

Krieger Schechter Day School of Chizuk Amuno Congregation

Agency History



When we came here there was a religious school and there was an adult education program, but it wasn't formal and it wasn't considered a school. We had a two day a week Hebrew High School and there was an early childhood program. Now the synagogue has early childhood, a day school, an adult education school. We have an afternoon two day a week and one day a week (two different programs) High School.

Started in 1871 as a traditionally Orthodox break away congregation from Baltimore Hebrew Congregation, Chizuk Amuno gradually evolved into one of the founding congregations of the Conservative branch of Judaism. Today, the synagogue complex is located just above the Baltimore beltway at the suburban edge of the Park Heights neighborhood, occupying a several acre campus set back from the road with a sweeping circular drive. A modern two story structure, originally dedicated in 1962, its several wings house the day school, an adult and after school religious program, a pre-school, and museum, in addition to a large sanctuary, auditorium and other facilities associated with a large synagogue. The synagogue membership roles include several of the major Jewish philanthropic families in Baltimore, with both members and religious staff playing leadership roles in the city and nation over time.

In the 1970s, synagogue membership was stable, but aging. In 1980, the congregation hired Rabbi Zaiman, an entrepreneurial rabbi with a keen interest in Jewish education who had run a synagogue with a day school in Rhode Island. During the interview process, the rabbi expressed interest in starting a school as one initiative in a larger education program. The Conservative synagogues in Baltimore had discussed forming a community school as an alternative to the several Orthodox day schools several times before, but had come to the conclusion that there was insufficient interest in Baltimore. A survey the year before he was hired conducted by three Conservative synagogues had led to this conclusion.

Undaunted, the rabbi presented a proposal to the synagogue board to start a school the following year, asking the congregation for \$25,000 and use of existing synagogue facilities as initial contribution. The synagogue approved the proposal in early 1981, with the proviso that the school remain a project of the synagogue and be overseen by a synagogue committee. The school remains a project of the synagogue today, but today has a formal advisory committee made up primarily of synagogue members, but with a few school parents who do not belong to the synagogue. While not formally stated, the entire board is Jewish.

Rabbi Zaiman chose to follow the Solomon Schechter school model, a Conservative day school movement started in the 1930s. KSDS is now one of 50 Schechter schools in the U.S., and a member of its umbrella organization. KSDS is a Hebrew immersion program with 40% of the day taught in Hebrew. The school fosters educational excellence in both academics and religious studies, designed to develop a conservative Jewish ethos in both its students and its families. Students must be Jewish to attend and the school keeps Kosher. Its current mission is *to provide excellent academic programs in Jewish and General Studies for students in*

kindergarten through grade eight. One of its leaders explained:

What makes this a Jewish school is the commitment to Torah as the primary text, to a life of mitzvot, to those Jewish values that embrace community such as tzedakah and gemilut hasadim. It is the choice of what we study.

Rabbi Zaiman's plan for the school entailed gradual development starting with kindergarten and first grade, adding one grade at a time until it reached 8 grades. Working with a small number of key supporters in the synagogue, the school started in fall of 1981 with two professional teachers and 16 students. One of the teachers, now head of the lower school, was a member of synagogue. As outlined by the timeline below, the school grew fairly quickly, expanding to 113 students by the time it hired its headmaster in 1983.

Dr. Paul Schneider, the school's only head master, is both an academic administrator and an ordained Conservative rabbi. He was hired not only to head the school, but all of the religious education programs for the synagogue. With the original title of Superintendent of Schools, he worked with Rabbi Zaiman to revamp the after school religious programs and build the adult education program. Rabbi Zaiman's vision from the start involved integrating the teachers from the day school and after school programs. This benefited all of the religious programs as it allowed hiring Masters level, highly qualified religious school teachers full time, attracting better teachers because most programs only offered part time employment. The various Jewish education programs for children and adults continue to use the same facilities and share staff. While Dr. Schneider has a clear vision for these programs, Rabbi Zaiman remained involved in all of the educational programs until he retired in 2003.

