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AUTHOR Schneider, Ilene
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ABSTRACT

This study assesses community-sponsored Jewish supplementary high schools, and its implications were analyzed and applied to proposed closings and mergers among Catholic schools in Philadelphia (Pennsylvania). Data were gathered via administration of a questionnaire, follow-up interviews, an examination of published articles and reports and archival materials from a specific community, and interviews with key community members. Forty-eight communities with community-sponsored supplementary Jewish high schools responded. The research also included a case study of one community where two supplementary high school systems merged. It is concluded that a community can have a successful supplementary school if: (1) the school is founded by synagogues in consort with a central agency; (2) the school is trans-ideological; (3) there is full participation by the rabbis; (4) expediency is not the sole motivation; (5) the location is fairly central; and (6) there is trust and desire to cooperate among stakeholders. These findings have application for reversing plans to close Philadelphia Catholic schools; in particular, stakeholders should be included in the decision process, merged school traditions should be protected, and the laity should have the trust of the clerics and be given a more significant role in school functioning. Contains nine references. (JB)

COMMUNITY-SPONSORED JEWISH SUPPLEMENTARY HIGH SCHOOLS: IMPLICATIONS FOR CATHOLIC SCHOOL CLOSINGS AND MERGERS IN THE ARCHDIOCESE OF PHILADELPHIA

ILENE SCHNEIDER, ED.D.

It would seem at first as though community-sponsored supplementary Jewish high schools would not have much in common with Catholic parochial high schools. Yet, the findings of an explanatory study which, through examination of a series of independent variables, developed a theory to explain why some localities have been able to establish and maintain community-sponsored supplementary Jewish high schools while others have not, has implications for the high school system of the Archdiocese of Philadelphia.

Nearly one-half of Jewish communities in the United States currently have a community-sponsored supplementary Jewish high school (post bar/bat Mitzvah, age 13), and increasing numbers of them have been studying the possibility of establishing such schools. In some localities there have been community-sponsored supplementary Jewish high schools for several years; these schools command a great deal of support by the students, parents, faculty, synagogues, and community as a whole. In other areas, there has been resistance to the establishment of such schools, either by synagogues which already have their own schools or by the potential financial backers of these schools. The resistance has existed even when there are other factors,

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such as shrinking numbers of students, lack of financial resources, and few qualified teachers, which would make communalization seem to be an effective and efficient method for schooling.

"Communalization" in the Jewish community is the equivalent of "centralization" in the secular. The general trend in the Jewish sphere has been away from the public school model of superintendency, with its common curriculum, centralized funding, and state- or district- regulated standards. Instead, Jewish educational policy decisions, administration, and funding have often been left in the hands of the individual synagogues. As a result of the predominance of the synagogue-sponsored supplementary school, the central agencies for Jewish education usually act as resources for existing schools rather than as founders and administrators of those schools.

In a community-sponsored school, the administration of the school is given to a central agency or a consortium of synagogues rather than to one individual synagogue. This community school approach, whether through a merger of several existing synagogue schools or through the establishment of new schools, seems to be on the increase. This increase is due to a variety of factors, mostly demographic and financial, and seldom to a philosophical commitment to the unified school.

Because of the issue of "turf", communities tend to sponsor high schools rather than elementary schools, for many synagogues do not run their own high school programs. Therefore, there was a gap into which the community could step without being perceived to be in competition with the synagogues. Yet, even on the high school level, there is much controversy about community schools.

The problems of consolidation, the lack of ideology, and the pressures of demographics and decreasing finances are not unique to the Jewish community, but are present in the secular sphere as well. They are particularly present in the Catholic parochial school system.

The Coopers & Lybrand Report

On October 9, 1992, Cardinal Anthony J. Bevilacqua of the Archdiocese of Philadelphia announced the findings of the Coopers & Lybrand management consulting firm, which had been hired to evaluate the Archdiocese high schools and make recommendations for their future. Coopers & Lybrand reported that there were 24,370 students (down from 58,000 in 1971 and 38,165 in 1983) in 25 high schools in the five counties of the Archdiocese; the deficit was $10.4 million (from an $8 million surplus in 1985). The enrollment had dropped 35% in five years; the tuition had increased 69.5%; and the deficit was amassing at $3.5 million annually. The management firm estimated that by 1999, the number of

students would drop to 17,200 and the debt would increase to $86.4 million. "The consultants found that despite a baby boom, enrollment at the parish elementary schools has declined by 20% over the last decade. And while most students who entered parochial school in first grade used to remain through eighth grade, now only 69% do" (Philadelphia Inquirer, Oct. 10, 1992, A5).

