This report is the first of two in the course of the documentation and evaluation process. The current report is an ethnographic study of the 2009 Los Angeles March of the Living experience: from the application process to students' perceptions of the trip's initial impact on their attitudes, knowledge, and behavior. Utilizing multiple research methods – including participant observation, qualitative interviews, and examination of program related documents – the study examines events, activities, and relationships and explores participants' and staff members' perceptions of the trip. This research contributes to a greater understanding of the learning processes that takes place during the journey, adding empirical data to the heretofore anecdotal accounts of students' "life-changing" and "transformational" experiences.

The second report, to be submitted in August 2010, will be an evaluation of recruitment efforts for the 2010 trip, and engagement activities for 2009 and 2010 alumni. That report will explore the extent to which individuals are using the resources available to them as alumni. It will also examine the scope of alumni's Jewish involvement and engagement. Finally, the evaluation will study the effectiveness of recruitment efforts.

Types of Education

The educational approach of the program was based on experiential learning. The schedule included almost 50 sites and activities during the 13-day trip. Rather than an educational focus on knowledge acquisition, the cultivation of participants' emotional connections to the subject matter was prioritized.

The current report describes the trip through the lens of seven educational processes: 1) Emotional modeling and experiential framing, 2) Site-based learning, 3) Commemorations and celebrations, 4) Intercultural exposure, 5) Interactions with living history, 6) Group process, and 7) Self-reflection.

People

Students

- Most of the 136 participants (88%) attended one of two Jewish day schools.

- The majority of students are Ashkenazi Jews, and a large number are Persian.
- Every participant had a previous affiliation with at least one Jewish organization, including synagogues, day schools, youth groups and camps.
- 82% had traveled to Israel prior to the trip.

Staff

- All but four of the 18 staff members took part in the trip as volunteers.
- Staff members ranged in age from their mid-20s to mid-50s.
- Among the staff were a social worker, a psychologist, two medical doctors, a rabbi and a song leader. Other staff members were Jewish educators, Jewish communal service professionals and lay people.

Survivors

- The five survivors who participated are in their early 80s.
- Every survivor had previously participated in the March of the Living.
- The survivors frequently speak publically about their life histories, and have been honored as community leaders and philanthropists.

Impact

Students' initial responses to the program varied. In the few months following the trip, some noted a change in attitude, while others responded intellectually. Still others said the trip motivated them to act differently. Many students reported that the trip affected them on multiple levels. Among interview respondents, no significant differences emerged from the responses of day school and non-day school students.

Attitudes

- Students who had never been to Israel, as well as those who had, described increased feelings of attachment to the State as a result of the trip.
- Some felt a stronger sense of Jewish identification and pride.
- Many expressed a greater appreciation for their lives in general.

Knowledge

- The trip made the Holocaust "more real," according to many students.
- Students reported an increased understanding of anti-Semitism.
- Some expressed a greater awareness of Jewish diversity.

Behavior

- The trip motivated many students to consider involvement in Jewish student life during college.
- Some became interested in taking college courses in Jewish and Israel Studies.
- A small number of participants decided to increase their religious practice.
- Many felt motivated to return to Israel.
- A few students said they felt more confident standing up for themselves as Jews.
- Most made new friends.
- Some expressed a desire to help publicize the trip.

Observations and Selected Suggestions

Participants were given a broad range of opportunities to make intellectual and emotional connections: by traveling to historical sites, participating in celebrations and commemorations, interacting with Jews and non-Jews, and forming relationships with survivors. There was time for self-reflection and occasions to learn through interactions with others. The data corroborate anecdotal assertions that the March of the Living is, in the short term, impacting both day school and non-day school students by: fostering their sense of attachment to Israel, helping them make emotional associations between the Holocaust and Israel, encouraging them to reflect on their lives and Jewish identities, and promoting their awareness of Jewish peoplehood. Participants articulated an understanding of the danger of intolerance and expressed a sense of responsibility to act as witnesses. Every interview respondent felt that the trip was a valuable life experience.

The following observations and related suggestions are made with the intention of highlighting opportunities to enhance the program and maximize educational efficacy. They are compiled from staff members' and participants' insights, along with those drawn from the research process.

1. **Participants had varied levels of familiarity with Jewish rituals and Hebrew.**
   To make the trip more accessible to students who have less Jewish and Holocaust education, and to provide additional learning opportunities:
   - Contextualize Jewish content, so students who are less familiar can more fully engage. For example, before the group says the Mourner's Kaddish and sings Hatikvah for the first time, a brief explanation of the meaning and relevance of those actions would be beneficial.
   - Give students reading materials to orient them about the historical places they visit.
   - Provide a learner's minyan on Shabbat.

2. **The educational component of the week in Israel was underdeveloped.**
   To enhance the educational depth during the week in Israel:
   - Help participants make connections between the Holocaust and Israel by exploring survivors' roles in the creation of the State.
   - Enrich participants' understanding of the complexity of tolerance in a contemporary milieu by discussing the Israeli/Palestinian conflict.

3. **The presence of a single Holocaust educator limited opportunities for learning.**
   To offer an optimal educational experience during the week in Poland:
   - Each bus would benefit from the presence of a Holocaust educator who could teach while the group is in transit, preparing students with information about what they will see at each site.
   - The presence of additional educators would more successfully engage students at each site, where it is challenging for the large group to gather around and listen to one person.

4. **Shabbat observance was not fully utilized as an opportunity for education, spirituality, and group cohesion.**
   To create a meaningful Shabbat experience for the group, when individuals have differing religious preferences:
   - Use pre-trip meetings to orient students about the spirit of a communal Shabbat celebration.
   - Showcase the prayer styles of students' various religious denominations and use services as an opportunity to teach about religious tolerance.
   - Offer traditional services to the entire group, framing the experience as cultural immersion and a tribute to the religious Jews who perished.

5. **Reflections groups were facilitated with varied levels of skill.**
   To offer skillfully facilitated reflections groups to all students:
   - Train staff to use a variety of small group facilitation techniques.
   - Provide staff members with guidance about specific topics and themes to explore with the students.

6. **The trip raised participants' awareness of the importance of tolerance, but did not equip them to operationalize those ideals.**
   To help participants to utilize the lessons of the trip:
   - Offer a workshop about Israel advocacy during the week in Israel.
   - Provide concrete suggestions about how participants can enact their responsibility as "witnesses."
   - Educate about contemporary anti-Semitism and anti-Zionism and recommend ways for participants to react if they are faced with such prejudices on their college campuses.
   - Supply participants with a resource guide of local, national, and international organizations working to stop racial injustice and religious persecution.

Table of Contents

I. Background

The March of the Living is an annual, international program that brings Jewish teens from 60 countries to encounter two sites of fundamental importance to the Jewish people: Poland and Israel.[1] The 2009 Los Angeles delegation of 136 teens was among the nearly 2,500 high school students from North America. Every year, along with Jewish educators, Holocaust survivors, and community leaders, participants spend a week visiting concentration camps and former sites of Jewish life and culture in Poland. On Yom HaShoah (Holocaust Remembrance Day), thousands of participants walk from Auschwitz to Birkenau in symbolic reference to the Nazi death marches that occurred near the end of World War II. A second march occurs a week later in Jerusalem. Participants walk from Jerusalem City Hall to the Kotel in celebration of Yom Ha'aztmaut (Israeli Independence Day). In Israel, delegations also commemorate Yom HaZikaron (Israeli Memorial Day), tour historical and religious sites and meet with Israelis.

The March of the Living International is the umbrella organization that coordinates the two marches, and helps delegations organize logistics in both countries, arranging details such as security and food. Each delegation is responsible for creating its own itinerary and educational agenda. The national organization offers the use of a curriculum in the form of a 300-page study guide that includes Holocaust and Israeli history, excerpts from autobiographical and fictional writing and reflective exercises.

Rather than utilizing the study guide, the Los Angeles delegation's educational agenda in 2009 was based almost entirely on experiential learning. The schedule included almost 50 sites and activities during the 13-day trip (see *Appendix A: Trip Itinerary*). Rather than an educational focus on knowledge acquisition, the cultivation of participants' emotional connections to the subject matter was prioritized. The experience is meant to: foster students' attachment to Israel, help them make emotional associations between the Holocaust and Israel, encourage reflection about themselves "as a Jew and as human beings," and give them a "concrete sense of Jewish peoplehood."[2] According to trip administrators, the March of the Living experience gives students "positive tools" for ensuring that "issues of personally responsibility, Jewish identity, social justice and Jewish peoplehood" are central to who they are in their new college communities. Participants are meant to leave the trip with an "understanding of the danger of intolerance and hatred" and a responsibility to be vocal witnesses: sharing the survivors' stories and "refusing to stand idly by in the face of injustice."

II. Context

In 2008, the Los Angeles Bureau of Jewish Education received a three-year grant from the Jim Joseph Foundation to benefit the March of the Living program. The funds are supporting the expansion of recruitment efforts, the facilitation of alumni engagement, and a process of documentation and evaluation.

Between 2005 and 2009, the number of students who participated in the trip rose from 51 to 136. According to trip administrators, this growth was the result of relationship building within two non-Orthodox day schools in Los Angeles. At these high schools, support of faculty and administrators, as well

[1] Though the majority of participants tend to be Jewish high school students, Jewish adult groups and non-Jewish groups also participate.

[2] These quotes are drawn from three "thinking papers" that were produced by the Los Angeles Bureau of Jewish Education for fundraising purposes.

as word-of-mouth among students has made trip participation part of the culture of students' senior year. As a result, the majority of trip participants in recent years have attended one of these two schools: 92% (120) of the 130 students who attended in 2008 graduated from Jewish day schools and 10 students (8%) did not. In 2009, 17 of the 136 students (13%) did not attend Jewish day schools. Support from the Jim Joseph Foundation funded a part-time recruiter whose primary goal is to increase the number of participants who do not attend Jewish day schools. The recruiter, Dalia Moghavem was hired and trained during the recruitment season for the 2009 trip. The recruitment season for the 2010 trip will be the first, full-scale recruitment effort.

Additionally, Pam Ganz was employed as the alumni engagement coordinator. Her role is to facilitate alumni's process of moving from the emotion generated by the March of the Living trip to action. Using a "case management approach" the engagement coordinator aims to help alumni articulate and actualize their interests in Jewish and civic activism and involvement. A website is currently being developed to provide alumni with a "virtual resource center" and a Facebook group has been created.

The author was hired in January 2009 to provide documentation of the 2009 March of the Living trip, and conduct an evaluation of participant recruitment and alumni engagement efforts through August 2010. Documenting the phenomenological processes of the entire March of the Living cycle – before, during and after the trip – is meant to facilitate learning and possible adaptation of program strategies.

This report is the first of two in the course of the documentation and evaluation process. The current report is an ethnographic study of the 2009 Los Angeles March of the Living experience: from the application process to students' perceptions of the trip's initial impact on their attitudes, knowledge, and behavior. The study examines events, activities, and relationships and explores participants' and staff members' perceptions of the trip. This research contributes to a greater understanding of the learning processes that take place during the journey, adding empirical data to the heretofore anecdotal accounts of students' "life-changing" and "transformational" experiences. The trip is described in thick detail and analyzed through the lens of seven educational processes:

1) Emotional modeling and experiential framing
2) Site-based learning
3) Commemorations and celebrations
4) Intercultural exposure
5) Interaction with living history
6) Group process
7) Self-reflection[3]

This approach to understanding the educational components of the journey emerged from the raw data inductively. Interviews and field notes were systematically coded and grouped into similar concepts. The seven educational processes surfaced as categories based on those concepts. The core of the report is organized around the seven educational processes. It is followed by an explication of students' perceptions of the initial impact of the journey, which were expressed in terms of changes in attitude, knowledge and

[3] The multiple processes have been delineated for analytical purposes. As the report illustrates, components of each are found in every educational process.

behavior. Finally, observations and related suggestions are made with the intention of highlighting opportunities to enhance the program and maximize educational efficacy.

The second report, to be submitted in August 2010, will be an evaluation of recruitment efforts for the 2010 trip and engagement activities for 2009 and 2010 alumni. That report will explore the extent to which individuals are using the resources available to them as alumni. It will also examine alumni's Jewish involvement and engagement. Finally, the evaluation will study the effectiveness of recruitment efforts.

III. Research Methods

Multiple research methods were used to collect data, including participant observation, qualitative interviews, and examination of program related documents.

Participant Observation
Participant observation was conducted at the three orientations and throughout the 2009 trip. This research included direct observation, and participation in the life of the group. Approximately 20 informal interviews were conducted during the trip.

