

Joint Conservative-Reform Religious Schools

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This paper was adopted by the CJLS on January 20, 1988 with sixteen votes in favor and three abstentions (16-0-3). Members voting in favor: Rabbis Isidoro Aizenberg, Ben Zion Bergman, Elliot N. Dorff, Amy Eilberg, Richard L. Eisneberg, Jerome M. Epstein, Robert Gordis, Howard Handler, Benjamin B. Kreitman, David H. Lincoln, Lionel E. Moses, Mayer E. Rabinowitz, Avram I. Reisner, Joel Roth, Seymour J. Rosenbloom, and Gordon Tucker. Members abstaining: Rabbis David M. Feldman, George Pollak, and Morris M. Shapiro.

שאלה

Rabbi Joseph Hirsch of Erie, Pennsylvania has asked the Committee on Jewish Law and Standards to establish guidelines for Conservative participation in schools jointly sponsored by Conservative and Reform institutions. Specifically, Rabbi Hirsch asks the following:

1. Should I participate in a joint Confirmation service held by the joint Conservative/Reform Religious school at the Reform Temple when there will be many men who refuse to cover their heads?
2. Should I participate in similarly co-sponsored Holocaust services which, when held at the Reform Temple, men refuse to cover their heads?
3. Should I sign school certificates of children in the joint Conservative/Reform Religious school who are only patrilineally Jewish?
4. Are there any guidelines for Conservative synagogues participating in a joint school for patrilineally Jewish children?

תשובה

There are three types of sponsors for Jewish schools: a synagogue or region of a movement; a federation, bureau of Jewish education, or

The Committee on Jewish Law and Standards of the Rabbinical Assembly provides guidance in matters of halakhah for the Conservative movement. The individual rabbi, however, is the authority for the interpretation and application of all matters of halakhah.

independent group (“communal schools”); or two synagogues (or regional agencies), each affiliated with a different movement (“jointly sponsored schools”). Most schools are attached to a given movement; but the likelihood is that communal and jointly sponsored schools will increase. In times past, this was primarily a phenomenon of small Jewish communities, which needed such cooperation to establish religious schools; but as the number of Jewish parents interested in day school education increases, larger Jewish communities are now facing the same issues, some on the elementary level and others on the high school level. Practical issues like the finances required to operate a school, the shortage of qualified teachers, and the critical mass of students necessary to make a school educationally as well as fiscally viable are usually the motivating factors for establishing such schools, but sometimes an ideological commitment to *כלל ישראל* plays a role as well.

The extent to which a Conservative rabbi can influence the religious outlook and policy of communal schools depends upon the rabbi’s personal relationship with the organizing group and the degree to which members of the rabbi’s synagogue are, or might be, involved. In schools sponsored jointly by Conservative and Reform synagogues, however, the Conservative rabbi and synagogue are asked to participate in an official capacity. That enlarges the degree to which they can influence the nature of the school, but it also increases their responsibility for doing so, to the point of deciding whether or not the final product is one which can legitimately carry authorization as a Conservative institution. Rabbis and synagogues have a stake in trying to root a school in the synagogue rather than a communal agency since synagogue sponsorship underscores the importance of the synagogue in Jewish life and contributes members and vitality to the sponsoring congregations. This responsum, then, speaks specifically to this last situation in which the school is, or is intended to be, a product of institutions from both movements working together.

Rabbi Hirsch asks specifically in the context of a religious (supplementary) school. The guidelines he seeks, however, are at least as important, and somewhat more complicated, in a day school. Since the number of children in day schools has increased significantly in the last decade, a trend which appears to be continuing, this responsum will address issues in both the supplementary and the day school settings.

Some of the questions in Jewish law which jointly sponsored schools raise have affected the operation of these schools from the time the first one was established. Other questions, while perhaps latent in the structure of such schools from the very beginning, have been made more acute by the Reform movement’s public acceptance of patrilineal descent as a criterion of native Jewish identity and the Conservative movement’s

insistence, embedded in a Standard of Rabbinic Practice, on the traditional, matrilineal definition. While the school boards of joint Conservative-Reform schools will probably not recognize the Committee on Jewish Law and Standards as their religious authority, Rabbi Hirsch asks for a specification of the conditions under which Conservative rabbis and synagogues can legitimately participate in such schools. Since the number of communities engaged in such joint ventures is increasing, this responsum will use Rabbi Hirsch's question as an opportunity to address not only the specific issues related to Jewish identity, but also a number of the other questions which arise in cooperative, educational settings. I want to emphasize at the outset, however, that individual situations vary widely and that the Conservative rabbi will therefore have to use his or her judgment in applying these guidelines to the specific situation at hand.

A. The Advisability of Movement vs. Jointly Sponsored Schools

The first issue, of course, is whether Conservative rabbis and institutions should engage in such joint ventures with Reform institutions at all. This responsum will make clear, if it is not already so to the reader, that there are hard halakhic and educational problems to be resolved in such joint ventures, and some of the problems do not admit of resolutions which Conservative affiliates can enthusiastically embrace. The philosophical differences between the Conservative and Reform movements, discussed by a number of writers from both movements, become painfully obvious when the details of running a school must be confronted. There are many areas of agreement between Conservative and Reform Judaism, on the one hand, and between Conservative and Orthodox Judaism on the other; but the three movements are ultimately distinct not only because of historical accident but because they each have a different view of how one should be Jewish in our time. Since the task at hand is to teach these views to the next generation, it certainly should not be surprising that each movement will have a distinctive approach as to how that should be done. Educational approaches and techniques are never ideologically neutral.

Moreover, the religious differences between the movements are not confined to the school and synagogue. They pervade the homes. Conservative rabbis and educators may not have succeeded in convincing a large percentage of Conservative members to observe Shabbat and *kashrut*, but members of Conservative synagogues and those who attend Conservative schools or send their children to them are not surprised when the synagogue or school teaches and advocates

observance of those and other mitzvot as part of what it means to be a Jew. Reform ideology requires Reform schools to teach mitzvot so that Reform Jews can intelligently consider them for incorporation in their personal lives, but the emphasis is on the individual's autonomous choice about these matters, not on the imperative to observe. It is a matter of choice in the eyes of Reform Jews, a matter of obligation (however explained and however much violated in practice) for Conservative Jews. As a result, while both Conservative and Reform parents undoubtedly want to assure a high quality, general education, Conservative parents expect – or at least are willing to tolerate – greater duration and depth in their children's Jewish education, as a comparison of the timing and curriculum in existing Conservative and Reform schools would demonstrate.

As a result of these halakhic, philosophical, educational, and sociological issues, if practical circumstances allow, it is preferable for both Conservative and Reform Judaism to sponsor their own schools. As educators will attest, even within the confines of each movement, it is often difficult to establish a clear vision of the school's Jewish objectives and practice, and schools within each movement in fact differ markedly from each other on these issues. That is true all the more when the school must somehow present both Conservative and Reform approaches to Judaism.