The report recommended establishment of an open enrollment plan (to cross parish lines), massive reinvestment in the surviving schools, and eventual replacement of the diocesan system with a federation of schools which would set their own educational courses and tuition. It further advised the closing of six schools and merging of four others, mostly in low-income and minority neighborhoods which would not be likely to attract students under an open enrollment plan.

Public Reaction and Action

The protests from the Catholic school alumni, parents, teachers, and students were immediate, especially in those schools earmarked for closure or merger. Cardinal Bevilacqua, who had emphasized that the report contained only recommendations and that no final decision by him would be reached until December, scheduled a series of public meetings, which often became protest rallies.

The protests centered on concern about losing identity and traditions if the schools closed or were merged, and tried to ignore the economic and demographic realities. One teacher in a school in which enrollment had decreased from 1600 to 960,is quoted as saying, "Why have they forsaken us? [The report] says we've lost enrollment. It doesn't say close the school." Another protester said, "They showed their true colors. Caring and compassion went out the window. It's a business." Said another, "Why are they abandoning the kids who need them the most? I hope it comes down to more than money" (Philadelphia Inquirer, Oct. 17, B3). Echoing the same sentiment, another one said, "Faith has to run deeper than the bottom line" (Philadelphia Inquirer, Oct. 26, B2).

Almost two weeks after his initial announcement, Cardinal Bevilacqua was described as "apparently taken aback by the strong public reaction against the school closures. 'I could never have predicted how positively the school communities would respond'" (Philadelphia Inquirer, Oct. 22, 1992, B2).

The fund-raising group Business Leaders Organized for Catholic Schools pledged to raise $10 million by the year 2000. On December 9, 1992, Walter Annenberg announced that the Annenberg Foundation would give the schools $2 million over four years (a maximum of $500,000 a year) if the Catholic community would match the grant 4:1 and raise $8

million over the four years from other sources. (Only collected pledges would count.) This additional $10 million could wipe out the current deficit, but not the projected deficit of $16-18 million.

On December 15, 1992, the Cardinal announced that only two schools would close the following September. He gave the remaining schools five years to raise funds and to implement an open enrollment plan.

The study of the factors predicting the success or failure of community-sponsored supplementary Jewish high schools offer some guidelines to help understand the reactions to the Coopers & Lybrand report and to predict what the reactions may be in five years if the schools need to be closed at that time.

Theoretical Framework

Several steps were followed in conducting the examination of the community-sponsored supplementary Jewish high schools:

1. An introductory section which included:

a. An historical overview of the Jewish community's responsibilities for the funding and administration of Jewish supplementary schools;

b. An overview of the controversy surrounding community-sponsored supplementary Jewish schools;

c. Parallels in the secular and public educational spheres;

2. An analysis of a questionnaire examining the following independent variables:

a. Denominational affiliation

b. Governance

c. Ideology

d. Direct involvement by the participating groups

3. A case study of a specific community to explore the relationships of the various factors. In addition to the factors surveyed in the questionnaires, the case study examined other questions necessary for an understanding of why a community school succeeds:

a. Is there philosophical support for the school? In other words, are there influential members of the community (lay and professional leaders) who do not believe in the efficacy of the community-sponsored supplementary Jewish high school? Or, conversely, does the school have the publicly stated support of the synagogues and the central communal organizations (the Federation of Jewish Agencies and/or the local central agency for Jewish education)?

b. What is the nature of the cooperation among the synagogues in the community? Is there a perceived competition among the synagogues for membership or a history

of animosity among the various denominational movements within a specific community? Do the synagogues cooperate on other community programming (such as adult education or Israel Independence Day celebrations)?

c. What is the relationship of the synagogues to the centralized Jewish organizational structures (e.g., the Federation of Jewish Agencies)? Is there a fear of loss of autonomy on the part of the individual synagogues if they join in the formation of a community school? Or is there a history of cooperative ventures for community-wide programs?

4. A theory for predicting whether a community school will succeed. By analyzing the data found in the questionnaires and in the analysis of the two communities, the factors which lead to a successful community school were identified.