Qualitative Interviews
In-depth, open-ended interviews were conducted with program coordinators prior to and following the trip. 12 of the 18 staff members and 21 teen participants (15%) were interviewed. Interviews lasted between 45-75 minutes.

A purposive sample was constructed for interviewing teen participants, for which subjects were selected based on specific characteristics. The sample included 12 participants from Jewish day schools and 9 participants from non-Jewish public and private schools. Non-day school students were purposefully over-represented in the sample: they were 43% of the interview sample, but made up only 12% of the entire group. The sample was also constructed to include a large percentage of students who had never been to Israel. Six of the 21 interview respondents (29%), traveled to Israel for the first time on the trip, but only 15% of the entire group had never been. The perspectives of these students were particularly valuable, since they represent a target population for future recruitment efforts.

The sample was constructed to echo the demographics of the group as a whole in terms of gender. As with the larger group, 57% of interview participants were young women and 43% were young men. Like the larger population, interview participants had diverse ethnic backgrounds including: Ashkenazi, Persian, Israeli, Sephardic, and a combination of ethnicities. Upon graduating from high school, interview participants attended Ivy League schools and community colleges, as well as state and private universities in seven states.

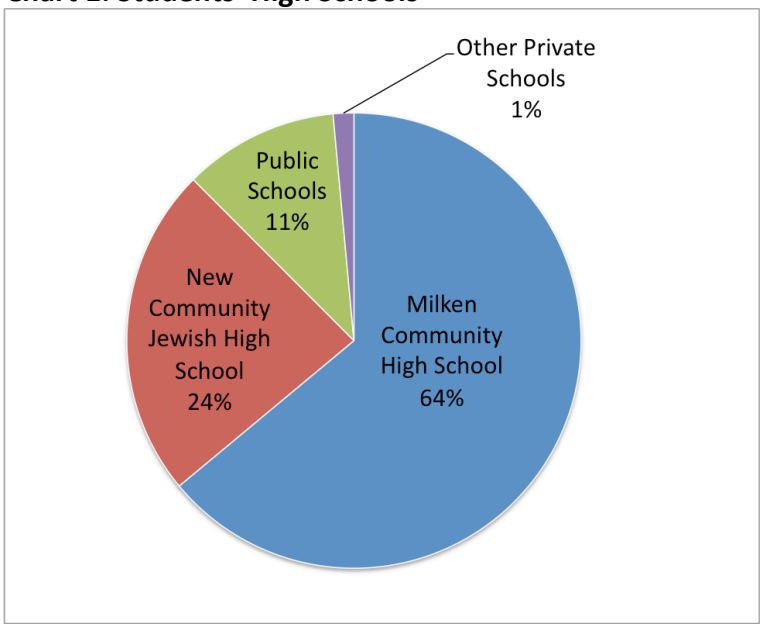
Secondary Sources and Related Documents
Analysis of relevant program-related documents is integrated into the report, including: 1) information from participants' applications, 2) preparatory materials provided to staff members, 3) articles about the program (from school newspapers), 4) program marketing materials, and 5) the travel blog written by staff and participants during the trip. Also included in the analysis are reflective writing submitted by seven students and two staff members.

IV. People

Students

The 136 high school seniors who participated in the March of the Living attended 11 public and private high schools across Los Angeles County. (*Appendix B: Profiles of Participants' High Schools* offers brief descriptions of each school). As Chart 1 illustrates, the majority of students (88%) attended one of two Jewish day schools: Milken Community High School (Milken) in Los Angeles and New Community Jewish High School (NJCHS) in the San Fernando Valley.

Chart 1: Students' High Schools



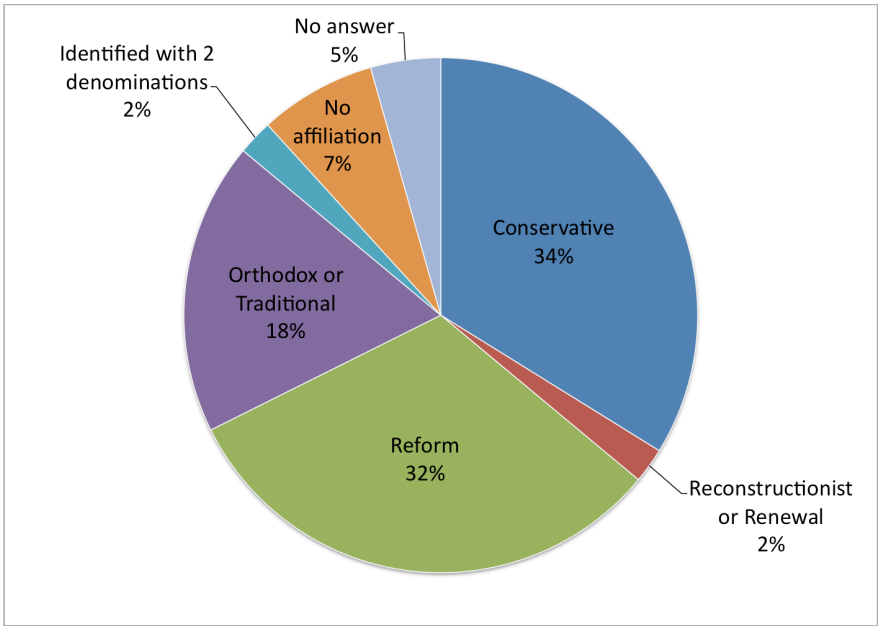
17 participants (16%) did not attend Jewish day schools. Of those, 9 were young men and 8 were young women. Some attended public schools in areas with large Jewish populations: six participants attended Beverly Hills High School, two attended Palisades Charter High School, another two attended Agoura High School and one student attended Hamilton High School. A smaller number attended public schools in areas with small Jewish populations: two participants attended Mira Costa High School, and one each attended San Pedro and Westchester High Schools. Only two students attended non-Jewish private high schools. Both of those schools, Harvard-Westlake School and Campbell Hall School, have Episcopal affiliations, but sizeable (generally secular) Jewish populations.

Among those who attended are students with diverse family backgrounds: most participants are Ashkenazi Jews, and a large number are Persian. A much smaller number are Israeli and Sephardic. A few have one parent who converted to Judaism. Some mentioned celebrating Christian holidays with their non-Jewish family members. At least two participants are adopted. Some have single parents, others have stepfamilies, and still others grew up in multi-generational families. Some participants have parents with disabilities and some have siblings with special needs. A few students identify as gay or lesbian.

Every participant had a previous affiliation with at least one Jewish organization, including synagogues, day schools, youth groups and camps. 120 (88%) said their family was affiliated with a synagogue. Students

identified across the religious spectrum. Chart 2 shows the broad range of denominational affiliation among participants.

Chart 2: Denominational Affiliation



11 students (7%) said they had no synagogue affiliation. However, lack of synagogue affiliation was not indicative of the extent of their Jewish involvement: 10 of the 11 students who were not affiliated with a synagogue attended Jewish day schools. Of the 17 participants who did not attend Jewish day school, 16 were affiliated with synagogues. Just one student neither attended Jewish day school nor was affiliated with a synagogue. Yet he too had Jewish communal ties: while he attended public high school, he had previously attended Orthodox elementary school. Additionally, both of his brothers had previously participated in the March.

Profile of Non-Day School Students

- 17 participants did not attend Jewish schools
- 8 young men and 9 young women
- 15 attended public school and 2 attended private school
- Synagogue Affiliation:
  - 10 Conservative
  - 3 Reform
  - 3 Traditional/Sephardic
  - 1 had no affiliation
- 8 had never before been to Israel
- 14 requested financial aid information

Almost every student knew at least one other participant prior to the trip, whether or not they attended the same high schools. Many spent time at camps, or participated in Jewish youth groups together. Others attended the same Jewish pre-schools or elementary schools. Some were long-time family friends. Many students mentioned that they knew participants on the trip indirectly, because they were "friends of friends."

Since the majority of the group was educated in Jewish day schools, most had extensive education about the Holocaust. The majority of students indicated that they had spoken with a survivor prior to the March. Approximately 20% indicated that they had Holocaust survivors and victims in their families

Though the majority of students grew up in affluent neighborhoods, the cost of the two-week trip was still a challenge for many families. The price, including airfare, room and board, and tuition was $5195. 66% of all students who applied for the trip requested information about financial aid.

Subsidies and need-based assistance were provided to approximately 44% of participants. 9 of the 17 non-day school participants received financial aid. The funding came from the Los Angeles Federation, the Bureau of Jewish Education, grants, participants' synagogues, and private donors. The promotional literature advertising the trip emphatically states that the cost of the trip should not prohibit to any student from attending. One participant explained her financial situation in these words:

> The trip wasn't that accessible. I kept telling my parents I want to do this; we have to try to make it happen. I was basically convincing them to spend money they didn't have. But they knew it was very important.

Some spent their Bar and Bat Mitzvah money to participate. At least one participant took on a part-time job to earn money to pay for the trip. Another asked his friends to make contributions toward the trip, rather than give him birthday presents.

Interests and Activities

During high school, both day school and non-day school students participated in an array of extracurricular activities. Many volunteered for social service programs: they worked at food pantries, homeless shelters, the Jewish Home for the Aged, and at the Veterans Hospital. They were involved with Jewish Big Brothers/Big Sisters, teen crisis hotlines, and programs for children with special needs. They spent their time as volunteers at Los Angeles Public Libraries and animal shelters. A small number of participants volunteered at the Museum of Tolerance and at the Los Angeles Holocaust Museum. Many worked on broad social issues, like environmental advocacy and Darfur activism. A few were involved in their schools' Gay-Straight Alliance.

While volunteering was widespread among the students, some also worked in paying jobs. They were camp counselors, baby sitters, and dance teachers. They worked in clothing stores and frozen yogurt shops. At least one was a hostess at a national chain restaurant.

Most had taken on some type of leadership responsibility. Some were involved in school government. A few volunteered on local and national political campaigns. A number of students were members of the National Honor Society. Some were fellows in prestigious national programs for Jewish teens, such as the Diller Teen Fellowship and Bronfman Youth Fellowship. Many were involved in Israel advocacy on their high school campuses and through AIPAC. They were members of Jewish youth movements, including: NFTY, USY, NCSY, and BBYO. Every interview participant who did not attend day school had been involved in a Jewish youth group, attended Jewish camp, or both.

Participants were highly creative. Among them were musicians who played guitar, saxophone, and piano. They participated in choirs and musical theater. They were aspiring filmmakers, journalists, fashion designers, photographers, and fiction writers.

Physical activity was popular among them. They participated in a wide range of sports including basketball, football, swimming, lacrosse, track and field, and volleyball. Some practiced yoga or martial arts. At least

one student was in a bowling league. They performed Israeli dance and one student was a competitive Irish dancer. A few competed in the Maccabiah Games.

Upon graduating, students were headed to Ivy League schools, state and private universities and community colleges. A couple of students were enlisted in the Israeli army and at least one was spending a "gap year" in Israel before attending college. Every interview participant who attended Jewish day school said that when choosing a college, the quality of Jewish life on campus was important to them. Among non-day school students, that priority was not as widespread: more than half interviewed said Jewish life on campus was not a concern to them.

Participants were extremely worldly. They spoke a number of languages, including Hebrew, Yiddish, Spanish, Farsi, French and Ukrainian. With their families and on exchange programs, students had traveled extensively across the United States, Western Europe and the United Kingdom. Many had also visited Canada, Mexico, Argentina, Costa Rica, China, Thailand, the Caribbean Islands and the Bahamas, as well as countries in the Balkan Peninsula, the Baltic States, the Former Soviet Union and the Scandinavian Peninsula.