The need to have separate movement schools is especially crucial for Conservative Jews because the ends of a spectrum are always easier to explain to both children and adults than the middle. As a result, joint ventures between Conservative and Reform Jews or between Conservative and Orthodox Jews all too often result in a curriculum and an ambience which are much more closely aligned to one extreme or the other than to the vital middle for which we stand. Even with the best intentions, as time goes on it becomes more and more difficult in a joint Conservative-Reform school to insist, for example, that children engage in prayer daily and that the prayer be traditional, or that parents not schedule birthday parties on Shabbat. Similarly, joint Conservative-Orthodox schools often have little tolerance of, let alone appreciation for, a Conservative understanding of Jewish texts and law, especially since the unfortunate lack of Conservative teachers often means that such schools are staffed almost exclusively by Orthodox Jews.

After all is said and done, the loyalty of most families to one movement or the other is not so strong or informed that any of the three movements, least of all Conservative Judaism, can afford to pass up the opportunity to teach its philosophy to the next generation. In a school setting, that philosophy is transmitted through everything the school does, ranging from the administrators and teachers the school hires, to

the texts it chooses to teach and the way it teaches them, to the rituals it practices and trains students to do on their own, to the ways it expects both children and adults to interact with others.

How does the establishment of separate movement schools accord with the value of כלל ישראל, the need to strengthen and care for the Jewish community as a whole? We in the Conservative movement have championed that value more than the other movements, often to our detriment. Does not the insistence on separate movement schools undermine that?

Moreover, we must be mindful of the point made tellingly by our colleague, Rabbi Harold Schulweis, of the need for us to overcome Jewish apartheid, as he calls it. The Jewish marriage pool is already small, and we should not add to the problem of intermarriage by separating ourselves into splinter groups in everything we do, least of all in our schools and youth groups.

I must admit that these arguments carry great weight for me, but not enough to override the needs described above for separate synagogue and movement schools. Contrary to a number of nineteenth and early twentieth century thinkers, we have learned that one cannot be a universalist without first being a particularist, and that applies not only to the need to be Jewish but also the need to belong to one segment of Judaism or another. Affiliation with a movement does not in and of itself preclude inculcating an appreciation for the larger Jewish community; on the contrary, a strong sense of one's own identity within a subgroup can actually strengthen one's identification with the larger group, and we who value כלל ישראל must insure that it does by teaching that value in word and deed. One of the ways to do that is to arrange for joint projects, athletics, and social events with other Jewish schools, and that would speak to the issue raised by Rabbi Schulweis. He himself does not argue against separate movement schools; he only argues for contact among the children and adults of our various institutions, and with that I heartily concur.

While separate movement schools are ideal, the realities of founding and running a school sometimes make it undesirable or completely unfeasible to establish them. As indicated earlier, most often it is financial concerns that lead to the founding of jointly sponsored schools. This is connected, in some instances, with a shortage of adequate facilities or staff. A distinct, but related concern is the educational and social undesirability of small classes, especially when the same children are together as a class for many years with little chance to make new friends or learn from others.

In such cases, it is clearly preferable to cooperate in the founding and running of a jointly sponsored school than it is to have no school at all.

Depending upon the situation, the joint sponsorship may only consist in cooperating to furnish the physical facilities and, perhaps, the staff, for a school which has separate tracks for the children from the Conservative and Reform synagogues and/or individuated instruction; or the joint sponsorship may be more extensive, with integrated classes and curriculum. I will discuss the advantages and disadvantages of some possible arrangements below. Our first concern, though, is to provide for a school. Our ultimate goal, after all, is that children not only know about their Jewish heritage, but that they value it and become active, observant, knowledgeable members of the adult Jewish community. Schools provide no guarantee of that kind of commitment, especially when families fail to model it, but a lack of Jewish schooling altogether would spell almost certain defeat. It would also be a failure on our part to fulfill the commandment to teach our heritage to our children.

Similarly, in those communities where synagogue religious schools exist but inter-movement cooperation will be necessary to establish a day school, it is definitely preferable to enter into such a joint venture rather than to leave all Jewish education in the community to the religious schools. Studies on the comparative influence of supplementary and day schools in achieving our Jewish objectives are difficult to construct and inconclusive at this point. One can say with reasonable certainty, however, that most children attending day school know more about their heritage, both cognitively and experientially, than supplementary school children of the same age. Moreover, one must remember that the choice for many parents is not a day school or a supplementary school, but a Jewish private school versus a secular or Christian one. Many who choose one of the latter two options enroll their children in no Jewish school at all. It thus becomes imperative for the Jewish community, if at all possible, to establish a quality day school which can compete in its secular education with the best of the private schools. In addition, there can be some advantages to jointly sponsored schools. The child may see a Jewish community supportive of variations but ultimately united. That is a good model for future Jewish leaders. Furthermore, the Reform and Conservative parents and staff can learn from each other. The Reform emphasis on theology and personal and social ethics can complement the serious attitude to the study of Torah and performance of moral and ritual mitzvot that marks the Conservative movement, and vice-versa. Both movements include all of those elements, but the differing degrees to which they highlight various ones of them can be mutually instructive and fructifying. The advantages to separate movement schools outweigh these factors, especially since one can reap these fruits only in ideal circumstances of cooperation; but if there will be a joint project or none at all, one should cooperate in establishing a joint school and seek to

maximize the positive potential inherent in such a structure. In sum, Conservative rabbis and congregations must strive to build specifically Conservative schools for the clarity of vision and consistency of practice they afford. When that is not possible, the Conservative rabbi and lay leaders should determine whether it is religiously and educationally possible to cooperate with a congregation from another movement in establishing a jointly sponsored supplementary or day school. The answer will depend upon the specific nature of the two congregations involved, the steps taken to insure that both congregations can participate without sacrificing their integrity, and a great deal of patience and understanding.

B. Religious Standards for Staff

In the remainder of this responsum, I shall concentrate on the halakhic issues of a joint Conservative-Reform school and not a joint Conservative-Orthodox one, not because of a lack of problems in the latter, but only because I was asked specifically about the former.

1. Jewish Commitments of Educational Staff: Balancing Reform and Conservative Ideals. Many factors contribute to the success or failure of a school, but none is as significant as the teacher. The best administration, curriculum, and facilities in the world become impotent in the hands of a poor teacher. On the other hand, a capable and inspiring teacher can make up for many deficiencies. Since in Jewish education we are interested not only in cognitive but in character education, the personal Jewish commitments of the teacher become a matter of prime concern. Ideally one wants a religious model as well as a competent teacher.

