

# A JEWISH DAY SCHOOL JOURNAL

Lessons Learned and  
Best Practices to Help Schools  
Achieve Sustainability

*A Journal by Rabbi Joshua Elkin*

*Joshua Elkin*

Winter 2012



Partnership for Excellence in Jewish Education  
88 Broad Street, Sixth Floor • Boston MA 02110  
617-367-0001 • [www.peje.org](http://www.peje.org)

© 2012 Partnership for Excellence in Jewish Education, January 2012.



## Table of Contents

Acknowledgements/Introduction .....	2
Preface .....	4
The Tripod .....	5
Financial Resources .....	12
Coaching .....	14
Collaboration for Change .....	15
Affordability .....	18
Community .....	20
Resources .....	23
Biography .....	25



## Acknowledgements/Introduction

I am honored to dedicate this journal to the hundreds of professional, board, and donor leaders with whom I have worked since 1997 in order to enhance the sustainability of Jewish day schools across the continent. I also want to single out the efforts of the outstanding PEJE staff, starting with my esteemed colleague, PEJE's new executive director, Amy Katz, who asked me to write this journal. Thanks also to the many coaches who have helped me and many day schools achieve higher levels of excellence.

In addition to these dedications, I would like to recall seven individuals who contributed so much to PEJE, to my own development, or to both:

- 🌿 Charles Schusterman and Jim Joseph, each founding Partners of PEJE;
- 🌿 Seymour Fox, a true visionary and a personal mentor;
- 🌿 Jay Orlin and Bennett Solomon, esteemed day school leaders; and
- 🌿 Jennifer Miller and Rheua Stakely, valued coaches and experts.

May each of their memories be for a blessing and for continued inspiration to each of us.

In trying to capture what I have learned based on more than three decades in Jewish education, I draw from my upbringing in the home of two Jewish educators, my experience as head of a major Jewish day school, and, of course, my tenure as PEJE executive director. I have also been inspired by great literature in our field. Some of these resources are cited in the "Resources" section at the back of this publication.

One of my dreams has been to inspire others with my own reflections. In this regard, I refer to two key strategic documents from PEJE's early



years: “Portrait of Excellence” and “Guiding Principles,” both of which can be found on PEJE’s website.

It is important to note that the above pieces, as well as others’ articles, are part of an evolving literature that contributes to shaping a field and creating a language of discourse. I know that new leadership at PEJE and in the day school field will refine existing documents and guide us in moving forward.

## **Culture of Philanthropy**

I would also like to offer brief observations about the challenges and opportunities connected with our culture of philanthropy. Before 2000, virtually no philanthropic culture was in place; fund raising had a narrow perspective; large gifts and endowments were rare. During that time, too often, we didn’t ask for gifts, we didn’t suggest an amount, and we presented a process whereby everyone was considered equal in their gift-giving capacity. Fortunately, that approach is changing just as a substantial transfer of wealth is underway. Over the years, thanks to PEJE initiatives and school involvement, we have embraced the emerging culture by adopting best practices, convening major donors, offering challenge grants and incentive/match programs, and hosting conferences.

But much more needs to be done. The day schools of North America need to secure a significant portion of funds for endowment and legacy. The total number of dollars being transferred within the Jewish community may be around \$400 billion. Collective endowments of even \$3-\$5 billion could make a huge difference in the financial sustainability, affordability, and overall strength of day schools.

## **Final Introductory Thoughts**

It is critical that all Jewish day schools receive accreditation from their local independent school accrediting body. This formal accreditation process, which must be completed every 7-10 years, helps ensure that a school’s leaders are responsive to accepted standards of excellence and that the school is indeed fulfilling its stated mission.

Uppermost, it is critical that we consider what PEJE is all about: Partnership, Excellence, and Jewish Education. With vision, leadership, and collaboration, I believe that we can help our precious schools become significantly more sustainable.



## Preface

I appreciated the wisdom of Josh Elkin even before he recruited me to be PEJE's associate director, and I worked very closely with Josh for eight years while he was executive director. When Josh decided to step down, and I was asked to become his successor, I thought about Josh's many contributions to the field and felt that it would be a blessing to have Josh pass along his insights to today's day schools as well as to future generations.