Over the years, the school has added students and the synagogue complex has expanded to accommodate its growing needs. Synagogue additions completed in 1988 greatly expanded facilities for both the day school and the pre-school. The school was renamed Krieger Schechter Day School in honor of significant benefactor Zanyl Krieger, Baltimore philanthropist and Chizuk Amuno member in 1992. In 1989, the synagogue board approved expansion to 8th grade and the school website reports current enrollments of 467 students. The website notes that the school now employs 82 faculty members, with 80 percent holding Masters degrees. In addition to membership in the Solomon Schechter school umbrella, the school belongs to AIM, the Maryland independent school umbrella organization. While it seeks to expand its visibility in the general Baltimore community, it has developed a reputation for academic excellence in the Baltimore Jewish community.

The school has also contributed to membership growth in the synagogue and has increased involvement of lay people in services. School leaders estimate that about half of the school families belong to the synagogue and about half of those joined the synagogue after coming to the school. Schein (2000: 368) reports that synagogue membership increased from 1,199 families in 1989 to 1,375 in 1994, with school families contributing to this growth. In 1988, the synagogue board created lower membership dues for newly joining school families to promote synagogue membership.

At the same time, the synagogue added a family oriented High Holy Day service led by Rabbi Schneider that involved school families in the services. Gradually, regular Shabbat services changed to include more lay involvement. These changes came from expansion and enhancement of education programs for both children and adults. As such, the school and synagogue have contributed to each other, remaining intertwined entities nearly 30 years after the school's founding.

KSDS Timeline

- 1979** Three conservative synagogues distribute survey regarding establishing a Jewish day school, which had been discussed in the past. The two other synagogues conclude that there is insufficient interest to form a school.
- 1980** Rabbi Zaiman is hired as senior rabbi for the congregation. He had previously worked at a congregation with a day school and expressed interest in forming a school during the interview.
- 1981** Rabbi Zaiman presents proposal for a Solomon Schechter day school to the synagogue board in January 1981. The proposal is approved with the school under the direct care of the synagogue with a committee of synagogue members to oversee it. The proposal calls for starting the school with kindergarten and first grade in fall 1981, adding one grade per year through grade six. The school starts in fall 1981 with two teachers and 16 students.
- 1983** Rabbi Paul Schneider hired as Superintendent of Schools. Enrollment has increased to 113 students.
- 1985** Synagogue begins capital campaign to expand buildings for school and other educational programs.
- 1988** New wing for the school and related facilities completed. Synagogue creates new membership category with reduced rate for KSDS families. Rabbi Schneider starts alternative family oriented High Holy Day services in synagogue auditorium that includes lay involvement and children from the school.
- 1989** Synagogue board approves expansion to 8th grade. By 1989, enrollment is up to 260 students.
- 1990-**
- 1992** School committee formalized into an independent advisory committee, still under the direct authority of the congregation
- 1992** School renamed Krieger Schechter Day School in appreciation of major donor.
- 1995** Synagogue starts alternative Shabbat service with lay involvement based on increasingly educated population due to the school and other adult education programs.
- 2003** Rabbi Zaiman retires, becomes Rabbi Emeritus of the congregation
- 2004** Rabbi Schulman begins tenure as chief rabbi of the congregation.
- 2006-**
- 2008** School advisory committee is allowed to select a few members who are not synagogue members.
- 2008** School initiates alumni event for students and parents.

2009 School has 467 students and 82 faculty members.

KSDS Financial History

KSDS started with at \$25,000 grant from the synagogue, tuition and other donations. School leaders estimate that the original budget was approximately \$100,000 and initial tuition in 1983 around \$3,000. School tuition is now approximately \$15,000 with slightly lower tuition for the kindergarten and early grades. While the school has generally relied primarily on tuition to fund itself, it has received significant in-kind and financial support from the synagogue and its members. These come in the form of major gifts and individual contributions. The synagogue continues to provide substantial in-kind support in the form of facilities and back office supports like bookkeeping and insurance. Since some of the staff are both employees of the synagogue and the school, the synagogue also provides supplemental salary supports as well as allowing the school to attract high quality teachers.