While the ideal Conservative instructor would be observant of Jewish law and the ideal Reform teacher would not necessarily be so, I doubt that Reform rabbis and educators would object to an observant person as long as he or she presented observance of Jewish law as a positive value but did not denigrate those who do not observe it. That poses a theological problem for a Conservative point of view because we understand Jewish law to be a set of commandments and not merely a good way of expressing oneself Jewishly. If truth be told, though, even in our own Conservative schools most of our students do not come from observant homes, and so one has to educate toward observance rather than assuming it. In line with the talmudic philosophy of education, according to which we hope that from doing the commandments not for their sake one may come to do them for their sake, in our own schools we present Jewish law as the way we practice but say little if anything negative about those who do not. It is not just a matter of plural

interpretations of revelation and differing ways of understanding and acting on God's will; it is that some of our own students come from families who do not believe in God's will in any sense and in fact observe very little. In this situation, we, recognizing the voluntary nature of American society and the easy option for the parent to withdraw the child from the school entirely, rightfully emphasize the positive about a life governed by Jewish law and not its theological or legal status in order to encourage the child and hopefully also the parents to observe halakhah. If we take that approach in our own schools, I do not see how or why we should object to a similar approach in joint Conservative-Reform schools. The real issues in regard to staff arise when we confront the reality that there are very few teachers who are also religious models in the Conservative mold. The question is not how to balance Conservative and Reform ideal types in the school; it is rather the minimal religious standards for staff without which the school cannot do its job as a religious, educational institution.

2. Non-Jewish Teachers. This issue arises primarily in the day school setting. The Solomon Schechter Day School Association's standards for staff permit non-Jewish teachers for secular subjects, and in some ways it is desirable that Jewish youngsters living in a Christian society come into contact with some non-Jewish teachers in elementary school. The non-Jews would, of course, have to agree to support the aims of the school for its children and would certainly not be permitted to missionize for Christianity or another religion. On the other hand, they must not be asked in any way to hide the fact that they are not Jewish or to participate in Jewish religious acts other than to assist in bringing the children to services or holiday assemblies and in maintaining order. One Catholic teacher in the Solomon Schechter school my children attended had a background in drama and played an active role in preparing the children for holiday dramatic presentations. That kind of support is certainly welcome but not to be expected. One would, however, want to orient non-Jewish teachers to Jewish ideas and practices so that they can feel a part of the school and respond to Jewish issues with knowledge and respect.

Many day schools, however, seek to integrate Jewish and general studies as much as possible. A lesson on the first American colonists, for example, may be followed by a lesson on the first *aliyah* (migration to Israel) of the modern Zionist movement to compare and more thoroughly understand the people and problems involved in settling a new land. Moreover, if the same teacher teaches arithmetic and Bible, the child meets an integrated, American Jewish personality who can serve as a model for what we are trying to achieve. If integration of the Jewish and the secular in both subject matter and persons is an important objective

and/or practice of a day school, hiring a non-Jewish general studies teacher may become educationally unworkable even if it is religiously permissible. Those founding a joint Conservative-Reform day school should consider this educational issue before hiring a non-Jewish general studies teacher.

3. Jewish Teachers for Jewish Subjects. Instructors for Jewish subjects and the school principal, however, must, according to Solomon Schechter Day School Association standards, be Jewish, and the same should be true for Jewish supplementary schools. Our goals in Judaica, after all, are not simply cognitive. It is important that the principal and Judaica teachers can serve as models for their students, at least to the extent of identifying as Jews.

Many Conservative schools have, formally or informally, also insisted that Jewish teachers on the staff not be married to non-Jews and that non-Jewish teachers not be married to Jews. These, of course, are intended as minimal requirements; the ideal is that Jewish staff members model a modern, traditional Judaism in all that they think, say, feel, and do.

In a Conservative-Reform setting even these minimal requirements may be problematic. As of this writing, twelve Reform day schools exist in North America, and their principals formed an association in January, 1987. There is as yet no movement-wide religious policy for Reform day schools, and there is no such policy for Reform supplementary schools either. Part of the reason for that is the Reform Movement's ideological commitment to autonomy and its consequent hesitancy to establish a binding policy, but a more significant part of the reason is that the problem rarely, if ever, arises: even small Jewish congregations are only interested in hiring teachers who identify positively as Jews. Thus, although there is no general standard to this effect, the Reform participants will most likely agree to require that Judaica teachers be Jewish since they too want the Judaica teacher, at least, to be a model.

4. Definition of Jewish Identity for Staff. Assuming that the Reform contingent agrees to require Jewish teachers for Judaica, "Jewish" by what standard? People converted by Reform rabbis without circumcision and/or immersion in a ritual bath (מקוה) are, according to a minority opinion of our Committee on Jewish Law and Standards, to be accepted as Jews retroactively even though we would insist on both rituals if we were asked to convert them. Conservative rabbis and congregations establishing policy for a joint Conservative-Reform day school may rely on that opinion regarding the staff of their school.

But what about people who never converted but who consider themselves Jewish through patrilineal descent? Since the Conservative and Reform movements disagree about the Jewish status of such people, at least at present, the only ways to resolve the issue are either (1) to

insist on Conservative standards of identity for the Judaica teachers in the entire school; (2) to do that for teachers of the Conservative Judaica track, assuming there are separate Judaica tracks for children from each movement; (3) to expect that all Jewish teachers be members of a synagogue, and leave it to the rabbi of that synagogue to define the person's Jewishness; or (4) not to require Jewish teachers for Judaica in the first place.

Separate Conservative and Reform tracks for Judaica (the second option) would solve a number of religious and educational problems, but it is unrealistic to assume that there would be sufficient students and staff for such a structure, especially in a setting in which it is impossible to establish separate movement schools. Moreover, separate tracks raise some serious educational and social problems. Children (and parents) will generally sink to the lowest common denominator of both observance and Jewish education, and the availability of a less demanding track may ultimately undermine the more demanding one (a Gresham's Law effect). Moreover, the last thing we want to do in a day school is to make the more observant and Jewishly interested child feel socially uncomfortable. This is, after all, one of our few opportunities to make such children the mainstream, the mode of living for which the school stands.

The fourth option listed above, to open the Judaica faculty to non-Jews, is also not an acceptable solution. Although there is no intrinsic halakhic objection to learning Judaica from a non-Jew, there are significant educational disadvantages in having non-Jewish teachers for Judaica, especially on the elementary level. Exclusively patrilineal Jews may consider themselves to be Jewish and may even live lives suffused with Jewish practices and values. We, however, do not recognize them as Jews, as our newly passed Standard of Rabbinic Practice clearly states.

That leaves the first and third options. The third option is to require that all Judaica teachers be members of a synagogue. The school would then require that all Judaica teachers be Jewish, leaving it to the rabbi of the person's synagogue to define the standards of Jewish identity and to attest to the person's Jewishness. In the next section, I shall suggest something parallel to that approach with reference to the religious criteria for the children in the school, and this approach would thus have the virtue of consistency. If a community were to follow this approach, however, it should recognize that it involves a stringency as well as a leniency. The leniency is that people who are non-Jews by Conservative standards might be teaching Judaica. The stringency is that all teachers must be members of a synagogue, a step which I think is educationally very sound but which would eliminate many of the current teachers in our schools, especially the Israelis. Synagogues, of course, might arrange

for some type of honorary membership, and that would be making a worthwhile statement to all concerned. In any case, this is one option for a joint Conservative-Reform school, and, especially in small communities, it may be the only possible one.