Methodology

An explanatory study does not only describe a situation but attempts to explain it. The theory developed in this study is a grounded theory, one that is uncovered through an examination of the data. "Grounded theory is developed by: (1) entering the field work phase without a hypothesis; (2) describing what happens; and (3) formulating explanations as to why it happens on the basis of observation" (Bailey, p. 54).

In order to test the theory, several variables were examined. The dependent variable is the success of the school; this success is influenced by the presence of independent variables including:

1. A commitment to the ideal of K'lal Yisrael [a pluralistic approach which recognizes that there is a common good for the community, and accepts diversity within unity];

2. External pressures (low enrollment, financial straits, lack of qualified teachers, etc.);

3. A belief in the efficacy of the community-sponsored supplementary Jewish high school;

4. The publicly stated support of the synagogues and the central communal organizations (the Federation of Jewish Agencies and/or the local central agency for Jewish education);

5. A perception of competition among synagogues for membership;

6. A history of animosity among the various denominational movements within a specific community;

7. A fear of loss of autonomy on the part of the individual synagogues;

8. The involvement of the pulpit rabbis in teaching within the school and of the lay leaders in the supervision of the school.

A combination of several methods were used to conduct the necessary research: 1. a questionnaire with open-ended questions; 2. follow-up interviews in order to obtain more details than possible from a written questionnaire; 3. an examination of published articles and reports and archival materials from a specific community; and 4. interviews with key people involved in this community.

The Questionnaire

The questionnaire was not designed to provide a statistical survey, but to help with the analysis of the problem and to establish existing conditions. This study did not test a hypothesis, but developed a theory which, in effect, is an empirical generalization. In an empirical generalization, a hypothesis is not tested; instead, a relationship is observed from an examination of the data. That relationship is then generalized to other cases.

As expected, there was a high return rate of the questionnaires (59 out of 97), since the information being gathered was relevant to the respondents. The questionnaire was constructed to avoid the difficulties, such as double-barreled questions, ambiguous or vague questions, slang or colloquialisms, leading questions, or threatening questions.

The questions were open-ended, since many of the schools to be studied defy easy categorizing. Although it is

more difficult to standardize the responses, the flexibility allowed the respondents outweighs this disadvantage. The easy-to-answer questions were asked first, with the most open-ended and complex question at the end.

The cover letter followed the recommended form. It identified the researcher, explained the importance of the study and its relevance to the respondent, and assured confidentiality. It was necessary for the researcher to know the identities of the respondents in order to conduct follow-up interviews, but the respondents and their communities have not been identified in any way within the paper itself.

There were follow-up interviews with those who responded to the questionnaire and were willing to be interviewed. The follow-up interviews, in all cases conducted on the telephone, were used to expand on the data collected from the written questionnaires. There are advantages and disadvantages to both mailed questionnaires and telephone interviews, but a combination of both provided the best means of data collection for this study. It was not possible for the interviewer to travel to each locale for face-to-face interviews.

The interviews were semistructured, so as to allow flexibility in the kinds of questions asked. Two specific questions were asked in most of the follow-up interviews, however: 1. Were there preexisting supplementary high

schools sponsored by the synagogues before the founding of the community school? 2. Why do the other schools not join in the community school?

The Case Study

One community was been studied in detail, code-named Community Aleph, a mixed urban-suburban Intermediate City in the Northeast. For several years, Community Aleph sponsored the High School of Jewish Studies, which was funded by the community through the Community Aleph Board of Jewish Education. The school, however, had the support only of the Conservative synagogues; the Reform congregations maintained their own programs. Despite attempts to consolidate the schools for many years, it was only with the 1991-1992 school year that the two school systems merged.

An analysis of the written reports from this community was been made in order to ascertain the "official" version of the events which occurred. The materials included letters, reports, minutes, and evaluations.

Interviews were conducted with lay people and professionals who were involved with the merger of the schools in Community Aleph. Again, confidentiality was guaranteed. These interviews, unlike the follow-up interviews with the respondents to the mailed questionnaires, were conducted in person and were tape

recorded, with the permission of the interviewees. These interviews were also semistructured.

Despite the subjective nature of interviews, it was important for this study that such interviews be conducted, since part of the theory is that it is perceptions rather than realities which often predict the success or failure of a community-sponsored supplementary Jewish high school. Objective scales can be used to determine such factors as amount of funding or numbers of students, but there is no objective scale for determining a locality's commitment to certain philosophical stances or a specific synagogue's sense that its autonomy is being undermined. It is only through discussions with the people involved, and a comparison with the reports which they have written, that such data can be determined.

