



What We Learned from the Interfaith Families and Religious Schools Survey
By Edmund Case

InterfaithFamily.com’s first Interfaith Families and Religious Schools Survey, which fielded responses from 56 people nationwide in August and September 2005, sought to shed light on the choices interfaith families make with respect to the religious education of their children, the reasons for their choices, and their experiences.

The survey respondents were self-selected, and 84 percent of the respondents said they were raising their children as Jews, in comparison to the 33 percent reported in the National Jewish Population Survey 2000-2001. While the survey thus is not representative of all interfaith families, it provides interesting new information about interfaith families who are raising their children as Jews -- a very important demographic for Jewish continuity.

The survey found that children having a religious identity is very important to interfaith families, with 96 percent saying “a great deal” or close to it:

1. Please rate how important it is to you that your children have a religious education, where 5=a great deal and 1=not at all.	Count	% (of 56)
5	31	55
4	23	41
3	2	4
2	0	0
1	0	0

Of the participants, 68 percent send their children to a Jewish Sunday and/or after-school program, while 30 percent send their children to a Jewish day school.

5. Do you send your children to:	Count	% (of 50)
Jewish Sunday school and/or after-school program	34	68
Christian Sunday school and/or after-school program	1	2
Jewish day school	15	30
Christian parochial school	0	0

The reasons given for sending children to Jewish day schools were: Religious education: 88 percent; academics: 58 percent; and social aspects: 38 percent. Seventy-one percent of the participants said doing so was important to them, and 25 percent said it was important to their partner. Smaller percentages said it was important to their parents (13 percent) or their partners' parents (8 percent).

The survey asked a series of questions that reveal the “comfort level” and involvement of the non-Jewish parents and grandparents of children being sent to Jewish religious schools. With respect to grandparents, 44 percent were on the very supportive end of the scale, 23 percent were on the not very supportive end, and 33 percent were neither supportive nor unsupportive:

7. Please rate how supportive the grandparents are who are not the same religion as the school your children attend, where 5=a great deal and 1=not at all.	Count	% (of 48)
5	11	23
4	10	21
3	16	33
2	9	19
1	2	4

With respect to the comfort level at school events of non-Jewish parents whose children attend Jewish religious school, 66 percent were on the very comfortable end of the scale, 10 percent were on the not very comfortable end, and 24 percent were neither comfortable nor uncomfortable; with respect to involvement in school activities, 58 percent were at the very active end of the scale, 24 percent at the not very active end, and 18 percent neither active nor inactive:

8. Please rate how comfortable the parent who is not the same religion as the school your children attend feels at events at the school, where 5=a great deal and 1=not at all.	Count	% (of 50)	9. Please rate how active in school activities is the parent who is not the same religion as the school your children attend, where 5=a great deal and 1=not at all.	Count	% (of 49)
5	14	28	5	14	29
4	19	38	4	14	29
3	12	24	3	9	18
	2	4	2	6	12
1	3	6	1	6	12

Seventy-eight percent of the participants reported that the reactions of other parents at their child’s religious school to interfaith families was warm and positive; only 8 percent said it was on the cool and negative end of the scale:

10. Please rate the reaction of other parents at your child’s religious school to interfaith families, where 5=warm and positive and 1=cool and negative.	Count	% (of 51)
5	24	47
4	16	31
3	7	14
2	4	8
1	0	0

In response to the question “What does the religious school your children attend do to welcome interfaith families?” some of the comments were:

“They are not treated any differently.” “There are many interfaith families, with no special notice made of us, which is nice! There is a warm welcome for everyone.” “They just welcome them, no questions asked.” “Non-exclusionary attitude.”

“They told us that there are many other families such as ours.”

“They provide parent education.”

In response to the question “What else would you like it to do?” some of the comments were:

“ I would like to see more family activities that were inclusive for all.” “More inclusion.”

“Not schedule anything big during Easter Sunday etc. so kids who are at other events won’t miss out at Hebrew school.”

“Add programs and curricula that recognize the phenomenon [of intermarriage] at least.”