Teachers, though, are models for children, and their Jewishness should ideally be beyond question. Indeed, one would hope that they are not only Jewish by minimal criteria, but that they express their Jewish identity and commitments in a number of ways. People have no control over their parentage, but a person who is Jewish only by patrilineal descent and who refuses to undergo the rituals of conversion is taking a stand against halakhah. Consequently, the most preferable option is to insist that all Judaica teachers be Jewish by Conservative standards.

It may not be as difficult to secure the agreement of the Reform participants to this as it may at first seem. Any school, and certainly a newly formed one, will only hire a limited number of people. The vast majority of Jews in North America are Jews by both Conservative and Reform standards. As a result, as difficult as this issue is in theory, in practice it may never arise.

Even if the school adopts this more stringent policy concerning Jewish identity, it should also consider adopting the stringency of the previous approach, i.e., requiring that all teachers be members of a synagogue. Again, special arrangements might be made to make this attractive and financially possible for teachers, and this may be one of the ways in which a synagogue concretely honors and appreciates its teachers. However this is instituted, the message conveyed by such a requirement to the teachers, students, and laypeople is potentially very powerful.

Having said that, I should mention that another option is to combine the first and third policies described above. A person would be eligible to be a teacher in a joint Conservative-Reform school, then, if he or she either was Jewish by Conservative standards (but not necessarily a member of a synagogue), or a member of a synagogue (but not necessarily Jewish by Conservative standards). This policy, which effectively combines the leniencies of both the first and third options, is open to a joint Conservative-Reform school. For the educational reasons described above, though, it is definitely preferable to make provisions for all teachers in the school to be members of a synagogue.

5. Mixed Marriages Among Staff. Jews married to non-Jews, and vice-versa, are even more objectionable. That is certainly not an acceptable model for children in a day school co-sponsored by a Conservative synagogue, as our Standard of Rabbinic Practice against mixed marriages clearly demonstrates. A non-Jewish teacher married to a Jew may not have done anything wrong in Jewish law since the non-Jew is not subject to Jewish law, but we must nevertheless insist that such

teachers not be hired. Teachers inevitably bring their own experiences into class discussion, including their home life, and mixed marriage is not the model we want our children to hear. The religious policy of the school must therefore exclude either or both partners to a mixed marriage from the faculty and administration.

C. Admission Standards for Students

1. The Solomon Schechter Association Standards. In addition to whatever academic, psychological, and financial criteria a school may have for admitting students, the Solomon Schechter Day School Association requires that all students be Jewish. The statement is very precise:

A Solomon Schechter Day School shall admit only Jewish children (i.e., children born of a Jewish mother, or children who have been converted to Judaism).

The definition of “converted to Judaism” is that definition which the Law Committee of the Conservative Movement has established. The determination as to whether or not the conversion is in keeping with the definition of the Law Committee is to be determined by the **מרא דאתרא** of the individual affiliate school. The term “**מרא דאתרא**” is to be understood as meaning a rabbi who is a member of the Rabbinical Assembly and who has been selected (designated) by the School affiliate to determine matters of *Halakha*.

The school may also admit a child whose mother (or both parents) is (are) certified by a rabbi who is a member of the Rabbinical Assembly as being currently enrolled in a formal program leading to her (or their) and the child’s conversion to the Jewish faith by the end of the current school year. (Thus, if the child is enrolled in September of 1987, it is understood that the conversion will have been completed in all respects by June 1, 1988.)

An affirmation of the child’s religion and/or conversion must be contained in the registrant’s application for admission. The definition of the term “affirmation” is understood as either information on the application form which clearly establishes the child’s mother is Jewish by birth or if the child’s mother is Jewish by conversion, and/or the child is Jewish by conversion, “affirmation” requires a written attestation by the rabbi who headed the **בית דין** which supervised the conversion.

For a Conservative school, whether a day school or a supplementary school, these standards are both reasonable and expected, but in the context of a joint Conservative-Reform school they raise difficult identity issues. Some of the questions are similar to those discussed

above with reference to teachers, but the problems regarding the Jewish identity of students are even harder. Among the relevant questions are the following: Should a joint Conservative-Reform school admit only Jewish students? If so, how does the school gain information about the student's Jewish status without offending the family of the potential student or violating that family's legal rights? Once the school has the information, how should the school define "Jewish"? Since both Conservative and Reform children attend, should the claims to Jewish identity of the entire student body be made available to the Conservative (and Reform) rabbi(s)? Should a Conservative rabbi sign the diplomas of the students whom the rabbi knows to be Jews only through their fathers or through improper conversions by our standards? Should the Conservative rabbi investigate the lineage of the students in the school before signing? Should he or she exclude such students from membership in his or her synagogue's youth groups?

2. Non-Jewish Students. Jews who spend the time and money to found a specifically Jewish school have the right to restrict the student body to Jews. Part of the point of such a school is to create a Jewish ambience so that the child can feel totally at home. The school policy might make an exception for a child who is in the process of converting to Judaism, as the Solomon Schechter standards provide, but otherwise there are good educational reasons to restrict the student body to Jews. There are no strong halakhic reasons to do that, however, assuming that non-Jewish children in the school live by the school's rules (e.g., regarding food) and that they do not missionize among their Jewish peers for Christianity or some other religion. Similar to Jews who attend non-Jewish private or parochial schools, non-Jews in a joint Conservative-Reform school could be excused from attending services altogether; be required to attend the school's services but not permitted to take a leadership role; or, if there are separate Conservative and Reform services, attend the school's Reform services and participate in whatever way the Reform rabbi deems proper, or attend the Conservative services and not take a leadership role. In the high school years we would be concerned about preventing the school from inadvertently encouraging subsequent marriages between Jewish and non-Jewish students, but that is not a major concern in elementary school.

Even so, the aim of those who establish Jewish schools is, at least in part, to immerse children in a Jewish environment. That cannot be done if there are significant numbers of non-Jewish children. There are, however, few non-Jewish parents who would want to send their children to a Jewish school with a strong Jewish curriculum, at least not beyond kindergarten. Consequently, a joint Conservative-Reform school might be able to preserve the Jewish ambience of the school without restricting

enrollment to Jews through its by-laws but simply through the nature of the school, leading non-Jews by themselves to select other schools. A policy of admitting only Jewish children would make the school's mission and audience clearer to all, but it is not a *sine qua non* for Conservative participation.

3. Defining the Jewish Identity of Students for Admission and Graduation. Whether non-Jews are admitted or not, the problems of defining the Jewishness of the Jewish students remain. Although I appreciate the efforts of the Solomon Schechter Association to put our new Standard of Rabbinic Practice into effect, I frankly doubt that many Conservative schools will undertake a registry of lineage, and that is even less likely for a Conservative-Reform school. One must remember that, with the possible exception of nursery and kindergarten, schools generally, and day schools in particular, do not have as many students as they would like; they thus will be reticent to ask for information which may well offend a potential parent, especially if they consider it an improper invasion of privacy in the first place. Moreover, schools may worry about losing their tax-exempt status or infringing federal or state anti-discrimination statutes if they ask searching questions about one's personal status in an application for enrollment.