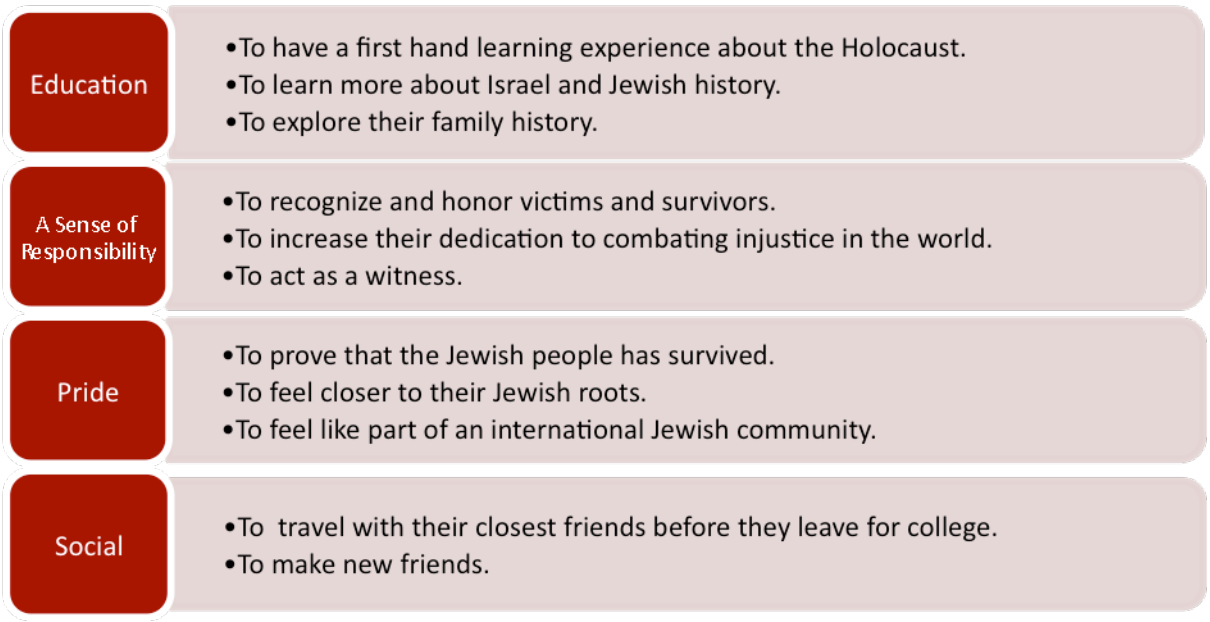
82% of the entire group had been to Israel prior to the March. They traveled on family trips, and participated in teen tours with their schools, youth groups, or camps. Some spent four months living in Israel during their sophomore year of high school. Some had family in Israel who they visited regularly. Before the trip, many already felt a deep sense of attachment to Israel, while others said they were ambivalent or felt no connection. Among the 41 participants who had not previously visited Israel, 8 (20%) were non-day school students.

Almost every student interviewed said they heard about the trip through word-of-mouth. Most knew about the trip through their Jewish day schools. Some students who did not attend day schools learned about the opportunity from their rabbis, or through family friends. A few non-day school students had previous relationships with staff members, who encouraged them to attend. For example, a number of students worked at camp with a March staff member who told them about the trip. One non-day school student learned about the trip from his grandmother, who was friends with one of the survivors. Only one interview participant (a non-day school student) said he learned about the trip proactively: his mother (who had been scanning the Internet on his behalf in search of an Israel trip), came across the March website.

Motivations

The majority of the senior class from Milken attended the trip. "It's like the Milken senior trip," a student explained. The seniors at Milken heard about the trip for years: older friends, siblings, and cousins participated, and returned enthused about the experience. For some students, the program was a family tradition. A student from NJCHS emphatically explained: "Everyone who came on the March in my family has seen the suitcase with [our family's name on it]: I can't not see it!"

Students articulated various motivations for participating. In their applications, many mentioned friends and family members who participated in previous years. They heard from multiple sources that the trip was "amazing," "life changing," and happened "once in a lifetime." A number of themes emerged from among the motivations articulated by the students. They chose to participate for educational, emotional, and social reasons. Some felt a responsibility to attend and others saw the trip as an expression of pride.



The trip attracted a particular type of student. In general, participants were: high achievers, who affiliated across the spectrum of Jewish belief and observance. They tended to be self-reflective about their Jewish identities and were interested in their Jewish heritage. They were all connected, to varying degrees, to networks of Jewish students and organizations.

Staff

The 18 staff members were fundamental to the success of the trip. The staff included three individuals who are employed by the BJE to work on the March during the year: the director, alumni engagement coordinator, and the recruiter. The Holocaust educator was the forth non-volunteer member of the staff.

Monise Neumann, the director of the Los Angeles delegation has worked for the Bureau of Jewish Education in various capacities for more that 20 years. The 2009 March was her fourth as the program's director. The alumni engagement coordinator also served as a staff member on the trip. She focused on making personal connections with as many students as possible. By building those relationships, she aims to strengthen her ability to maintain connections with alumni. The recruiter for the Los Angeles delegation accompanied the trip to familiarize herself with the program and improve her ability to attract participants. Throughout Poland, a Holocaust educator accompanied the delegation. The educator, Ronnie Mink, who also works as a headmaster at a Jewish day school in South Africa, has been studying Holocaust history for more than 30 years. He was the former chair of the South African National Yad Vashem Memorial Foundation.

Every other staff member took part in the trip as a volunteer.[4] Among the volunteer staff were a social worker, a psychologist, two medical doctors, a rabbi and a song leader. Other volunteer staff members were Jewish educators and Jewish communal service professionals. Two staff members were BJE Board

[4] In some delegations, staff members are required to pay their own way, resulting in a staff composed solely of people who are able to fund their trip. According to the program director, the Los Angeles staff was assembled based on individuals' qualifications and compatibility, rather than their ability to pay for the trip.

Members who were recently honored for their years of commitment to improving Jewish education. Many of the staff members had years of experience leading teen trips and working with teens as camp counselors and youth advisors.

The rabbi on the trip has been nationally recognized for his achievements in Jewish education. He teaches Jewish law at a modern Orthodox day school in Los Angeles and has taught Jewish studies at Milken Community High School. He is also the assistant rabbi of a modern Orthodox synagogue. He did not serve as the trip's sole religious leader or educator. Though he assumed some rabbinic functions on the trip, he was one of a number of staff members who led prayers, facilitated discussions and offered counsel to students. Like other staff members, he was a resource for students' who had religious and theological questions. He led services for the entire group once during the trip, which led to a heated debate about how to best approach observance in a religiously diverse group (see the Group Discussion section on page 23). The rabbi also accompanied a small group of students who chose to attend traditional services on Shabbat, while the majority of the group participated in more Conservative style services.

Having a modern Orthodox rabbi on the trip was beneficial to some participants, but was not particularly advantageous to others. Some students, who came from traditional Sephardic backgrounds, said they had never before encountered an Orthodox rabbi with whom they could relate. To them, he provided a model of openness and accessibility that expanded their image of what a rabbi could be. Other participants expressed confusion as to why a modern Orthodox rabbi accompanied the trip, when no participants identified that way. Some said that a Reform or Conservative rabbi would have been a useful addition to the trip, since the majority of students affiliated with those denominations. According to the director, an Orthodox rabbi was chosen as a staff member to accommodate the minority of religious participants. She found a rabbi with experience working across denominations, in hopes that he would be accessible to Reform and Conservative participants as well.

The social worker on staff has worked at Jewish Family Service of Los Angeles for two decades. She has worked extensively with Café Europa, a Holocaust survivors' support group and had previous relationship with the survivors who participated in the trip. Her primary role was to support the survivors, though she also attended to students as needed. Along with the trip psychologist, she checked in with a few students daily. The medical doctors were also in regular communication with students who had health concerns.

Some staff had been on the trip before: the 2009 March was the social worker's fourth time on the trip. Five staff members were accompanying the trip for the second time. The majority of staff members (ten people) were new to the program. The gender composition of the staff roughly replicated that of the participants, with slightly more women than men. Staff members ranged in age from their mid-20s to mid-50s. Like the students, there was a broad range of religious observance among them.

Staff members assumed both educational and supervisory roles, as well as providing emotional support to students and survivors. *Appendix C: Organizational Structure* provides an overview of the staffing configuration. 12 staff members led reflection groups: small groups of 10-12 teens that met at various points during the trip for facilitated discussions. Every student was assigned to a reflection group, and to one of four buses. Two staff members were track leaders, who each oversaw two buses. A senior staff person was a bus captain on each bus. Each bus also had at least two younger staff members. Other staff members like the Holocaust educator, the social worker and the song leader, as well as the survivors, switched buses throughout the trip. Local tour guides and security guards accompanied each bus in both

Poland and Israel.

Staff members also helped with logistics. Moving the entire group of more than 160 people and their belongings across two countries was a cooperative effort. Each person's luggage was labeled with a red, blue, green or orange luggage tag that corresponded with the color of his or her assigned bus. Rooms were assigned for each of six hotels and were coordinated with attention to students' roommate preferences. A volunteer staff member oversaw the hotel check-in, which included passing out and collecting more than 50 keys multiple times. Before the trip, additional volunteers were needed to help with administrative details.

Prior to the trip, the staff met once for an orientation. At that meeting, they were familiarized with the trip itinerary and logistics. They discussed the trip rules and the Standards of Behavior contract that each student signed. The religious policies were also reviewed. Staff members learned about their particular roles and expectations were discussed. Every student who had health or psychological concerns was talked about. Students' possible emotions and reactions to the experience were reviewed.

Though many had never been on the March, every staff member had a previous relationship with at least one other on staff. Many had been colleagues in other capacities, and others had been longtime friends. In many cases, people had multiple connections. One of the first-time staff members, for example, worked at a camp with a veteran staffer. Additionally, she was a family friend of at least two other staff members, one of whom "watched her grow up." Two staff members were brothers. Another two were mother and son.

The staff was a group of individuals who were dedicated to Holocaust education, and fostering teens' Jewish identities. They temporarily put aside their families and occupations, and many used their vacation time to work as volunteers. They had deep connections to their own Jewish identities and commitments to Jewish education and community. Staff members modeled a positive image of Jewish adulthood for the students.

Survivors

Both staff members and students asserted that the five survivors who participated were of profound importance to the trip. The four women and one man are in their early 80s. Each survivor had previously been on the March: one had previously participated five times. They live in the same neighborhoods as many of the students: Calabasas, Sherman Oaks, North Hollywood, Los Angeles and the Pacific Palisades. Some of the survivors have health concerns: one needed a wheelchair at times during the trip, another walks with a cane and still another sleeps with a breathing machine.

The survivors are dedicated Holocaust witnesses who frequently share their life stories as guest speakers in schools, university courses, and at youth group events. One can even be found telling her life story on youtube.com. Their testimonies are part of the USC Shoah Foundation Institute for Visual History and Education. One has volunteered at the Institute for many years and others volunteer in the Holocaust section of Los Angeles' Museum of Tolerance.

They have been honored as community leaders and philanthropists. Newspaper articles have been written about them and at least one has had their story published in a book. Another was the subject of a student-made documentary. They have received community recognition over the years. Most recently, one

survivor was honored during California Holocaust Memorial Week. In 2008, some were awarded honorary high school diplomas from the New Community Jewish High School.

As the delegation traveled through Poland, the survivors told their stories of survival and described their lives before the war. They also talked about their lives since: bragging about their grandchildren and complaining that their kids do not call often enough. Along with the students, survivors endured long bus rides, participated in discussions, and experienced the emotions of the journey. The survivors were treated like the celebrity guests of the trip. Students vied to talk with them, carry their luggage, and walk beside them.

Despite the amount of effort it took to participate, survivors said they valued the opportunity. "We have to retell the stories," a survivor (who was on the trip for the sixth time), asserted: "Its not enough for [the participants] to read about it or see a movie… it's painful to go, but I'm glad I do."

V. Types of Education

Emotional Modeling and Experiential Framing

From the earliest communication with the staff during the application process, the tone of the trip was being shaped. That tone was one of seriousness and import. Potential participants completed a rigorous application and interview process. There was a checklist of requirements that had to be met for applicants to be considered. Requirements included three passport photos, a $500 deposit, letters of recommendation, medical forms, and an online application. The application asked students about their Jewish involvement, curricular and extracurricular activities, and their familial connection (if applicable) to the Holocaust. The application also included an "applicant reflection" question: a short essay explaining why they wished to participate.

The application process was followed by a face-to-face interview at each student's school or at the Bureau of Jewish Education office at the Los Angeles Jewish Federation. Upon acceptance, every student was required to attend three pre-trip orientation meetings, each of which was three hours long and was held at a different location in Los Angeles.

The students were not told that the application process was not actually related to selecting applicants: almost everyone who applied was accepted.[5] The process was designed to frame the experience, ensuring students' commitment and conveying the gravity of the trip. Gathering information about the applicants was almost secondary.

That tone was maintained throughout the orientation meetings. At the first session, students were congratulated for their acceptance into the program. They were given an overview of the trip details, taught the rules and regulations, and given the opportunity to meet the staff and participating survivors. Parents and teens attended one of the three-hour sessions together. When students asked questions, the director responded using their first names, establishing a sense of familiarity and connection.

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[5] To ensure that students were emotionally equipped for the trip, the director spoke with applicants' references.

During each interview, and at every orientation, students were told about the indisputable rules of the trip: 1) no drinking or drugs 2) no leaving the group 3) they must sleep (alone) in their assigned beds and 4) they were not to acquire any tattoos or piercings during the trip. The director warned that if any of these rules were broken, participants would be sent home. She added that if anyone were sent home, their parent would be required to travel to Poland or Israel to pick them up. "We have high standards of behavior," the director explained, "but I know you can do it."