KSDS Funding Sources

Source	2006	2007	2008
Tuition	86.6%	83.47%	85.70%
Foundation Allocation	4.1%	5.18%	4.50%
Subsidies and grants	4.4%	4.38%	5.20%
Weinberg Initiative		3.61%	
Annual Giving and Events	3.3%	2.79%	4.10%
Other	1.6%	0.57%	0.50%
Total	6,108,000	7,508,000	6,620,000

This table shows funding sources for recent years drawn from annual reports. Analysis reveals that the bulk of school funding comes from tuition. Foundation allocations include contributions from The Associated for scholarships and other curriculum development activities provided all of Baltimore's Jewish day schools. The Weinberg initiative was a five year scholarship grant to Jewish day schools from the Weinberg foundation, a large Baltimore foundation, run through The Associated. Subsidies and grants include synagogue contributions as well as other sources. Annual giving includes both individual donations and fundraising events.

In addition to financial support, the school enjoys significant volunteer support from its families and alumni parents.

Relationship History

We have a hesed committee. hesed means loving kindness. So we have a hesed committee. Every class has a parent who is part of this committee. Whenever we hear of anyone in the community who has had a hard time – maybe it is somebody in the hospital, maybe there is a loss in that family – something is going on where we know that family needs help. We will call first and say, “Can we help you?”

If you went to the board of the congregation and looked around the room you would see the majority of people either had kids at Schechter, had grandchildren at Schechter, served on the board of Schechter, served as the chair of Schechter

-so the congregational board has many, many people who have direct ties on some level to the day school, which is very important for us.

These two quotes from school leaders testify to the strong impact the school has had on the synagogue. As the first quote suggests, the school stresses building community. While many of these committee activities involve school families, they can extend to synagogue members. As the second quote illustrates, the school has contributed to building the leadership of the synagogue, which in turn enhances support for the school. Other leaders comment on the fact that school committee leaders regularly become synagogue leaders. The earlier history suggests that the school has brought new families to the congregation and helped shift the style of worship to encourage more lay involvement.

Since the school is a language immersion program, it primarily brings in students in kindergarten and first grade, contributing to the close community of the school. Unless older students have substantial Hebrew educations, it is hard to transfer into the school in later grades. Analysis of recent enrollment statistics show that approximately half of school students come from the synagogue's pre-school program. Both school and synagogue leadership comment that families enroll their children in the pre-school thinking that this will improve chances to get into the day school. While school officials deny this preference, this nonetheless enhances the pre-school population. More than half of the remainder of the students come from pre-school or kindergarten programs sponsored by other synagogues or the JCC. With one exception, the percentage coming from non-Jewish preschools and public schools has usually ranged at 20 to 25 percent.

Despite this strong, evolving relationship, not all synagogue members have always appreciated the school. Early on, some families complained that the religious school was being short changed due to the presence of the day school. The rabbi denied these allegations. At points, the school and synagogue communities have had issues over space. While the school has had enthusiastic support from some older synagogue members, others remain aloof from its activities. Other than financial support and board membership, the school gets few volunteers from synagogue members who are not associated with the school.

Taken together, this study suggests a strong, positive relationship between school and synagogue with each benefitting the other. Nearly 30 years after its founding, the school remains an integrated program of the synagogue with no movement toward independence. The school has contributed to synagogue growth and revitalization. Yet for some synagogue members, the school remains one program among many. In a synagogue of this size and complexity, this mixed support picture is not surprising as members have many synagogue activities to focus on, in addition to the other organizations outside of the faith community that draw their support.



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University of Maryland, Department of Anthropology, 1111 Woods Hall, College Park, MD 20742

Phone: 301.405.7121 Email: faithandorganizations@anth.umd.edu