In contrast, people joining a synagogue expect to be asked about their religious status. They may be uncomfortable about it or unaware that there is any problem, but they are unlikely to refuse to join just because the membership form includes questions of Jewish status. If there is a problem, in a synagogue setting the rabbi can interpret and explain the synagogue's definition of Jewish identity to the new member and can suggest solutions, but not every school has a rabbi on its staff. Even if it does, adults in the first stages of enrolling themselves as members of a synagogue and their children in a school are generally more willing to divulge and discuss their lineage and personal status with a synagogue rabbi than with a school principal, even one who happens to be a rabbi. Their expectations in the two settings are different.

For these reasons the burden of defining and insuring the Jewish identity of the school's students should not rest with the school even if it is exclusively Conservative, let alone if it is Conservative-Reform. The responsibility should rather rest with the synagogue and rabbi.

The way to accomplish that and thus to solve at least most of the school's problems regarding the children's Jewish identity is for the school to require synagogue membership of the families of all of its Jewish students. Many Conservative and Reform schools already require that for good practical and educational reasons. Practically, schools provide a natural source of new, young families for synagogue membership. In the short term, that may actually be a financial burden since

synagogues commonly provide reduced dues and scholarships for parents who cannot afford membership and/or tuition. These families, though, provide an immediate infusion of human energy and resources for the synagogue, and in the long term they contribute to its fiscal health as well. In the meantime, requiring synagogue membership enables the synagogue to have a religious and educational effect on the newly affiliated families. Moreover, in insisting on synagogue membership, the school makes an important educational statement: it affirms that Judaism is not merely a matter which one learns in school, but is rather a way of learning and living which extends beyond school hours and throughout life. For all these reasons, many Conservative and Reform schools already require synagogue membership, and thus it would not be a totally new policy.

In the context of the issues addressed in this paper, requiring synagogue membership would relieve the school of the need to determine the Jewish status of the family, with its attendant potential of offending the family and losing the student. Instead, whichever synagogue the family joins would be responsible for asking questions of personal status on its membership form, and then the rabbi must decide whether conversion of a parent or child is necessary and, if so, according to what standards. Incidentally, obligatory synagogue membership would also automatically resolve the issue of non-Jewish students.

In order to eliminate any misunderstanding, the school's by-laws and the materials parents receive explaining the nature and policies of the school should state the requirement of synagogue membership together with its rationales. These documents should also clearly state that the Conservative and Reform movements differ in their respective understandings of who is a Jew, and the cooperation of each of the two synagogues in the school does not constitute an endorsement by either synagogue of the other's definition of Jewish identity.

Requiring synagogue membership will, of course, cause problems for those families within the community who are not affiliated with a synagogue. Synagogues and schools should do all in their power to insure that families are not excluded for lack of financial resources, and most already do. They should also try to preserve as much privacy and dignity as possible in the process they devise for considering applications for financial aid. They might offer a year's free membership to families joining the synagogue so as to provide an opportunity for those with very tentative commitments to the synagogue to get to know it. Rabbis and school principals may point out that in Jewish law not only parents, but also grandparents are responsible for the Jewish education of their grandchildren, and so perhaps grandparents can be urged to help pay for their grandchildren's tuition. After all available steps have been taken to

insure that finances do not exclude children, however, it is both reasonable and educationally desirable to insist on synagogue membership for each child in the school. After all, one of the strengths of a synagogue school is its strong tie between what is taught in the school and what happens in the synagogue, a tie articulated in integrated programming and organization and often in name and location as well.

The requirement of synagogue membership also provides an answer to Rabbi Hirsch's question concerning graduation. If the principal who signs diplomas happens to be a Conservative rabbi, he or she could sign the diplomas of all graduates because it is generally understood that officers of a school only attest to the academic attainments of its graduates, not to their religious status. If the rabbis of the sponsoring synagogues are also asked to sign, they could sign the diplomas of their members' children only. Those, after all, are the children with whom they have a relationship, and this policy would eliminate any need for the Conservative rabbi to investigate the Jewish status of children of the Reform congregation.

If synagogue membership is not required, the only way in which a Conservative institution (e.g., a synagogue, a United Synagogue region) could attach its name to a school is if all participants agree that teachers and students must be Jewish by Conservative standards. Since some elements of the Reform movement disagreed with the decision to accept patrilineal descent, this may be possible in some settings. This alternative would require, though, that the school itself investigate the parentage of each teacher and student, and it would entail losing the educational (and political) advantages of requiring synagogue membership – both serious drawbacks. On the other hand, it would enable families unaffiliated with a synagogue to send their children to the school, and it would solve some of the problems with social activities and prayer discussed below. Because of the large degree of acceptance of patrilineal descent within the Reform Movement, I doubt that this will be a realistic alternative in most settings, and so the rest of this responsum will assume the first option described above (the one in which synagogue membership is required and used to define eligibility for the student body); but this second alternative, in which all agree to abide by the Conservative definition of Jewish identity, is obviously also halakhically permissible.

4. Social Activities. It is in regard to social issues that the problems raised by the Reform definition of Jewish identity are most evident and worrisome. Relationships established in early years sometimes continue on into high school and beyond. To discourage interdating and ultimately intermarriage we want our children to meet as many other Jewish children as possible; but, painfully, some of the children considered Jewish by the Reform Movement are not Jewish by

our halakhic standards. How, then, do we balance these conflicting commitments?

This problem, incidentally, concerns every synagogue youth group as well, to say nothing of Jewish youth groups and trips to Israel sponsored by communal agencies (Bureau of Jewish Education, B'nai Brith, etc.) Jewish youth groups are often more than happy to gain as many members as possible, welcoming any teenager who proclaims himself or herself Jewish. Even if membership is restricted to children of synagogue members, what happens when the group wants to plan a joint activity with another group?

I think we must acknowledge that any attempt at segregation simply will not work, that, indeed, part of our objectives as a Conservative Movement is to train our youth to be traditionally Jewish in a non-Jewish world and in a pluralistic Jewish community. Synagogue youth groups may be restricted to children of members, but certainly any activity sponsored by a joint Conservative-Reform school must be open to every student in the school. In both settings, the key to resolving the problem is education, not segregation. The teenage years are those in which this problem becomes most disturbing for fear that romantic relationships formed then between a matrilineal Jew and one who is only patrilineally Jewish will ultimately end in marriage, but these years are also the ones in which people are old enough to understand the issues. The differing definitions of Jewish identity in the Reform and Conservative movements, the reasons for them, and the implications of them should be part of the educational curriculum of every Conservative and Reform youth group so that the issue can become relevant to young people when they are in the process of forming a commitment to a permanent relationship.