The tone was set using the language of responsibility, privilege, praise, and pride. Students were told of their responsibility to "become witnesses" and were reminded that they are likely to be the last generation that will hear stories directly from the survivors. The trip was described as a privilege, a gift that the survivors were giving them. The director praised the students for their decision to participate. "I'm so grateful that you want to be a spokesperson for people who can't speak for themselves," she asserted, "they can't thank you, so I will." "You can't understand six million," the director repeatedly asserted, "to understand, you have to think of it one story at a time."

She thanked the parents and guardians for allowing their children to participate. She described the March with these words: "Instead of a death march, we are reversing history … we'll march with Jews from 60 countries and show the power of the worldwide Jewish community." 8000 people would be attending the March, which would be filmed live by the Jewish Television Network, she explained.

The survivors' presence at the orientations added to the emotionally potent tone. The director modeled respect and reverence for the students by introducing the survivors as her "heroes." She warned the students never to disrespect them or keep them waiting. The survivors each offered impassioned words. "You give me strength and hope that my story won't be forgotten," one asserted. With tears in her eyes, another said, "My heart is filled with pleasure that you people are so interested in your Jewish heritage." Still another explained, "We promised each other in the camps that we'd tell the story, and now it's up to you." When they finished speaking, the students acknowledged the survivors with a standing ovation.

Group identity building was also fostered at the orientations. Participants were given their official name badges, which they were required to wear every day of the trip. The group responded with applause when they were officially introduced as the "March of the Living – Los Angeles Delegation!" Participants were given matching shirts, jackets, hats, and backpacks, which they would wear throughout the trip. They were given the opportunity to buy Israeli flags, which they could drape over themselves during the March. They were also sold pins to trade with students from other delegations. Accompanied by her guitar, the song leader led the students in the first of many group-singing opportunities.

Students were introduced to what would be an ongoing process of self-reflection, and urged to think of themselves as part of the history they were learning. "You are the subject of the trip, rather than the Holocaust, the victims, or the survivors," they were told by the Phill Liff-Grieff, Associate Director of the BJE, "the trip is a tool to help you look at yourself." Divided into their reflection groups for the first time, the students were asked to discuss the idea of defiance, and urged to think about defiance as something as simple as stealing bread or living one more day. "Telling the story is your act of defiance," they were told. They were asked to bring their own family's stories with them on the trip and reminded that they were learning about their heritage, whether or not they had relatives who were affected.

Other aspects of the orientation included time for students to get to know one another through "ice-breaker" type conversations. Two short films related to the Holocaust were shown. A Polish woman who grew up not knowing she was Jewish shared her life journey, which led her to pursue a master's degree in Jewish Communal Service at Hebrew Union College. Additionally, students were given a small packet of forget-me-not seeds with the instructions to visit the Shoah Victims' Names database on the YadVashem.org website, and select a name to "always remember and keep in [their] heart."

The week in Israel was mentioned far less at the meetings. When it was discussed, the tone was also emotional, but was more celebratory in nature. A short promotional video highlighting the beauty of Israel was played, and a March participant gave an impassioned presentation about the importance of joining AIPAC. Two participants, who had already committed the joining the Israeli army upon graduating, were asked to stand for applause.

Many interview respondents asserted that the most valuable part of the orientations was the opportunity to meet other participants. One student, who did not attend a day school, made this observation about his fellow participants:

> Most of [the participants] are kids who've grown up with Jewish identity through childhood, where it's a big part of their life. They are comfortable taking off and putting on their Jewish identity. My Jewish identity is still in its incubation.

He noted that "getting a feel for what the kids were like was good" and that "meeting the kids in the reflection groups was invaluable, because on the trip, we'd already met them so it was an easy way to connect." Another non-day school student said she felt overwhelmed by the orientation. "Since I never went to any stuff before, it was intense," she said, continuing: "I was like: how intense are these people?"

The experiential framing and emotional modeling proved effective: the tone set through the interview process and at the orientation meetings was maintained throughout the trip. One student articulated the sentiments of many when she explained that the "sensitivity and connection to the story" expressed by the staff and survivors helped her realize: "you don't need to keep yourself distant." Another commented about "all the preaching," but noted that they were preaching a message he wanted to hear.

Site-based Learning

The intensity of the educational experience was related in part to the specific historical sites. Through experiential learning, students were given the opportunity to form direct relationships with the places they visited. Students repeatedly expressed the power of "being there." In a post-trip piece of reflective writing, one participant explained:

> The horrors, the atrocities, the appalling capabilities of the human race that we witnessed firsthand in Poland are simply unbelievable. I must have heard someone in the group exclaiming, "how could anybody do this?" not once, not twice, but at least a thousand times, expressing the rawest form of disbelief at the gruesome reality that lies directly in front of our very eyes. In fact, this mindset lies at the very core of the March of the Living, and why it is of grave importance: such actions as those committed by the Nazis are so far-fetched, so unbelievable, that one must visit the sites and see it for themselves in order to fully grasp the gruesome reality of it.

"It's powerful because it's in your face," another student explained. He continued, describing how "being there" compelled him to ask moral questions about his own behavior, if he were faced with such extreme circumstances:

> American teenagers grow up with a lot of stuff you can just turn off if you don't want to look at it. The trip was something you couldn't turn off. It forced us to except reality and do a little bit of soul searching: could I ever have done this? Would I have fought back? Tried to convert?

The following sites are only a few of the many places the delegation visited over the course of 13 days and two countries. Students' comments and reflections about their experiences at these locations illustrate the depth of learning that occurred through their direct experience. The power of the place was both shaped and heightened by the educators' ongoing emotional modeling and experiential framing.

Upon arriving at each site, the group gathered around the Holocaust educator, who spoke into a portable microphone. He told individuals' stories and shared horrific facts about the sites, providing a human face, as well as historical context, to each place the group toured. The delegation visited three of the most infamous Nazi death camps in four days: Auschwitz-Birkenau, Majdanek, and Treblinka. Each camp provided a unique learning atmosphere that affected the students differently.

Auschwitz-Birkenau

Auschwitz-Birkenau was the first camp the group visited. In the cool fog of the morning, one of the survivors described how his fate was decided during the selection process: he was one of 13 chosen to live, when hundreds of others were selected for the gas chambers. For months he spent his days doing hard labor in Birkenau, living in the shadow of the crematoria. With tears in his eyes, the survivor talked about how lucky he felt to have the opportunity to walk out of the gates with the participants. Students listened intently, and some cried, while others hugged.

From the grounds, a student called his grandmother to tell her that he saw the trees where she ran to escape. "I've been hearing about it my entire life," he explained to the student who stood next to him. For many who had family connections to the Holocaust, touring the camps was a powerful opportunity to share their families' stories with their peers.

Another student was surprised by her strong emotional reaction to the experience, explaining:

> When I arrived in Poland, I didn't really think I would be affected that much by the camps, especially since I don't have any family in the Holocaust. But when I entered the gas chambers at Birkenau, I felt myself being overwhelmed with rage. I just couldn't believe that anyone could do this.

Later in the day, the delegation toured the Auschwitz-Birkenau Museum. The group gathered between blocks 10 and 11 next to the notorious shooting wall at Auschwitz. There, the director told the story of a survivor who had previously accompanied the trip, but had since died. She cried as she described how he had been forced to watch his brother's murder on that very spot. Her authentic outpouring of emotion observably affected the group. A student described what she called the director's "influence on [her] emotional judgment." Taking cues from the director's demonstrative example helped her "realize how important it was to know about those things," the student explained.

After the talk, students walked around alone, in pairs and in small groups. As they toured the grounds, some students stayed close to the survivors, listening to stories that brought the horrors of the place to life. They walked through exhibits of over 80,000 shoes, more than 3,800 suitcases (most of which bear the names of their owners), hundreds of prostheses, and a mountain of human hair. They saw barracks and latrines. As they toured, many students embraced, crying openly in each other's arms.

The group met up again outside of the gas chambers. Standing in a circle, they were led in the recitation of the Mourner's Kaddish and in singing Hatikvah. Some described that moment as a powerful religious experience. A student asserted, "that is the first time I felt really connected to Judaism, the first time I ever prayed with intention." Her comment was particularly notable considering her background: she was a Jewish day school student who had been to Jewish summer camp for 8 years and who attended services with Chabad. Another young woman remarked: "When we prayed in the camps, that was my favorite part."

Another student described how hearing a survivor's recollections helped her to synthesize what she learned years before. A survivor described being forced to stand outside, barefoot and freezing for hours during line-up. The story reminded the student that she had learned about the line-ups in school when she first studied the Holocaust. "It really hit me," she said, "I made a childhood connection with the place."

Others explained that watching Schindler's List on the bus a few days later helped to make the experience real for them. "When I saw the gate in the movie and realized I'd actually been there… that really hit me," a student said.

Majdanek

Majdanek is located just outside of Lublin. When they arrived, students were horrified to realize the camp had a clear view of the city. "There's no way people didn't know," a student asserted. Again, the students were free to explore the camp on their own. Many stayed in small groups as they toured the barracks, which had been converted into a museum. Students taught one another, sharing family stories and facts they remembered from their previous Holocaust education. Others gathered around the educator, listening attentively as he walked through the exhibits with them. Students could be seen embracing, and comforting each other.

The experience prompted students to connect with one another. One participant found herself walking with a student from her school. Though they attended high school together for four years, the two had never spoken. They reflected on one of the survivors' stories and had a discussion about human nature. "It was one of the most memorable conversations I had on the trip," one of the students explained, "and it was the first conversation we ever had." Another student felt a sense of connection by helping a close friend. "One of my best friends was very emotional," she explained. "I wanted to be there for her when she was so sad …we got so close because we both needed support," she said.

The group gathered on the steps next to an enormous dome-shaped monument that housed a mountain of human ashes. Another survivor told her story, but unlike some of the others', hers was not a story about courage and hope. Her story remained raw and filled with despair. She grew up in an observant family, and lost everyone. She told the group that she spent her life feeling angry and confused about what happened, and wished that she could feel connected to God again. When she finished her story, a small group of students stood up and hugged her, announcing, "We're your family!"

A number of students mentioned that moment as one of the most powerful of the trip. A young man spoke about how effective it was to travel to the historical sites with the survivors:

> "Survivors have told their stories before at my school," he explained, "it's different when they're there with you …you don't get caught up in the numbers and forget about their individual stories."

Treblinka

The third camp the delegation visited was completely demolished by the Nazis. Treblinka is now entirely a memorial site. Concrete blocks symbolically mark the path of the former railway line. Hundreds of stones represent Jewish towns and cities whose entire populations were obliterated at the camp. A staff member described the efficiency of the killing, using a metaphor the group could easily understand. "Picture the Staples Center [a sports stadium near downtown Los Angeles] filled with people," he said. "It seats about 18,000: that's how many people they killed here a day." When recalling the visit to Treblinka, a number of students directly quoted the educator, who told them: "this camp oozes evil."

Students were gathered into reflection groups to discuss their reactions to where they were. One student talked about Darfur, reminding her group that genocide was still happening. Another talked about doubting God, and a third said (to the disbelief of some in her group) that her faith in God was actually deeper. "We're still here and we have Israel, that has to mean something," she asserted.

Tarnow and the Buczyna Woods

Students talked about two other places with the same emotional intensity they used when they spoke about the camps: the town of Tarnow and the Buczyna Woods. After breakfast at their hotel in Krakow, the group boarded the buses to travel to Tarnow. About a half hour later, they gathered in a large open space in the middle of town, next to the remains of a bimah: four slightly charred brick columns under a dome. It is what remains of a 17th Century synagogue that once stood where the group was gathered. The educator began his talk with these words: "I can go to any camp, but this place is more emotional and challenging for me, because it represents all that we lost." He described the town as a former center of Orthodox Judaism. The synagogue where the group stood had been one of approximately 30 that once served the town. Before the Second World War, the 25,000 Jews in the town could trace their history back to the 15th Century. Tarnow had the dubious distinction of being the first town in Poland where the Jews were forced to don Star of David armbands. The Jews of Tarnow were also among the first victims at Auschwitz. The educator stood surrounded by the group, and described the grizzly massacre that took place before the transport. Given a ration of alcohol, Nazis, together with Polish police, broke down the doors of Jews' houses with axes. Groups of Jews were taken to the nearby forest and murdered with machine guns. To save money on bullets, the educator explained, children's heads were smashed against walls and pavement.

"Though no Jews remain in Tarnow," the educator said, "it's important to recognize the fact that we're still here!" Slowly at first, the group began to sing "Am Yisrael Chai." From the sidelines, a student quietly asked another: "what does that mean?" Upon learning that her peers were singing "The People of Israel Live," she enthusiastically joined the group. The singing turned raucous and the group began to dance as they sang "Od Yavo Shalom Aleinu" (Peace Will Come to Us). Their energy was fueled by their awareness that Polish people were staring down at them from the windows of what had once been Jewish tenement houses.