Data Source

There were 81 communities with community-sponsored supplementary Jewish high schools surveyed. Forty-eight of them responded, giving a response rate of 59.3%.

Almost 3/4 (72.9%) of the responses came from Large Cities and from Intermediate Cities, thereby giving a sample of schools from a wide range of populations. Although Intermediate Cities account for 35% of the total responses, they represent 50% of the locales in which there is only a

community-sponsored supplementary Jewish high schools and no other supplementary Jewish high school in the area.

Over 2/3 of the schools were founded after 1960, with 56% of them having been established after 1970. The search of the literature indicates that this finding is valid.

Almost the same percentage of community-sponsored supplementary Jewish high schools were founded by synagogues as by central agencies. When adding together all of the synagogue-founded schools (those founded by synagogues and community organizations working together as well as by synagogues alone) and all those founded by community organizations (Federations of Jewish Agencies, colleges of Jewish studies, and independent groups), a larger percentage of schools were founded by community groups than by synagogues. Unlike the total sample, however, the majority of the "successful" community-sponsored supplementary Jewish high schools were founded by synagogues or by synagogues working with community groups. It is theorized that these schools have been able to gain the support of all the synagogues because they were seen to have been founded from self-interest and not from outside pressures. The vast majority of schools, regardless of the founding bodies, are still under their original sponsorship.

One of the criteria for determining the "success" of a community-sponsored supplementary Jewish high school is that there be no other supplementary Jewish high schools in the

area. Over half of locales with community-sponsored supplementary Jewish high schools, however, do have other supplementary Jewish high schools in their area. And, yet, over 4/5 of the community-sponsored supplementary Jewish high school consider themselves trans-ideological. Almost all the locales with other schools indicate that at least one of these other schools is affiliated with the Reform movement; the vast majority are sponsored by individual synagogues.

Almost 3/4 of locales report that the rabbis do teach in the community-sponsored supplementary Jewish high schools. Slightly more than half are paid separate salaries for teaching. A larger percentage of the rabbis teach in the "successful" schools than in the total sample, but there is no difference in the per cent that is paid a separate salary for teaching.

As could be expected in any dynamic situation, it was a combination of factors which led to the establishment of the schools. When examining those factors, however, both a commitment to K'lal Yisrael and the exigencies of external pressures were predominant. K'lal Yisrael was defined as responses which indicated that the motivation was the socialization of the students, a chance for the Jewish teens to meet together, or the greater good of the community. Expediency was defined as lack of teachers, financial constraints, the sharing of resources, or small numbers of

students. Educational effectiveness was defined as student retention, "the best way to educate our teens," "more meaningful interaction," "an expanded pool of students," "more successful than the individual synagogues," "control over educational process."

Expediency and K'lal Yisrael are the two motivating factors mentioned the most in communities with only a community-sponsored supplementary Jewish high school, in almost the same proportion as in the total sample. Educational effectiveness, however, is mentioned twice as often as it was in the total sample.

Conclusions

Based on the survey, the case study, and the follow-up interviews, the following conclusions were drawn. A locale can have a successful community-sponsored supplementary Jewish high school if:

1. The school is founded by the individual synagogues acting in consort with the central agency;

2. The school is truly trans-ideological, taking into consideration not only the curriculum, goals, and educational philosophy of all the denominations, but practical details, such as number of hours-per-week of instruction, as well;

3. There is full participation by the rabbis, particularly in maintaining and teaching their own 10th grade students in preparation for Confirmation;

4. Expediency alone is not the motivating factor, but a commitment to K'lal Yisrael and to educational effectiveness is also present;

5. The school is not located in an area that is so geographically diverse that it becomes impractical for students to travel to the school;

6. There is mutual trust and a desire to cooperate among all the stakeholders in the venture.

Implications for Catholic Schools

Many of the conclusions about the Jewish schools are applicable to the Catholic school situation, and help explain the public reaction to the Coopers & Lybrand report and to Cardinal Bevilacqua's surprise at the outcry.