D. The Structure and Curriculum of the School

1. Common Curricular Differences between Conservative and Reform Schools. Because the Conservative and Reform movements understand Judaism differently, the curriculum of Conservative schools differs from that of Reform schools. There are, of course, wide variations from school to school in each of the movements; but, by and large, Conservative schools emphasize Hebrew language skills, classical text study, and Jewish law more than Reform day schools do.

In the day school setting, because Conservative schools generally devote more hours per week to Jewish instruction, they either spend a correspondingly smaller amount of time in general studies or schedule a longer school day. Most Conservative day schools arrange for worship each day, while Reform day schools have the children pray less often.

The nature of the services in all schools varies with the age group. Conservative schools, however, seek over time to make the children familiar with the traditional prayerbook; Reform schools are not interested in doing that, at least not to the same extent.

Ultimately, in Conservative schools the tradition is presented as something which one not only studies but should live, while the Reform movement stresses the autonomous choice of the individual in deciding which aspects of the tradition to adopt and which to ignore. These differences, as well as institutional concerns, motivate the creation of separate Conservative and Reform schools in many communities.

2. Time Allocation for Jewish Studies. Where fiscal and/or other reasons lead to the founding of a joint Conservative-Reform school, the first curricular issue will be the number of hours to be spent on Judaica. In supplementary schools this is not too much of a problem, for if there is disagreement on this issue, the Conservative synagogue can schedule an extra session or two each week and cooperate with the Reform congregation only for part of its program. This is not ideal, but it is possible, and it will serve to alleviate some of the burden in finances and staff as well as providing some social contact.

The problem of time allocation is more serious in the day school setting. All parents, even those who are Jewishly committed, want to be sure that their children get a solid general education so that they will not have academic problems on higher levels. It takes time for a day school to demonstrate that it can accomplish that goal in as little as half the time it takes public schools so that the remaining time can be safely used for Jewish studies. One should be aware, however, that adjustments in the school schedule later on to provide more time for Judaica, while always theoretically possible, are increasingly hard to make since precedent must then be overturned.

The time allotted for Judaica is clearly not the only factor which determines the seriousness of the school as a Jewish educational institution, but it is probably the single most important one. It is therefore imperative for the more Jewishly committed participants in a joint day school to be very insistent on this matter. The achievements of established Conservative schools in general education can be used as evidence of a school's ability to teach what needs to be taught in general studies while spending as much as half the school day on Judaica. Moreover, it should be pointed out to parents that Judaica skills do not replace those in general education but rather supplement and apply them. Parents will probably not need to be convinced of the value of acquiring a second language, but they may have to be shown that Judaica studies hone the child's skills of analysis, comparison, and

critical thinking in a way uniquely available in a school teaching two cultures.

This is one of many places where parent education is vital and must be seen in a developmental way. Over time, of course, we want to teach parents the value of Jewish education in its own right, but at the beginning we must argue in accordance with the parents' own primary concern with general education. We must teach parents to have high expectations of the Jewish education of their children both for its instrumental value *vis-à-vis* general education and for its own sake. Only then will they be willing to devote the needed time to it.

In any case, it is crucial that children from Conservative and Reform synagogues spend the same time in Jewish studies, even if they study in separate tracks. A differential in time spent in Jewish studies will soon lead to all children spending less time in Judaica. Gresham's Law is very powerful in these matters.

3. Content of the Curriculum. Since it generally is not feasible to support two separate Judaica tracks, one for children from the Conservative congregation and one for children from the Reform congregation, and since there are, as discussed in Section B-4 above, some educational objections to such an arrangement as well, the school may seek to establish a joint curriculum. That may turn out to be more difficult than first imagined since Conservative and Reform schools generally have different approaches to a number of important elements in the curriculum, as delineated in Section D-1 above.

The differences in perception, goals, and methods are not easy to overcome, and that is the primary reason why it is preferable to establish separate schools if at all possible. The question which prompted this responsum, however, assumes that it is not. In that situation, the Conservative and Reform representatives will have to come to some accommodation in establishing the curriculum. Reform educators have no ideological reason to object to intensive Hebrew language study or even the study of classical texts and commentaries; the real issue will be the time those studies are allotted in comparison to modern social and moral topics, and the approach used. Some partial tracking may be tried, perhaps mixing Conservative children from two consecutive grades and doing the same with the Reform children, with other parts of the Judaica curriculum taught to all children of the same grade together.

Much time and patience may well be needed to formulate an agreed curriculum and methodology. There are no hard and fast rules here, and some fair compromise must be reached in such a joint venture. Conservative rabbis, educators, and laypeople should only be careful that the traditional elements of a Conservative education are not given short shrift in time, materials, or staff.

E. Worship

A harder part of the curriculum to accommodate is worship. What kind of service shall there be? How much of it should be in Hebrew? To what extent is the school trying to familiarize the children with the traditional prayerbook? What other materials are to be included in the service, and who chooses them? Who may take a leadership role in the services? Must *תפילין* and *טלית* be worn for those beyond bar (and perhaps bat) mitzvah age? Because supplementary schools have limited time and meet in the late afternoon or early evening, they generally do not include worship within school hours (except if they meet on Saturdays as well as during the week), but educators in supplementary schools still must decide what, if anything, to teach in this area. Day schools, which often do schedule services as part of the school day, regularly face these problems in action as well as in curriculum. In day schools, the first issue which must be agreed upon is that children from the Conservative and Reform congregations will spend the same time in prayer. Prayer is a critical element of the religious experience, but it is one which both children and adults must be taught to do and to appreciate. Since most Jewish children and adults are not sensitive to the religious values of prayer, many, given the option, would rather spend the school time on something else. Therefore, rabbis, educators, and laypeople concerned with the Jewish education provided by the school must apportion set times for prayer, and they must not be less for Reform children than for Conservative children for fear of Gresham's Law.

The determination of the content and goals of the services entails halakhic problems which are difficult, if not impossible, to resolve in the context of a joint Conservative-Reform school. I would therefore advise one service for children from the Conservative synagogue and another for children from the Reform congregation, with children going to the services of the movement to which their parents belong. (Leaving the choice to either the parents or the children poses a distinct danger of a Gresham's Law effect.) The rabbis from each of the congregations would not necessarily lead the services; but, in consultation and cooperation with the school's administration and staff, the congregations' rabbis would set the religious policies governing the respective services. This would insure that the school's services abide by its sponsors' varying interpretations of Judaism. In the Conservative service, for example, the content of the service would be largely in Hebrew and would follow the traditional structure, leadership roles would be restricted to those Jewish by Conservative standards, and boys (and perhaps girls) past bar (bat) mitzvah age would be required to don *טלית* and *תפילין*. Separate services

would also help to assure that children are prepared to participate in the services of their own congregations (although both Conservative and Reform congregations have had the experience of day school children being too well educated to enjoy the services of their home congregations).