As the group sang, an older woman approached the group and in Yiddish asked a survivor: “Are you Jewish?” The group quieted as she spoke to the survivors, explaining that she is the only Jew currently living in Tarnow. When the survivors translated for the group, they erupted in song and began dancing a hora around the woman and the survivors. As they recalled that moment later, many students described the experience as “mystical.” Some called the moment “bashert” (destiny), and said they felt God’s presence there.

The magic of that moment turned solemn as the group traveled to the Buczyna Woods in Zbylitowska Góra: the site of the mass grave of the Jews of Tarnow. Below towering trees with streams of sunshine filtering through, the group stood around an area distinguished by a small blue fence. There, at the mass grave of 800 of Tarnow’s children, the group once again recited the Mourner’s Kaddish. Pencils and paper were handed out, and students were given time for personal reflection. Some left their writing at the gravesite as a tribute, and others took their thoughts with them.

Traveling to these sites engendered learning on multiple levels. Visiting the sites and hearing individuals’ stories brought the history to life. Students also witnessed staff members’ emotional connections to the places they visited and experienced their own reactions to what they saw. Some felt a sense of spiritual connection, while others reacted with theological questioning. They made connections to prior classroom-based lessons, and became educators themselves as they shared their families’ stories.

Commemorations and Celebrations

During the two week trip, there were five instances of large-scale celebrations and commemorations: the march on Yom HaShoah in Poland and the march in Jerusalem on Yom Ha’atzmaut, followed by a celebration at Latrun, as well as observance of Yom HaZikaron (Israeli Memorial Day). Through participation in these events, students saw themselves within the larger context of Jewish peoplehood. They expressed a sense of connection to Israel and to Jews around the world.

The March - Poland

The march on Yom HaShoah took place on the second day of the trip. Approximately 8,000 people – including Jews and non-Jews, students and educators, survivors and dignitaries - assembled at Auschwitz. Each delegation, wearing its own baseball caps, t-shirts, jackets and pins for trading, took their assigned place in the line-up among the buildings. Students traveled in delegations from 60 countries including Canada, Australia, France, Sweden, Israel, Germany, Panama, Argentina, and the United States. Many students remarked that they had never seen Jews from so many countries. Others admitted they had not realized there were Jews in some of the countries represented. A student asserted: “The march was one of the most powerful things I’ve ever seen …all those Jewish kids from all over the world, I just couldn’t believe it!”

There was a buzz of excitement when news about a delegation from Hong Kong moved through the group. Their enthusiasm quickly faded when a student announced with disappointment: “the Jews from Hong Kong are white!”

As the delegation waited for the march to begin, they took photographs of themselves and began interacting with students from other countries by trading pins. Much like Olympic pin trading, students tried to collect the widest variety possible. Upon returning to the Los Angeles delegation’s assigned spot,

students showed off their growing collections of pins. Many came back to the group excitedly displaying their newly acquired baseball caps from the Parisian delegation, having traded their own American flag printed caps for hats printed in French.

When a shofar was blown to mark the beginning of the march, the mood changed. Delegations had different philosophies about how the march should be approached. Some saw it as a solemn event, walking in silence or reading psalms aloud. Others saw the march as a time to celebrate and proclaim the triumph of Jews' continued existence. The Los Angeles delegation had a policy not to mandate how their students should participate. Some in the group walked arm in arm, some were silent, and some chatted casually. A few shared their grandparents' stories of survival with their peers as the walked. Some made a point to walk with their closest friends. One student described his experience marching with some one he did not know well:

> We did most of the march together. We don't usually hang out outside of school. It was cool. It was a situation where we all had something in common.

Many were draped in Israeli flags they brought with them for that purpose. As they walked through the infamous gate marked by the iron words "Arbeit Macht Frei" (Work Brings Freedom), they stopped to take pictures. Many commented that it looked exactly like it did in the movies.

The march proceeded for about two miles, down a road and over a bridge flanked on either side by quaint cottages. Polish police officers stood at attention at various points on the route to ensure the event's security. Upon entering the gates of Birkenau, students planted small, wooden memorial plaques along the train tracks, which they inscribed with personal messages. Then they were free to wander around the grounds in the company of thousands of other young Jews. On the far end of the camp, a stage was set up and a formal ceremony was held. That aspect of the march seemed to leave virtually no impression on the participants from Los Angeles.

The March – Israel

A week later, a second march took place in Israel. Again, marchers from all over the world gathered – this time in Safra Square (Jerusalem City Hall), for a celebration that included music, a drumming troupe, spontaneous group cheers, Israeli dancing, more pin trading, and even Capoeira. Numerous shofarot were sounded, and the group marched to the Kotel. Students were acutely aware of the contrast between the marches in Israel and Poland. One student explained:

> When we marched into the streets of Jerusalem, I led a song. We were all thinking about the march in Poland and we felt so proud and strong.

As they had in Poland, students marveled at their connection to Jews from around the world. One young man described being with an international community of Jews as, "one of the most religious aspects of the trip." He explained:

> There was a small group of us who got separated [during the march in Jerusalem]. We were suddenly surrounded by Jews from four countries. We were singing "Gesher Tzar Me'od," and all the songs we know from school. We all knew the same songs!

Pride was a resounding sentiment evoked by the experience of the two marches. Reflecting on the experience, a student wrote:

> Jews from all across the globe can come together in Poland and in Israel and marched in unison towards one goal: to proclaim Jewish unity and pride. This is where the heart of the March of the Living truly lies.

The day ended with a party at the Armored Corps Memorial Site and Museum at Latrun. The group arrived before sundown and had time to explore the collection of military equipment, which mostly meant taking photographs of each other standing tanks. A buffet dinner was served and members of the LA delegation mingled freely with the other 3000 students participating in the celebration. When the sun set, the students gathered in an outdoor amphitheater for a show that was part rock concert, part variety show, part revival meeting and entirely a spectacle. The show began with stage lights pulsing to the beat of amplified drums. Then hundreds of young adults took to the stage, performing various choreographed dance routines in matching costumes, which they changed numerous times. Two young men emceed the show, which included video clips of the two marches that were set to music and projected onto two huge screens. Fire dancers also performed. Representatives from every delegation present were brought on stage and introduced. As they acknowledged each delegation, huge cheers erupted from the audience. Hundreds of students danced in front of the stage with a fervor that evolved into what the students referred to as a "mosh pit." The show ended with a large fireworks display and the singing of Hatikvah. Recalling the evening, a student proclaimed:

> The big concert in Israel was the funnest [sic] thing in the whole world. It was 3000 Jews dancing and having a good time. In the mosh pit, I got carried by some Texan Jews!

The central theme that was carried through the show was: "Embrace the past, grasp the future."

Yom HaZikaron and Yom Ha'atzmaut

The group attended an Erev Yom HaZikaron ceremony in Rabin Square. Along with thousands of Israelis, the students from Los Angeles stood in silence as sirens blared, honoring the fallen soldiers. One student explained that standing in silence felt particularly meaningful, because it was something she had been "hearing about for years." The students watched respectfully as Israeli singers performed and testimonies from soldiers' families were shown on large screens. "Singing Hatikvah in Rabin Square was intense, having just sung it at Auschwitz," a student explained.

The following day was Yom HaZikaron and the group gathered in Gan HaBanim, a park commemorating those who died in the Israeli wars. The director of the delegation talked about her passion, dedication and commitment to the State of Israel. "We need the State of Israel, because no one helped us [during WWII]," she asserted, "this country will ensure that another Holocaust will never happen again." "The people who died dreamed about this place," she said.

She talked about the necessity of the army. "We wouldn't have this country without the soldiers," she explained. The students in the group who were already committed to joining the Israeli army were praised for their choice. Two soldiers, who were Americans not much older than the students, spoke to the group about their motivation to join the army and their experiences so far. The students participated in a brief memorial service, reading aloud from prayer books. Again, they stood is silence with the entire country as

the sirens blared.

That evening, the group returned to Rabin Square to celebrate Yom Ha'atzmaut. People of all ages gathered to celebrate Israel's 61st birthday and Tel Aviv's 100th year. Children sprayed shaving cream and carried glow lights. People danced and sang along to Israeli folk songs that were amplified across the Square. Many simply milled about in the crowd. A fireworks display lit up the sky over the city.

Participating in these celebrations and commemorations gave students the opportunity to think of themselves in the context of something larger: in connection to Jewish history and to world Jewry. Many were exposed to the diversity of the Jewish people for the first time. Along-side Israelis, students observed two national holidays and were encouraged to mark the occasions as if they were their own.

Intercultural Exposure

In addition to their interactions with Jews from around the world, students from the Los Angeles delegation had three other opportunities for intercultural exposure. They met with Polish students, saw a play with deaf-blind Israeli actors, and visited with Israeli orphans. These experiences were meant to challenge stereotypes held by participants and help them to humanize the perceived "other."

Otwock Kirkut Jewish Cemetery

The delegation traveled to Otwock, Poland, the birthplace of one of the survivors. The town, the survivor explained, had been known as a health resort. Most of the Jews of Otwock, the group learned, had been murdered at Treblinka and Auschwitz. At the Otwock Kirkut Jewish Cemetery, the participants met with a group of Polish high schools students who were involved in a program of the Foundation for the Preservation of Jewish Heritage in Poland called, "To Bring Memory Back." The program engages middle and high school students to discover the Jewish history of their towns, learn about Jewish traditions and values, and care for Jewish cemeteries. The students from Los Angeles and Poland interacted with one another, asking questions about their taste in music and their plans for college. Many exchanged email addresses. Together, the students used black paint to restore the Hebrew lettering to the cemetery's fading gravestones. The afternoon ended with the song leader, along with four Polish and Jewish students, playing the Beatles song "Imagine" on their guitars, as the entire group sang along.

The encounter helped some participants to humanize the Poles. "You have this idea that Polish people are bad," a young woman remarked, "and meeting them made that idea fade away." Another student saw the interaction as valuable in a broader sense: "as a [Jewish day school student]," she explained, she has "so few interactions with Christians at all."

The Nalaga'at Center

On their first evening in Israel, the group walked through the streets of Jaffa from where they were staying at the Mishkenot Ruth Daniel Youth Hostel to the Nalaga'at Theater, home to the Deaf-blind Acting Ensemble. There, they watched the play "Not by Bread Alone," in which 11 deaf-blind actors described their inner worlds. Subtitled in English, Hebrew and Arabic, the actors shared joyful moments, recalled their dreams, and described their memories. As the play progressed, the actors baked bread on stage. The phrase, "not by bread alone," which was repeated throughout the play, referred to their essential need for human interaction. At the play's end, the audience was invited onstage to eat the bread.

Following their exposure to the most extreme consequences of prejudice in Poland, the play was a powerful reminder that discrimination continues. Some students connected to the experience by recalling that people with disabilities were among the first murdered by the Nazis. One student asserted that seeing the play was "one of the most effective parts of the entire program." To her, the play brought a sense of hope and triumph. "Seeing the Jews on stage," she said, "makes you feel like we can do anything!"

Neve Michael Children's Home

Half of the delegation visited Neve Michael Children's Home, a group home for Israeli children at risk.[6] The group learned that in many cases, the children had been neglected and abused by parents who struggled with poverty, and suffered from mental illness, addiction, or both. Children ages 3-18 from around the country live at the Home where they are fed, clothed, educated and provided with therapy. A representative who worked at the Home told the group that a number of children would soon be celebrating their Bar and Bat Mitzvot. After watching a short film about the impact of Neve Michael on the lives of two young adults who grew up there, the students had the opportunity to play with some of the children. Since the Home is an observant Jewish community, the play was gender segregated: the boys played basketball while the girls threw Frisbees and jumped rope. The director had arranged to bring toys to leave with the children as gifts.

In the bus ride following the visit, a student sat next to a survivor, and the two spoke about how moved they were by the experience. They decided to collaborate on a project for the children. A few weeks after the trip, the student and the survivor met and together they made cards which they sent to the children who were celebrating their Bar and Bat Mitzvot.

The participants were encouraged to cultivate tolerance and empathy through these opportunities to relate with people who were different from them. For some, the experience challenged stereotypes they held about Poles. The creative social service programs they observed in Israel engendered a sense of pride in others.