1. "The school is founded by the individual synagogues acting in consort with the central agency": in the case of the Philadelphia Archdiocese, the decision as to the implementation of the Coopers & Lybrand report was to be reached by one person acting alone, the Cardinal. It was important that the stakeholders in the parochial schools themselves -- the students, parents, and teachers -- be brought into the process. Andrew Greeley's solution to the problems of the Catholic schools is to turn over the schools

to "the laity who are not dependent on ultimate decisions made by the pastor or the bishop" (Greeley, p. 237) and will make the financial decisions and hire the staff and administrators. As the John J. Reilly, President of the National Association of Catholic School Teachers, wrote in a letter to the editor of the Philadelphia Inquirer:

> Archdiocesan officials have not been willing or open to the involvement of the entire Catholic community (parents, alumni, teachers, business leaders). Even as our schools face this most critical situation, a situation brought about by the very people who now claim the right to put into place what they see as a solution, the cardinal seems more willing to accept an outside firm that apparently based its finding and recommendations on less than hard facts.

2. "The school is truly trans-ideological, taking into consideration not only the curriculum, goals, and educational philosophy of all the denominations, but practical details, such as number of hours-per-week of instruction, as well": one of the major concerns expressed by the stakeholders in the schools slated for closing or merger was that the traditions of those schools would be lost and be submerged into that of the remaining schools. It was important to reassure them that their specific school traditions would be respected and continued.

3. "There is full participation by the rabbis, particularly in maintaining and teaching their own 10th grade students in preparation for Confirmation": one of the causes of the rising deficit is the reliance on lay teachers for staffing. Even though Catholic schools spend one-half the amount per student as do public schools (Allis, May 27, 1991, 48), the lay staff is paid less than public school teachers, they are paid more than nuns (Deedy, Sept. 13, 1988, 6).

On the other hand, Greeley, who opposes closures and mergers, proposes transferring control of Catholic schools from clerics to laity. "I argue that the decline of the Catholic schools is the result of a loss of nerve in the Catholic clerical culture -- among priests and bishops especially, when faced with massive loss of income...We clerics haven't been able to do it; give the laity a chance" (Greeley, 235).

Reilly in his letter to the editor would agree with Greeley's recommendations:

> At the root of the issue lies a tremendously important question. Whose schools are they? It might be legally correct to say that Cardinal Bevilacqua's name is officially on the deed, but he holds that distinction only because he has been appointed by Pope John Paul II. In point of fact, the schools belong to us, the parishioners of the

archdiocese, not to the cardinal and, certainly, not ot the clergy. These officials have been appointed stewards.

4. "Expediency alone is not the motivating factor, but a commitment to K'lal Yisrael and to educational effectiveness is also present": the Coopers & Lybrand report cited surveys which showed that Catholic school parents want quality education, personalized attention, and more program offerings. Unless these factors are present, then the financial exigencies will not be sufficient to convince them that the schools need to be closed or merged. In addition, Greeley argues, "In the long run, the financial crisis in the church will not abate unless and until the Catholic laity...are given their full share in the financial decision-making of their parishes and their dioceses" (Greeley, 236).

5. "The school is not located in an area that is so geographically diverse that it becomes impractical for students to travel to the school": the opposition to the open enrollment plan supports this finding. "It is the overlapping networks of school and parish that make Catholic schools so effective academically .... Regionalization is the current buzz-word that one hears from Catholic school administrators. They do not seem to realize that when you break apart the union between school and parish, you destroy social capital and diminish, if not eliminate completely,

the religious and ecclesiastic outcome of Catholic education" (Greeley, p. 235).

6. "There is mutual trust and a desire to cooperate among all the stakeholders in the venture": the laity need to be empowered, and the clerics need to trust the laity. Commenting on the closure of an Episcopal school in Manhattan, a report stated, "In many ways, the last month provided an important if not pleasant lesson. 'I never knew there was a board of trustees that could make these decisions without consulting us,' [a student] said. 'Their picture was always at the front of the year book, but I didn't know they had that kind of power'" (New York Times, Nov. 28, 1992, 24). Reilly ended his letter to the editor by noting, "The schools belong to all of us and we, through the board, should have the opportunity to share in the decisions affecting them."

The stakeholders in the Philadelphia Catholic high schools -- the alumni, parents, students, teachers -- have been challenged to find a way to reverse the financial and demographic decreases within the next five years. It can be predicted that if, in five years, it is still necessary to close and/or merge schools, the decision, while lamented, will not be met with the same degree of bitterness and resistance as the October, 1992, recommendations were. It is now a partnership which will try to raise enrollment and decrease the deficit; and it will be that partnership,

rather than an outside agency, which will take responsibility for the outcome of their actions.

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