While scheduling separate services solves many problems, it causes others. Aside from practical issues like the extra staff time needed to plan separate services and the possible lack of sufficient children for separate services in the higher grades, separate worship hardens the divisions between Conservative and Reform Jews from children's earliest years. The existence of separate movements is a reality, and so, for that matter, is the existence of different types of services within each of the movements and even, in many cases, within the same congregation. In some ways, that is the strength of pluralism. At the same time, we do not want to educate our children into thinking that Jews of various sorts cannot and should not ever join in services. We are, after all, one people, and, at least on occasion, we should be able to pray together.

How often this is done, when it is done, and how, will largely depend upon the good will and cooperation of the rabbis, educators, and laypeople involved. Depending upon the nature of the Reform congregation, a truly joint service may be possible, if not on a regular basis then at least at special times. If combined services are not ever possible without raising questions about the Jewish status of the leaders or the nature of the service, then perhaps on occasion the Reform group could attend the services of the Conservative group, and vice versa, in order to become acquainted with services led in the style of the other movement. The nature of Conservative and Reform services and the perceptions out of which they emerge probably require separate services for most of the school year, but some method should be found to bring the children together with some frequency for religious and not just for social and educational activities.

The curricular issues, while not easy, should be less difficult to resolve. The Reform Movement is committed to autonomy based on knowledge, and so Reform representatives should not object to teaching the traditional prayerbook as long as Reform innovations are also taught. Learning about changes made by the Reform and Conservative movements in their respective prayerbooks would afford all of the students concrete examples of the goals, the process, and the problems of liturgical development while at the same time graphically illustrating some of the rationales behind the movements and the differences between them. Since none of this is possible, however, until students have a sense of the traditional liturgy, the real question is how much time

the school is going to devote to that. If the Conservative constituents feel that not enough of this is being taught, perhaps supplementary work can be done in the context of children's and youth services at the synagogue.

F. Eating: The Dietary Rules and Blessings

Probably the most obvious areas of potential religious conflict in a Conservative-Reform school concern the dietary rules, Shabbat, and the Festivals. Because they are more obvious, Reform representatives seeking to establish a school with their Conservative co-religionists may well have already decided to come to some accommodation on these issues. In any case, they must be faced.

1. School Dining Facilities and Functions. If a school has its own kitchen and/or dining room, or if it uses a synagogue's, the facilities must be kosher. Because of Gresham's Law again, it will not do to have separate kosher and non-kosher sections. Even if the vast majority of our congregants do not themselves keep kosher, we must insist on *kashrut* in our institutions. That is the only way we have a chance of teaching and motivating people to observe it.

In addition to these religious and educational factors, there is an important communal rationale for this policy, whether one is personally committed to *kashrut* or not. Exclusively kosher facilities are necessary simply as a matter of accommodating the dietary needs of a significant element in the school and are not an acquiescence on the part of the Reform constituents to the binding character of *kashrut* for themselves. It is what must be done for the group to come together in this joint effort. Many federations now insist on kosher food service for the same reason, and that example should help us here.

For the same religious, educational, and communal reasons, all school functions in both supplementary and day schools, whether held on school grounds or elsewhere, must be kosher. Since many homes are not kosher, and since it is preferable to avoid casting aspersions on people, the best policy may be to require that, for school functions held in homes, all food must be cooked in the school's or synagogue's kitchen and served on its dishes or on paperware. If that is not possible, only kosher homes may be used for school functions at which meals are to be served. Where the menu calls for only coffee and cake, other homes may be used, provided that the baked goods come from an approved bakery or list of baked goods and that only paperware is used.

To enable parents to abide by the laws of *kashrut* in planning a school function in their homes or in sending food for birthday parties, *Oneg Shabbat* programs (on Fridays), and other school celebrations, the school must distribute some basic information on *kashrut*. Depending

upon the locale, it may also be important to list bakeries and other food distributors, or brands of food, which the school accepts as kosher. These materials should explain the rationales for *kashrut* as well as its rules in as brief and clear a form as possible – especially important for those families to whom the dietary rules are foreign. The tone must not be onerous or judgmental but rather upbeat and reassuring.

2. School Lunches and Snacks. Most day schools do not provide lunch every day, and supplementary schools often do not sell after-school snacks. Conservative schools in that situation commonly inform parents that the food they send with their children for lunch or snacks must be kosher. Many schools go further, spelling out in more or less detail what providing kosher food entails. Since children inevitably share parts of their lunches and snacks with friends (even if the school rules forbid that), many Conservative schools permit only dairy lunches, while others specify meat days and dairy days. These policies clearly do not guarantee a specific standard of *kashrut* in the food the children eat, but they usually are reasonably successful in publicly establishing the school's policy of *kashrut* and in assuring that parents and children abide by it.

In light of the food sharing situation, a joint Conservative-Reform school must also require that food sent from home be kosher according to a standard which is agreed upon and explained. Here again the need for a common, communal standard may be the determinative factor in agreeing on this policy for those who do not accept a religious imperative to keep kosher.

3. Blessings Before and After Eating. School meals, whether for children or adults, and whether held in school or away, should be preceded and followed by appropriate blessings. A short version of Grace After Meals may be more palatable to the Reform (and maybe the Conservative) elements of the school, but it should include all of the four blessings of the traditional form. The snacks which children eat at recess should be used as an opportunity to teach the attendant blessings before and after eating them. Reform representatives will probably not object to any of this, but they may not think of it, and so Conservative representatives must remember to raise these issues for discussion and implementation.

G. Sabbaths and Festivals

1. Calendar. The school must be closed on Sabbaths, both days of Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, the first two days of Sukkot, Shemini Atzeret, Simhat Torah, the first two days and the last two days of Passover, and the two days of Shavuot. It may be open during the Intermediate Days of Sukkot and Passover. It may also be open on Hanukkah, Tu

B'Shevat, Purim, Yom Ha-Shoah, Yom Ha-Atzmaut, and the Minor Fast Days, although special services and/or programming should be planned (with the possible exception of the Minor Fast Days).

2. Curriculum. The curricular issues with respect to Sabbaths and Festivals fall under the general rubric of the differences between the two movements on the status of these occasions as mitzvot. As discussed above, although this theoretical difference is of the first degree of seriousness, in practice it will probably not translate into significant problems, at least on the elementary school level. The primary educational objective with regard to the Sabbath and Festivals for both movements, after all, is to teach an appreciation for, and observance of, Sabbaths and Festivals. The one place where some care will have to be taken is in describing what is permissible and what is not in celebration of those days. Teachers will have to be trained to teach the traditional way of observing these occasions in a sympathetic way and to say that some Jews observe traditional requirements in a given matter while other Jews do not. That approach is not as halakhically pure as we would like it; but it is true, and, furthermore, it fulfills the educational objectives of presenting the tradition and advocating some mode of observance. This, of course, is easier said than done, but since many families affiliated with Conservative congregations do not observe the Sabbath or Festivals in a traditional manner, Conservative educators have already had to face this situation themselves for many years and have learned to take a similar approach.