Interactions with Living History

Almost every person interviewed – students and staff members alike – asserted that traveling with the survivors was one of the most powerful aspects of the trip. The students built relationships with the survivors through their ongoing interactions. They walked with them, held their hands, carried their luggage, and sat with them at meals. "The best part was that the survivors were always available to answer questions and hang out with," a student commented. Another said: "I learned more on the bus talking to the survivors than during the tours." "I wanted to go on the trip," one student explained, "because I would get to see a different side of history." She continued:

> I wanted to look at living breathing history and get a different perspective on Israel. I've been taking Yiddish for a few years and reading testimonies in Yiddish. I wanted to see where people were when they wrote it and interact with people who were there.

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[6] The group was split that day for logistical purposes. The other half of the group worked on a community service project with Table to Table, an umbrella organization that coordinates the donation of surplus food to soup kitchens, homeless shelters, senior citizen centers and other social service organizations around Israel.

Spending time with the survivors allowed the participants to see the survivors as whole people. Many noted that the survivors expressed a broad range of responses to what happened. Some "exuded joy" students observed. For others, happiness seemed more elusive. A few months after the trip, a student remembered:

> For the first time, I heard from a survivor who wasn't so happy that she survived. The others were so positive. She really embodied everything that happened. …She said she has no pictures of her family, and can't remember what they look like. Her childhood was erased. Her face was stricken with pain. I think about [that survivor] often …her lingering despair. She was the most important part; she really represented that it was very human.

Another participant described a conversation he had while sitting next to a survivor on the bus:

> On the bus, [a survivor] told me about what happened after [liberation]. He showed me photos of his family. He was so proud. He showed how much more there is to him than what happened.

With appreciation and amusement, many students described how a survivor had joined in when they performed an "American Idol" singing contest on their bus.

Students watched the survivors, marveling at their ability to return to the places their families' had been murdered. "The survivors shocked me," a student said, "I don't have half the fight in me that they do." Another said she was amazed that the survivors could be so happy. "It makes you feel like: if she could go through that horrible experience and still be happy, then if something really bad happens in my life, maybe I could still be happy."

Many students said that interacting with the survivors made the experience more vivid. A student explained:

> When you watch a documentary, read about it, or see pictures, it's not real. You can keep yourself separate from it. Hearing them and forming relationships with them made it more real.

"At first I didn't connect because I didn't have anyone in the Holocaust," a student explained, "but after connecting to the survivors, that made a difference." Others commented that it was easier to feel connected to the survivors than it was to connect with the places they visited.

The survivors added a critical element to the trip. Their ability to make personal connections enabled the participants to internalize the experience. The survivors modeled courage and fortitude, while also expressing vulnerability and grief.

Group Process

At the core of the trip was the delegation's interaction as a group. Students' relationships prior to the trip added to the ease of group cohesion. Their extensive prior exposure to group settings – via camps, youth groups, and group travel – also enhanced the cohesion of the group, since most individuals came to the trip with positive expectations based on prior group experiences. The cohesion of the group grew stronger as individuals traveled, reflected, and relaxed together, and in turn, the impact of the group on individual's experiences increased. Participants had multiple opportunities to interact, both in small groups and as a

delegation.

Reflection groups

At various points throughout the trip, students gathered in their reflection groups to articulate their feelings among their peers. The groups were organized so that people who did not previously know each other had structured opportunities to interact. "You got to spill your guts out to people you've never met before, so you got close to the people in your group," a student explained.

For some participants, reflection groups provided a useful forum to learn about their peers' reactions and to explore their own responses. A student asserted that reflection group participation was "a good way to understand what we're all thinking about." "It was very helpful to sit and force yourself to think about where you are," another asserted.

On some occasions, students passionately discussed theological and political issues. A young woman described a conversation that she found particularly memorable:

> I said that I've had trouble believing in God my whole life, but the trip was helping me to have a stronger belief. My group was shocked! It turned into this whole dilemma. But I just explained how I felt: despite all that went on, if you think about where we are now and what we are capable of as Jews …God made it possible for us to succeed and go through anything.

Another group had a heated argument about whether religion is ultimately destructive or beneficial. Still another group discussed the importance of the trip:

> We were talking about genocide, and one girl was saying that Jewish people always say 'we can't stand idly by,' so instead of going on the trip and paying so much money, we should just use the money to really help end the genocide. Other girls got really offended and said it's important that we come [on the trip].

Reflections groups were challenging for those who were less comfortable articulating their emotions in a small group setting. "I didn't talk that much [in the reflection group]," explained a young man, "but I'm never much of a talker." Another was more comfortable talking with friends directly, "rather than in a group where [he] felt forced."

Students' opinions of reflection group facilitation varied. Some felt that if facilitated more skillfully, their experience in a reflection group would have been more beneficial. One student articulated the sentiments of a number of others with these words:

> [Our facilitator] tried hard, but she never got us to a meaningful place. …I know people in other groups had meaningful experiences in reflection groups. I wish I had a better group leader.

Group discussion

On the first Friday evening of the trip, the group gathered in a meeting room of the Holiday Inn in Warsaw for Shabbat services. The rabbi began the evening by posing a dilemma to the students: He would only feel comfortable leading an Orthodox style service. If the group preferred a more liberal service, they would have to lead it themselves. A heated discussion ensued.

Some students felt that an Orthodox style service was an appropriate way to honor the victims of the Holocaust. One young man asserted that the group should participate in a traditional service because: "So many of the people who died in Poland were Orthodox …and we're trying to get in touch with the former Jewish culture that was here." Others argued that the trip was about the importance of tolerance. As one student said:

> I don't mind an Orthodox service. But I do mind forcing religion on other people. While I know the prayers, a lot of people don't; they aren't in touch in the same way.

A young woman expressed her mixed emotions with these words:

> It was more respectful to do the Orthodox thing, but personally I would rather do a Conservative thing. I know some kids were saying: 'It's not fair to force people who are Conservative to do things they don't want to do.'

Still others felt that the group should cater to the most religious among them. "I felt like if some one there is Orthodox, its wrong not to do it Orthodox," a student explained.

Many felt frustrated that they had not been told earlier that leading a more liberal service was an option. Others thought that the conversation had simply "gotten out of hand," as one student put it. Eventually, the students acknowledged that since no one was prepared to conduct a non-traditional service, the rabbi should take the lead. The students changed seats, dividing the room by gender, and the service proceeded.

Ultimately, some found the service very moving. "It took a long time to decide what type of service, but when we finally did it was really nice to do Shabbat with other Jews from LA and with the survivors," a young man said. Another remarked:

> Here we are where so many died for this. The first Shabbat felt like a tribute to those who died. It felt like we were doing something to honor the people involved in a way they cherished and died for.

Others were distressed. A young woman shared these strong feelings about the rabbi: "If this is a trip about tolerance, you can't have some one so rigid …there was no pluralism passing through his head."

The discussion prompted students to articulate and express their ideas about religiosity and pluralism: both to themselves and to one another. It also underscored the complications inherent in undertaking a Jewish educational program that caters to a population with diverse educational backgrounds and religious preferences.

The official policy of the trip was religious tolerance, where the religious needs of all students were accommodated. Traditional rules of Shabbat observance were required in public spaces but students were free to observe as they wished in private spaces. Services were mandatory, but prayer was not: students were free to sit quietly if they did not wish to participate.

Two options for services were available to students for all other services on the trip. Though 27 students identified as Orthodox on their applications, only 10 -12 students ever participated in the more traditional service. The majority of the group took part in egalitarian services conducted with Siddur Sim Shalom, a prayer book published by the Conservative movement. This approach was not unproblematic, since almost 60 participants (44%) identified with the Reform movement, or had no synagogue affiliation. Underscoring this incongruity was the fact that very few young men brought kippot with them on the trip, even though it was an item included on the packing list.

Group Play

The schedule included a balance of emotionally charged activities and opportunities for decompression. Students had free time to shop and eat in the Old Town Historic District of Krakow, Warsaw's Rynek district, and Rehov Shenkin in Tel Aviv, as well as Ben Yehuda Street and the Jewish Quarter in Jerusalem. They hiked at Ein Gedi, waded through Hezekiah's Tunnel in the City of David and floated in the Dead Sea. They strolled through the streets of Jerusalem, walked from Tel Aviv to Jaffa, and toured Caesarea.

Upon arriving in Israel, the group went directly to a beach in Jaffa, where they acknowledged their arrival with a prayer, ate a sumptuous meal and flew kites on the beach. Kite flying was a tribute to Janusz Korczak. The students were first introduced to Korczak's story of selflessness and heroism during orientation. They encountered his story again at the Warsaw Jewish Cemetery where he is memorialized with a monument depicting his famous walk to the deportation trains destined for Treblinka with 200 orphans, with whom he chose to die rather than abandon. A famous advocate for the rights and welfare of children, Korczak felt that "every child should have a kite." In the bright sunshine, participants decorated kites with phrases like: "never forget" and "we remember you."

Participants had the opportunity to share their talents with each other during two talent shows. The first took place on the group's final evening in Poland. Students sang, played guitar, and danced as a tribute to the survivors. The first was so popular that students participated a second show in Jerusalem, on the last evening of the trip. That evening, students also participated in a drum circle and enjoyed a dance party.

The week in Israel had a markedly celebratory tone compared to the solemnity of the preceding week in Poland. In Israel, a sense of optimism and pride in the achievements of the Jewish people were highlighted. Activities tended to include less educational content and students were given more unstructured free time. This served two purposes. First, it allowed students to decompress after being saturated with emotionally charged experiences in Poland. As one student explained:

> We just got back from our first time in Poland. We saw some of the most disgusting things in our lives. Now we want to compartmentalize that for a while. We don't want to think about the Holocaust in Israel.

Framing students' experience of Israel with a celebratory tone also served to further one of the primary goals of the trip: to foster participants' sense of positive connection with Israel.

Opportunities for casual interactions throughout the trip gave students time for personal reflection, relationship building, stress relief and emotional integration.

Self Reflection

Through processes of self-reflection, students began to integrate what they learned. They looked at their lives from different perspectives and exhibited an increased sense of self-awareness. Students were influenced by their peers' emotional openness. Observing each other's reactions helped particpants to internalize their own responses.

Internalization and Integration

Students' conversations moved fluidly from the profound to the mundane and back again. They were at once engaged trip participants and graduating seniors. Twice during the trip, young women were invited to the senior prom with chivalrous gestures in front of the entire group. At least one romantic relationship ended and others began. There were conflicts between long-time friends and flirting among new friends. A number of students struggled with pre-existing emotional issues and social discomfort.

While they remained rooted in their adolescent perspectives, participants reacted to their experiences with increased self-awareness. As they complained about the food in Poland, students had new consciousness of the millions who starved to death in Polish ghettos. "I get it: if you complain about the food you're a douche bag," a young man said, "but it's still really gross." Other young women acknowledged they had been "emotional eating" in response to all they saw.

As they heard survivors' stories, students made connections to their own lives: "I can't imagine never hearing my brother laugh again," a young woman said, as she frantically dialed his number on her cell phone. After learning that BMW engines were used to asphyxiate victims in Treblinka, a few asked the educator: "Is having a BMW wrong?" (They had not previously realized that their cars had any connection to the Holocaust).

During a walking tour of Warsaw, the group stopped on the steps of the Nathan Rappaport Memorial to the Heroes of the Warsaw Ghetto. To help the students understand the severity of ghetto experience, the delegation's director held up a small 100-calorie candy bar. "We carry these around just in case we get hungry between meals," she reminded the students. She explained that Jews in the Warsaw ghetto were allotted a food ration of 184 calories per day. As the delegation walked to the next stop on the tour, a small group of girls discussed what they ate for breakfast, adding up the calories to discover the contrast.

In another case, the group spent the evening at the restored Yeshiva Chachmei Lublin, which had once been the largest in Europe. Sitting in the pews of the main study hall, the students were led in a chevruta-style study session by the rabbi. They sat in pairs and enthusiastically discussed their Jewish identities. Then the group sang and danced, vigorously celebrating the continued existence of the Jewish people with Hebrew songs. Learning about the fate of the Jews of Tarnow earlier in the day most likely intensified the celebration. Motivated by that experience, a non-day school student entertained the idea of studying in a yeshiva in Israel for the first time. Though he had minimal Jewish education and had never been to Israel, he said: "Going to the Yeshiva was awesome …it was fun to get a taste of how that might be."

