

SDJA From The Perspective Of A Non-Jewish Parent

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To friends outside the school, our family's love of SDJA for high school was initially a source of great curiosity. What's it like to be non-Jews at a Jewish school? And why would one choose to ride a school bus all the way from East County?

Our reason was simple. Our love of SDJA is a reflection of the loving way the school community embraced my non-Jewish son, as it does all students, whether athletes, poets or scholars, to guide each on the path of discovering their passion in life and place the world.



We couldn't find such a strong dual curriculum anywhere else, combining rigorous academics with developmentally appropriate character and ethical education, in as diverse a setting. This diversity runs not just through the wide range of Jewish beliefs, but a significantly international student body and faculty as well.

The Judaic Studies curriculum supported our family's beliefs in ways we could not have anticipated. Material is presented in the context of a broad spectrum of thought. Far from dictating opinions, the school creates a safe space using Socratic method to challenge students to reflect, question and consider. In this way students come to *own* their beliefs, which strengthens the framework that will carry them into the world beyond high school.

Because teachers know each student well, they know how to engage their curiosity and grow their self-discipline. My son discovered interest in subjects that had never caught him before. We knew we had the right school when he proclaimed at dinner one night, "Mom, physics explains the world!" and again when the Academic Dean found a mentor so he could do a specialized independent study.

The strong sense of community created by these relationships is perhaps its most defining characteristic of SDJA. There is a palpable sense of caring and joy for life on campus, coming together to celebrate achievements and good times, and supporting families in times of grief and loss. It's reflected in the highest award given each year, the Derech Eretz award, for character and ethics.

This principle of community extends to the larger world through *Tikkun Olam*, deeds of loving kindness. Students work face-to-face and hands-on on the Junior Habitat for Humanity trip, delivering Thanksgiving baskets, and packing pallets and shipping containers after Hurricane Katrina and the Haiti Earthquake. Abstract principles become actions, which become an understanding that anyone can help make the world a better place.

Looking back on my son's class making their way through their teen years at SDJA, what strikes me is just how remarkably at home in their own skins each of them are, how able to articulate their thoughts and feelings, and how ready to launch themselves into the world of college now, because of the richness of experience SDJA has given them. It truly is an education for life.