3. Programming. In addition to these calendar and curricular issues, there are questions of policy regarding school programming on Sabbaths or Festivals. Schools which are part of synagogues sometimes have programs of their own in the synagogue on Sabbaths or Festivals or participate in synagogue services in a special way. In that case, of course, what is permitted and prohibited is determined by the rabbi of the synagogue.

In contrast, an independent school may choose by policy not to schedule any school activity on those days, either because it is not deemed the school's function to do so, or because it does not want to compete with neighboring synagogues on those days or otherwise offend them. That may well be the best policy for a joint Conservative-Reform school since it obviates the need to discuss and agree on a host of halakhic issues. Synagogues might still schedule a special Shabbat in honor of the school in order to emphasize their support for it, but then the synagogue rabbi determines the appropriate mode of participation, including the halakhic questions involved.

Similarly, a synagogue might schedule special services on Shabbat for school children or special programming on one or both days of the

Festivals, but those activities would be the responsibility of the synagogue, not the school. The school policy should then stipulate that it will cooperate with a synagogue's program for its school children only if the synagogue's school children exclusively are involved. That way no other children will be pressured or tempted to travel to the synagogue on the Sabbath or Festival or do anything their own rabbi thinks inappropriate for those occasions. Furthermore, if staff members of the school are to be involved, they must not be pressured into doing what they would not normally do on those days for halakhic reasons.

If the school wants to schedule a program of its own on the Sabbath or one of the Festivals, then school policy must require halakhic observance of those days. It is both educationally and religiously objectionable to differentiate the requirements and activities for the children from Conservative and Reform homes in such school events. Educationally, one of the chief objectives of such a program is to create a shared experience of the Sabbath or Festival, and that would be undermined by separate activities. Religiously, it is unrealistic to assume that children and staff will abide by Jewish law in such a setting if there is an option not to do so (Gresham's Law again). Moreover, the last thing we want to do in creating a day school is to make observant people feel odd or burdensome in their halakhic observance. School-wide programming must therefore not involve violations of the rules of the Sabbath or Festival (e.g., writing) and must fulfill its positive halakhic requirements (e.g., services).

A special program at the school or a retreat at some other site on Shabbat or a Festival, while difficult to plan and execute, can be a fruitful learning experience for all involved, not only about the chosen theme, but also about Shabbat or the Festival. That is especially true for older children. Careful, cooperative planning and good will are the keys to insuring that that happens within the parameters of Jewish law.

H. Kippot

Especially since it is a common curricular goal in Conservative day schools to integrate Jewish and general studies, most Conservative day schools require boys to wear *kippot* throughout the day, and a few may make the same requirement of girls. In Conservative supplementary schools, boys are required to wear *kippot* throughout the two or three hours of each session, and some encourage or require girls to do so as well. The Reform Movement varies widely with regard to head covering in synagogues and schools. In a joint Conservative-Reform school, therefore, the policy in this, as in other matters, must be worked out with reference to the particular sensitivities of the constituents.

If there are separate Conservative and Reform tracks for Jewish studies and/or separate services, the requirements regarding *kippot* could obviously be different in the separate settings, but most often jointly sponsored schools cannot afford the luxury of separate classes for the children from each of the two movements. As a result, in a day school it may be easiest to require all boys (and perhaps girls) to wear head coverings all day long or, alternatively, during the hours of Jewish studies and meals. It would be pragmatically difficult, and educationally and religiously objectionable, to require *kippot* of the Conservative boys (and girls) and not of the Reform boys (and girls) sitting in the same classroom. Similar remarks apply to *kippot* during joint services and to the sessions of a supplementary school: the requirement should apply to all. While wearing a *kippah* is a custom and not a law, it is a widespread custom among traditional Jewish males to wear them while engaged in religious matters, and so school policy should insure that boys, at least, wear *kippot* for at least jointly held Jewish studies, services, and meals.

Rabbi Hirsch asked about our policy regarding *kippot* in community events like a joint confirmation ceremony or Holocaust services. In years past, some Reform congregations actually forbade head covering during services, but that is extremely rare today. The more likely situation is that the Reform congregation involved in the joint sponsorship normally does not insist upon head covering for males (or females) during services but permits it, and that should make coming to an accommodation easier.

The key, of course, is for the participating groups to agree on some policy. It may be a function of where the event is held. Specifically, if the confirmation or Holocaust services are held in the Conservative congregation, all participants can be asked to abide by the policy of the Conservative congregation. That policy may require *kippot* for every event held in the synagogue, or it may distinguish in this matter between community-wide events – especially those held in the social hall rather than the sanctuary – and those of the congregation itself. If the services are held in the Reform congregation or in a place outside both congregations, then, while *kippot* should be made available, they may not be required. Alternatively, the confirmation services may be seen as a school event, in which case the policy governing the school may apply to the services. Some agreement should be reached, and *kippot* should not be the issue which undermines joint activities with our fellow Jews.

CONCLUSION

This responsum has not, and cannot, address all of the issues which a joint Conservative-Reform school raises, although it has dealt with some of the major questions. Rabbi Pesach Schindler, in writing about

Solomon Schechter Schools specifically, has well stated an important theme when thinking about religious and educational guidelines for any school:

The Solomon Schechter Day School Association does not share the view of those who insist that “hammering out” a complete set of guidelines, goals, and objectives for a new Solomon Schechter day school as a condition prior to initiating the organizational process is absolutely essential. Those associated with education and, specifically, Jewish education, have witnessed [the] stultifying, and even the eventual demise, of promising projects on the planning board because “all was not ready and in its proper niche.” In the spirit of *נעשה ונשמע*, Solomon Schechter day schools (and most day schools in North America) have been organized by those who have felt the need for such a Movement and [who have] followed sound intuition in acting on their convictions.

However, equally objectionable are the uncharted policies of schools which, in the heat of organization, continue to organize and expand, without closely examining and reexamining the very purpose of their existence, becoming meandering institutions without true purpose or perspective. Therefore, it is incumbent upon the school authorities, and specifically, the board of education, together with its professional staff, to develop a philosophy of education sufficiently flexible so that it can evolve along with the functioning school. The school will then assume its proper role as a laboratory, wherein objectives and goals are tested, validated, evaluated, and, if need be, modified or changed.

A Conservative-Reform school may require that somewhat more be spelled out at the outset than a Conservative school since the affiliations of the founding people already indicate that they have some disagreements about how they understand and practice Judaism. These guidelines will hopefully help all founders of a Conservative-Reform school to articulate its distinctive religious policy. Nevertheless, one must remember that some things must be left to experience. The keys to establishing reasonable religious and educational policies in such a setting are to remember that Jewish education is worth whatever headaches it takes to work out a way of providing it; that a school bearing the endorsement of a Conservative synagogue must provide for and encourage halakhic observance in a modern mode; and that where separate movement supplementary or day schools are not feasible, a great deal can be accomplished in coming to an agreement about these issues with our religionists if all will remember our common goals.