Peer Influence

Students described their peers' influence on them in both Israel and Poland. Many spoke about the power of their friends' reactions to Israel, whether they had previously been there or not. Upon leaving Poland, the group's excitement was palpable. Most students had already spent time in Israel and were eager to

return. For those who had never been, their excitement was fueled by anticipation and roused by the energy of the group. The plane ride from Warsaw to Tel Aviv reflected this. The group had the plane to themselves, and the students took full advantage: they stood in the aisles; sat backwards in their seats; talked to the people behind them, in front of them, and a few aisles away; sang; and cheered unabashedly. Many described what they were looking forward to: the food, the shopping, eating their favorite candy, and the friends and family they would see. Students who had never been were swept up in their friends' excitement. A non-day school student who visited for the first time, shared his experience:

> Until recently, I would have said there's no way that anyone would get me to go to Israel, because of all the stuff in the news. I was freaked out about coming because of the bombings. But I saw how everybody else felt about it: they think it's the best place ever. [My friend] said coming back every time is like the first time. …When we arrived in Israel, a new sense of national pride arose in me. The food, the people, the culture … everything was beautiful and I felt really connected to it.

Another student, whose parents were Israeli and who had spent time living in Israel, was also influenced by his peers:

> I've been there so many times, but some people were going to the Western Wall for the first time. I was with some friends who hadn't been there before. I saw it for the first time through their eyes. Coming from the March …what it means for the Jewish people. I saw it in a new light.

In Poland, numerous students commented about the experience of seeing "a different side of people." The trip created an atmosphere that enabled many to show emotional vulnerability. "I got to see people from my school who were deep and emotionally touched by things," a participant explained. "I didn't know that about them before," she said. Another asserted:

> You go to high school, you see your friends, but on the trip, you see their sensitivity. …People who are mean at school … you see a different side of them.

A participant described his revised impression of a student whom he once thought of as "the class clown."

> I thought he didn't care about the trip at first. I didn't think he was sensitive. At the second camp, he broke down and cried. He told me he doesn't show people his sensitive side unless he knows them.

Students said they grew closer to their friends and started new relationships. The emotional openness that developed in the group led people to make connections they might not have otherwise made. "I wasn't that close to a girl, but I started crying and she supported me …after that we hung out a lot and got really close" a student explained. Another remarked: "Once you are all in Auschwitz and see what your people have been through, and see some one crying, you help them, you get closer." Still another said:

> In the gas chamber at Majdanek, I saw a girl from [a Jewish day school] standing there. We hugged a long time. I didn't even know her, but we bonded.

Participants' effusive expression of emotions influenced their peers. The atmosphere enabled them to show vulnerability and express empathy. Their enthusiasm was contagious.

VI. Impact

Participants were given a broad range of opportunities to make intellectual and emotional connections: by traveling to historical sites, participating in commemorations and celebrations, interacting with Jews and non-Jews, and forming relationships with survivors. There was time for self-reflection and occasions to learn through interactions with others.

Staff, survivors and students felt the emotional impact of the trip. Though staff members helped to facilitate the program for the students, they also participated. Staff members reported gaining valuable life perspective. New relationships were formed and existing relationships were deepened with students, survivors and fellow staff members. Staff members said the trip intensified their sense of connection with Israel. The experience increased their interest in discovering their family histories and sparked their desire to learn more about Jewish history and culture. For one staff member, the trip renewed his interest in applying to rabbinical school. Another was moved to claim her identity as a Zionist for the first time.

Survivors also benefited. According to the social worker, their participation has contributed to survivors' emotional healing and has transformed their relationships with family members. Survivors built new relationships and deepened existing connections with staff members and students. Some relationships have lasted beyond the trip: a number of students said they have been in telephone and email contact with the survivors. Some have met to share meals together.

Students' initial responses to the program varied. In the few months following the trip, some noted a change in attitude, while others responded intellectually. Still others said the trip motivated them to act differently. Many students reported that the trip affected them on multiple levels. Among interview respondents, no significant differences emerged from the responses of day school and non-day school students.

Attitudes

Students who had never been to Israel, as well as those who had, described their increased feelings of attachment to Israel as a result of the trip. Some felt a stronger sense of Jewish identification and pride, and many experienced a greater appreciation for their lives in general. A student who attended Jewish day school and was active in USY wrote the following about experiencing Israel for the first time on the March:

> I stepped into the March with many doubts about Judaism and my personal connection to it. I didn't quite understand many of the religion's routine practices and failed to connect emotionally and spiritually to Israel despite a lifetime of Jewish education. …No time throughout that week [in Israel] did I feel more spiritually enthralled than our Shabbat spent in Jerusalem at the Kotel. It was unlike anything I've ever experienced before. I kept thinking: I am in the single holiest place for Jews …those moments put my whole perspective on Judaism and its continuation in check: I am a Jew …I love Israel and absolutely everything it entails and stands for, and will continue to believe so, not only for myself, but for all six million Jews killed in the Holocaust that never made it to see [the creation of the State of Israel].

"I feel like I walked out of the gas chamber and into my Jewish life," another dramatically stated. "Before the trip, I was scared to go to Israel because it's dangerous," a non-day school student explained, "but now I feel like it's my duty to go as a Jew."

Another student had been to Israel one other time, as a participant on a prestigious youth fellowship program. On her previous trip, she learned a tremendous amount and connected with her peers, but said that prior to the March, she did not feel emotionally attached to Israel. In her words: "I didn't get why Israel was such a big deal." She described the moment that helped her connect for the first time:

> When we went to the beach on our first day in Israel, and I saw [the survivors] looking at the ocean, everything came together for me. I get it now. The contrast really makes you appreciate it. Now I can't wait to come back.

For another student, his deeper sense of connection with Israel was sparked in Poland.

> I saw the brutality of the Nazis first hand. Millions of shoes and human hair lined the exhibits. When I remember that every shoe and every lock of hair belongs to one of our people, our own ancestors, then I was able to understand the importance of a Jewish homeland.

The trip prompted many on the trip to think about their own sense of Jewish identity. For some, the trip helped to clarify their thinking. A day school student explained that she had been pressured to celebrate Shabbat for years, but had never felt personally connected to the tradition. The trip helped her to connect with Jewish practice:

> I realized the laws are there to make it feel more spiritual. Judaism helps people mold a life. It doesn't have to be a set of rules. It's a source of personal belief and a way to find self-satisfaction. That's what Judaism can be for me. I really saw Judaism in a new light.

Another day school student had been skeptical about religion more broadly. She explained:

> I doubted whether [religion] is necessary. It's archaic. The part of our brain that believes in God is obsolete.

She went on to explain her new understanding, gained as a result of the trip:

> With Judaism, I realize that regardless of how I feel, this is a religion that helps people lead fulfilling lives. People practiced in the camps. It helped a lot of people survive and persist. [The trip] made me more optimistic about religion.

The trip solidified another student's sense of herself as a Jew. "Before I went on the trip," she explained, "I was with my [non-Jewish] dad and his family and my Judaism wasn't so important to me …I felt okay with being in a house with Crosses everywhere." She continued: "Now I feel really, really Jewish. I realized that's my unchanging identity."

Many students spoke about their newfound sense of pride in the Jewish people's capacity for survival. "I saw so many other people from all over the world that were Jewish," a student explained, "I felt so proud to be Jewish, and I thought: we're not defeated, and we're going to thrive!" Another student asserted:

> I felt proud to be walking as a Jew on the train tracks [at Birkenau]. I'm still here, even though the dead Nazis can't hear me say it. I'm here and this means something to me and I'm Jewish.

Still another student reflected on the importance of remembering Jewish traditions. "Things people can take away from you, but traditions and memories people can't," she remarked.

Many said they felt more connected to their families. A few mentioned newly prioritizing their relationships with their grandparents. "I appreciate my family more and I don't take anyone for granted," a young woman explained.

The trip gave students perspective about their lives. "Having a bad day or if some one is mad at you, isn't the worst thing that can happen," a young man realized. Another reflected:

> We come from an area where we basically get everything we want. [The trip] helps you appreciate what you have. We can live our life and be free and we won't get killed for being Jewish.

"The trip makes me realize that every day is a gift," another student stated.

Knowledge

The trip made the Holocaust "more real" to many students. Others gained increased understanding of anti-Semitism. Some students expressed a greater awareness of Jewish diversity.

Experiential learning helped many students better understand the Holocaust. A young woman explained the experience of encountering tangible history:

> In [advanced placement] world history, we read a packet about different genocides. We read it with a distant attitude. It's not like you'd ever cry in class. We studied it as something to know, learn, discuss. [On the trip] you really feel it. You know the facts, but now you really understand the gravity of this. With the survivors, every sense is addressed. Being able to see it and hear about it and smell it and touch it helps you know that it really happened. It overwhelms you.

A number of students mentioned their efforts to imagine themselves in the story, and consider how they might have reacted.

For some, the trip raised their awareness about anti-Semitism. "I was living in a bubble of Beverly Hills," a student explained, "I never thought there was that much anti-Semitism in the world." He continued:

> I really didn't understand how much people are against Israel. I didn't know that hatred was out there to such a great extent. It made me love Israel ten times more. It means more to me now that I know it's so much more important.

Behavior

The trip motivated many students to change their behavior. Some said they were now considering involvement in Jewish student life during college. A few said they want to learn more, and others decided to increase their Jewish practice. The trip made many want to return to Israel. Some said they felt more confident standing up for themselves as Jews. Others talked about the new relationships they made with their peers from the trip. Some expressed a desire to help publicize the trip.

Many students said they plan to get involved with Hillel and AIPAC on their college campuses. "I never considered Hillel until after the March," a day school student said. Others expressed a more ambiguous desire to "do something" or "get involved." Upon returning from the trip, one young woman began working as an intern at the Los Angeles Holocaust Museum. A few students said they were investigating the possibility of joining the Israeli army. "I would never have done that before," one student explained. One participant said she wants to spend her junior year in Israel.

The trip motivated some to take courses in Jewish Studies. "I decided that no matter what I major in, it will have something to do with Israel," a day school student asserted. Another plans to take courses about the Holocaust. One student said she felt motivated to take Hebrew in college, and she expressed frustration that she had not been interested in the mandatory Hebrew language courses at her Jewish day school. Another student had already enrolled in three Jewish Studies courses, something he "would never have done before."

Some students reported that they took on new Jewish practices. One began reciting the Mourner's Kaddish every night during camp. Another explained:

> I say the "modeh ani" every morning when I wake up since we've been home. It's the best way I could think of to start the day and remind myself not to take my life for granted.

A student reported that someone in her reflection group, who had "almost nothing to do with Judaism" before the March, decided to affix a mezuzah to the doorframe of her dorm room. Other students said they were thinking about keeping kosher at college.

Some students made proclamations about their future plans. A non-day school student mentioned that in the past, he joked about not wanting to get married or have kids, but the March changed that. "I'm going to marry a Jew definitely now," he said. A day school student asserted:

> [The March] definitely solidified that I want to remain connected to Judaism. I wanted to honor the memory of those who perished and try to connect by keeping a tradition that they kept. It solidified the fact that I want a Jewish family, and that I want to marry a Jew.

A few young men asserted that they felt more confident about standing up for what they believe. "I'll know how to act if I encounter anti-Semitism at college," a day school student said. Another explained that before the March, he would not have said anything if he heard people speaking disparagingly about Jews. "I'd stand up for Judaism now," he asserted. "If some one denies the Holocaust I can argue I've been there," a non-day school student said.

A non-day school student described his increased understanding of tolerance about differences. "I live in an urban area with lots of racial discrimination," he explained, continuing:

> Where I work [at the Boys and Girls Club], they appreciate my mindset of accepting people for who they are. Before the trip I didn't care.

A student who identifies as a lesbian said: "I'm more open-minded than I was before, because I'm a minority."

Many students were enthusiastic about their desire to publicize the trip. "I've been telling every one about what I saw and telling everyone to go or send their kids," a non-day school student said. "I would go speak at my high school and convince people to go," a day school student offered. Another mentioned that she spoke about the trip in her speech at graduation. A non-day school student was featured in her school newspaper and a day school student made a video that he posted on Facebook.

VII. Observations and Suggestions

The data above corroborate anecdotal assertions that the March of the Living is, in the short term, impacting both day school and non-day school students by: fostering their sense of attachment to Israel, helping them to make emotional associations between the Holocaust and Israel, encouraging them to reflect on their lives and Jewish identities, and promoting their awareness of Jewish peoplehood. Participants articulated an understanding of the danger of intolerance and expressed a sense of responsibility to act as witnesses. They understood the trip to be a valuable life experience.

The following observations and related suggestions are made with the intention of highlighting opportunities to enhance the program and maximize educational efficacy. They are compiled from staff members' and participants' insights, along with those drawn from the research process.

1. **Participants had varied levels of familiarity with Jewish rituals and Hebrew.**
   Though every participant had some type of previous affiliation with a Jewish organization (including synagogues, day schools, youth groups and camps), some non-day school students are less conversant with Jewish rituals Hebrew, and Holocaust history. A number of interview respondents who did not attend Jewish day schools were aware that they had less Jewish education than other participants. Respondents tended to minimize this difference: some remarked that they "caught on fine" and others mentioned that "not understanding everything didn't matter." Attention to participants' differing levels of knowledge about Jewish practice, history and culture would provide additional educational opportunities. For students with less exposure to Jewish learning, education about Judaism could be a more central aspect of the experience.

   To make the trip more accessible to students who have less Jewish knowledge and Holocaust education, and provide additional learning opportunities:

   - Contextualize Jewish content, so students who are less familiar can more fully engage. For example, before the group says the Mourner's Kaddish and sings Hatikvah for the first time, a simple explanation of the meaning and relevance of those actions would be beneficial.
   - Give students reading materials to orient them about the historical places they visit.
   - Provide a learner's minyan on Shabbat.
   - Offer students transliterations of prayers and hand out song sheets.

- Translate Hebrew terms and phrases that are used when addressing the group.
- Involve a rabbi who is can offer a pluralistic perspective, thereby increasing the capacity of the rabbi to play a more central role as a Jewish educator.

2. **The educational component of the week in Israel was underdeveloped.**
   While a seasoned Holocaust educator primarily facilitated the learning in Poland, there was no equivalent educator in Israel. Israeli tour guides provided some background information at historical sites, but they did not have the same ability as the Holocaust educator to engage the group. Though most participants had been to Israel and had extensive knowledge of the country's history and culture, some did not. Those who were visiting for the first time would have benefited from a more in-depth learning experience. For example, the importance of the Israeli army was emphasized throughout the week, but was presented with little requisite historical or political context. In fact, the Israeli/Palestinian conflict was not referenced. Other than the group's visit to Yad Vashem, few other connections between the State and the Holocaust were made during the week in Israel.

   To enhance the educational depth during the week in Israel:

   - Underscore the importance of tolerance by educating students about the ethnic and socio-economic diversity of Israelis.
   - Have students participate in a social service activity to benefit some of the estimated 90,000 Holocaust survivors in Israel who are living in poverty.
   - Help participants make connections between the Holocaust and Israel by exploring the survivors' roles in the creation of the State.
   - Enrich participants' understanding of the complexity of tolerance in a contemporary milieu by discussing the Israeli/Palestinian conflict.

3. **The presence of a single Holocaust educator limited opportunities for learning.**
   Participants spoke very highly of the experience learning from the Holocaust educator. Yet his teaching ability was limited by logistical factors. When the educator spoke to the entire group, it was difficult for everyone to hear (even with the use of a portable microphone), so it was challenging for participants to remain engaged. Tour guides on each bus were not able to effectively engage the students. As a result, only one-forth of the participants at any given time (i.e. those who were on the bus with the educator), had an opportunity to continue the learning process while in transit.

   To offer an optimal educational experience during the week in Poland:

   - Each bus would benefit from the presence of a Holocaust educator who could teach while the group is in transit, preparing students with information about what they will see at each site.
   - The presence of additional educators would more successfully engage students at each site, where it is challenging for the large group to gather around and listen to one person.

4. **Shabbat observance was not fully utilized as an opportunity for education, spirituality, and group cohesion.**
   In the process of accommodating participants' varied levels of comfort with and interest in Shabbat celebration and religious observance, the full potential of the experience was not realized. A staff member articulated the sentiments of many when she said, "Shabbat was not done with a full heart."

To create a meaningful Shabbat experience for the group, when individuals have differing religious preferences:

- Use pre-trip meetings to orient students about the spirit of a communal Shabbat celebration.
- During the orientation, gauge students' interest in leading services. Engaging students in the planning process will enable them to take ownership of the experience.
- Begin Shabbat services with a communal gathering before breaking up into smaller groups for separate services that cater to the diverse needs of individuals.
- Offer traditional services to the entire group, framing the experience as cultural immersion and a tribute to the religious Jews who perished.
- Showcase the prayer style of students' various religious denominations and use services as an opportunity to teach about religious tolerance.

5. **Reflections groups were facilitated with varied levels of skill.**
   Participants had starkly different responses to the reflection group process. Their comments indicated that the skill level of group facilitation varied considerably and had a marked effect on the value of the experience. Providing more structure to the reflection group process could enhance the exercise as a learning opportunity.

   To offer skillfully facilitated reflections groups to all students:

   - Train staff to use a variety of small group facilitation techniques.
   - Provide staff members with guidance about specific topics and themes to explore with the students.

6. **The trip raised participants' awareness of the importance of tolerance, but did not equip them to operationalize those ideals.**
   During the trip, discussions about participants' responsibility to "do something" on their college campuses remained largely abstract. The trip provided the impetus, but not the positive tools for participants to act.

   To equip participants to utilize the lessons of the trip:

   - Offer a workshop about Israel advocacy during the week in Israel.
   - Provide concrete suggestions about how participants can enact their responsibility as "witnesses."
   - Educate about contemporary anti-Semitism and anti-Zionism and recommend ways for participants to react if they are faced with such prejudice on their college campuses.
   - Supply participants with a resource guide to local, national, and international organizations working to stop racial injustice and religious persecution.

Appendix A: Trip Itinerary

Monday 4/20	Tuesday 4/21	Wednesday 4/22	Thursday 4/23	Friday 4/24	Saturday 4/25	Sunday 4/26
• Jewish Quarter • Remuh Synagogue and Cemetery • Temple Synagogue • Bohaterów Getta Square • Schindler Factory • Plazsow Concentration Camp • Old Town Historic District, Krakow	• Birkenau • Worldwide March of the Living event • Auschwitz	• Tarnow • Buczyna Woods • Lublin Chachmei Yeshiva	• Majdanek • Otwock Kirkut Jewish Cemetery • Rejnek District	• Treblinka • Warsaw Jewish Cemetery	• Shabbat services • Walking tour of Warsaw • Rappaport Memorial • Mila 18 • Umschlagplatz • Talent Show	• Jaffa shore • Nalaga'at Theater
Monday 4/27	**Tuesday 4/28**	**Wednesday 4/29**	**Thursday 4/30**	**Friday 5/1**	**Saturday 5/2**	**Monday 5/3**
• Caesaria/Ayalon Institute • Neve Michael Children's Village/Table to Table • Erev Yom HaZikaron Ceremony	• Gan Habanim • Rehov Shenkin • Yom Ha'aztmaut Celebration in Rabin Square	• Haas Promenade • Worldwide March of the Living event • Jewish Quarter • March of the Living Yom Ha'atzmaut Celebration at Latrun	• City of David, Hezekiah's Tunnel • Yad Vashem • Ben Yehuda Street	• Ein Gedi • Dead Sea • Tefillot at the Kotel	• Tefillot • Havdallah • Concluding Program and Talent show	• Return to Los Angeles

Appendix B: Profiles of Participant's High Schools[7]

Agoura High School (2 participants)
Agoura High Schools is located approximately 40 miles outside of the city of Los Angeles, in a suburban, residential, high-income community. It is a public school with 2,200 students, grades 9-12, in the Las Virgenes Unified School District. 84% of the student body is Caucasian, 8% are Asian, 5% are Hispanic and 1% are African American. 95% of graduates attend college: 46% attend 2-year colleges and 49% attend 4-year colleges. In 2007, Agoura was selected as a California Distinguished School, which identifies it among one of the 5% of the most exemplary public schools in the state.

Beverly Hills High School (6 participants)
This school is the only public high school located in Beverly Hills. With an enrollment of 2215 students, Beverly Hills High School has a student to teacher ratio of 19:1. The school serves grades 9-12. 70% of students are Caucasian, 5% are Asian, 4% are African American and 4% are Latino. Approximately one third of the student population is Iranian. The school has an unusually large international population: 35% of students are born outside the United States. For 42%, English is a second language. 96% of graduates attend college: 48% attend 2-year colleges and 48% attend 4-year colleges. The school has been featured in a number of movies and has many famous alumni, as well as students who are children of celebrities. It is one of the most decorated public high schools in the country.

Campbell Hall School (1 participant)
Located in North Hollywood in the San Fernando Valley, Campbell Hall School is a private, co-educational K-12 Episcopal day school. The total student body numbers 1090 students and the average class size is 15 students. In 2008, Campbell Hall School had 10 students for every full-time equivalent teacher. (The California average is 21 students per full-time equivalent teacher). 81% of the student body is Caucasian (the state average is 29%) and 2% are Hispanic (the state average is 49%). Tuition is $23,460 annually. Child actors and the children of celebrities are among the student body.

Hamilton High School (1 participant)
One of the 199 public schools in the Los Angeles Unified School District, Hamilton High School is located on the Westside of Los Angeles. The school has 3232 students in grades 9-12. 47% of students are Hispanic, 30% are African American, 17% of students are Caucasian, and 4% are Asian. For 12% of students, English is a second language. 45% of students participate in the free or reduced price lunch program. There are 22 students for every full-time teacher.

Harvard-Westlake School (1 participant)
Harvard-Westlake School, located in North Hollywood, is a private, co-educational university preparatory school. 1,600 students are enrolled in grades 7-12 and the student to teacher ratio is 7:1. 72% of students are Caucasian and 15% are Asian. The school is known for its selective admission, strong academic program, and celebrity parents and alumni. It is ranked 35 out of thousands of secondary institutions across the country in sending students to top colleges and universities. In June

[7] This information was drawn from various sources on the Internet including: school web pages, privateschoolreviews.com, publicschoolreview.com and greatschools.net.

2009, Forbes listed the school as one of the country's top prep schools. Current annual tuition at Harvard-Westlake is $26,250.

Milken Community High School (87 participants)
Located in the affluent Los Angeles neighborhood of Bel Air, Milken is a private Jewish high school, serving grades 9-12. With 600 students enrolled, Milken is one of the largest Jewish day schools in the United States. Though officially non-denominational, the school is affiliated with the Reform Stephen S. Wise Temple. All students are required to take four years of Hebrew, of which 18 different levels are offered. Four years of Jewish studies are also required, and are offered at regular, honors, and high honors levels. Prayer takes place once a week, with varied options such as traditional-egalitarian, yoga, social action, meditation, liberal, doubters, and others. An optional daily Mincha minyan is also offered. In partnership with the Alexander Muss Institute for Israel Education, Milken offers students the opportunity to live in Israel during a semester of 10th grade. The student to teacher ratio is 5:1. Annual tuition is $28,885.

Mira Costa High School (2 participants)
This school is located in Manhattan Beach, a city on the Pacific Ocean in southwestern Los Angeles County that is one of the most expensive coastal towns in the U.S. The only high school in the Manhattan Beach Unified School District, Mira Costa is a public high school serving grades 9-12. The average class size is 30 students, with a student to teacher ratio of 24:1. Of the 2332 students enrolled: 71% of students are Caucasian, 7% are Asian, 7% are Hispanic, and 1% are African American. 2% of students are part of the free or reduced price lunch program, and English is a second language for 1% of students.

New Community Jewish High School (32 participants)
Opened in 2002, NCJHS is a private school housed on the campus of Shomrei Torah Synagogue, a Conservative congregation. The school is located in West Hills, an affluent city in the San Fernando Valley. The school serves approximately 400 students in grades 9-12. 99% of students are Caucasian. The average class size is 16 students. Hebrew is a required course for all 4 years and Israel exchange programs are offered. Prayer takes place weekly on Thursday mornings and there is an optional daily minyan that meets before school. Annual tuition is $24,650.

Palisades Charter High School (2 participants)
This independent charter high school is one of the most highly ranked public schools in Los Angeles. The school is located in the Pacific Palisades, a very affluent and primarily residential area. 2760 students are enrolled in grades 9-12. 43% of students are Caucasian, 25% are Hispanic, 21% are African American and 8% are Asian. The student to teacher ratio is 24:1. The average class size is 33 students. 95% of graduates attend college. About half of the students live in the surrounding area: the other half travel (mostly by bus) from communities across Los Angeles. For 3% of students, English is a second Language. 27% of students participate in free or reduced price lunch program.

San Pedro High School (1 participant)
This magnet high school in the Los Angeles Unified School District has 3440 students enrolled in grades 9-12. The school is located in a densely populated, racially diverse part of the Los Angeles Harbor Area. The student to teacher ratio is 24:1. 67% of students are Hispanic, 20% are Caucasian, 8% are African

American and 4% are Asian. For 9%, English is a second Language. 46% of students participate in the free or reduced price lunch program.

Westchester High School (1 participant)
This magnet high school in the Los Angeles Unified School District is located in Westchester, a city that is also home to the Los Angeles International Airport. Among the 1812 students: 72% are African American, 17% are Hispanic, 8% are Caucasian, and 2% are Asian. The student to teacher ratio is 21:1. For 5%, English is a second Language. 46% of students participate in free or reduced price lunch program.

Appendix C: Organizational Structure