I am pleased that Josh honored my request to record his experience for posterity. The result is this journal, a rich collection of Josh's observations and life history. Josh draws on his 35 years of work devoted to Jewish education. This includes his tenure as head of the Solomon Schechter Day School of Greater Boston and, of course, his many accomplishments after being named the first executive director at PEJE. Indeed, this journal is imbued with many lessons learned, best practices, challenges, and visions of the future. Above all, perhaps, it reflects Josh's spirit and passion about the promise of Jewish day schools along their path toward sustainability.

While this is a guide to help day schools succeed, it is not meant as a definitive primer, since no two schools are identical. Rather, it is a framework and a source of inspiration for all of us committed to this movement. Certainly, school change is a challenging and time-consuming process. PEJE is here to help with thought leadership and resources for the field. But ultimately, as Josh articulates, schools need to improve their quality and enhance their resources as they strive toward financial sustainability.

Key to a successful journey is a focus on the tripod that Josh describes—vision, board, and professional leadership—as well as the critical role of collaboration.

I invite you to explore how this journal can be most valuable to you. You may also want to review the material presented in the "Resources" section; you can find the full text of Josh's seminal documents and other pieces he has authored on our website.

Josh, on behalf of the extended family of PEJE, I thank you for compiling this insightful publication and for imparting your great wisdom through the years.

Amy Katz  
Executive Director



## The Tripod

The foundation for successful Jewish day schools is what we call the tripod, which consists of the following three pillars:

- 🌿 Vision
- 🌿 Board leadership
- 🌿 Professional leadership

We will explore the individual components of this three-legged platform in more detail shortly. But first we will briefly focus on the importance of these elements and how they work together.

If schools don't work to strengthen the three legs of this tripod, they weaken their entire enterprise. While a school may survive if one leg is weak, the whole institution is jeopardized if two parts are shaky. Given the critical nature of these three pillars, it is essential for there to be an ongoing structure to support the proper functioning of each leg. For the board leadership, that structure is clearly the Committee on Trustees, which must have the authority and the bandwidth to ensure that the board is functioning optimally. For the professional leadership, a standing Head Support and Evaluation Committee should assume this role.

What about accountability for and focus on the vitally important and often overlooked vision of day schools? The responsibility for bringing the vision and mission statements to life (more on the difference between vision and mission later) must rest with the board chair and the head. A good way to ensure that these statements receive the attention they deserve is to place these reflections at the top of ongoing agendas between the head and board chair, who may also involve others in the periodic examination of these powerful statements. At the same time, vision/mission should be a top priority of all members of the organization—hence the increasingly common practice of posting these statements in every classroom and meeting place as a public reminder.

Before we proceed, we should understand the general dynamic between the key dyad of the board chair and head. Simply stated, the heads are in charge of the day-to-day operations of the school, and they should have multiple touch points with the chair to ensure that there are no surprises. Board chairs lead the trustees in providing strategic direction on broad



policy; they also work to support the school financially and nurture its long-term viability. Because issues arise that are on the borderline between operations and strategic direction, it is essential that the board chair and head of school meet regularly to navigate the matters requiring deep collaboration and coordination.

## Vision

It all starts with vision, the first pillar of the tripod and the one ingredient that is of paramount importance to Jewish day schools and to our entire Jewish community.

How do we define a vision statement, and how does it differ from a mission statement? A vision statement is a picture of your institution in the future; it is your inspiration, the framework for where you want to go, the articulation of your dreams. A mission is a statement of the current purpose of the organization; it should guide the present actions and decision making and spell out the overall goals of the school as it now exists.

Whatever the funding challenges, the quality of our schools—which is the result of how well we execute and breathe life into the vision statement—will ultimately determine whether a school “makes it.” Vision requires a long-range view that lights the way to a brighter future. In fact, the more we focus on short-term activities, the further removed we become from the bigger picture. In addition, day schools with strong vision statements are typically more resilient during challenging times.

Vision operates on multiple levels, analogous to a series of concentric circles. In the center are the day school students and the vision of optimizing their educational experience through graduation. The next circle is the school itself, envisioning the ideal environment for nurturing the ideal Jewish day school graduate. Then we reach into the ideal Jewish community within which each school resides. Finally, we imagine the Jewish world of the future, including Israel. Each of the circles informs the others, and they should be regularly reviewed for inspiration and revised as deemed appropriate.

Unfortunately, resources on vision are not available in abundance. For that reason and in keeping with PEJE’s commitment to the centrality of vision, we marked our 10th anniversary with a publication entitled





*Ten Years of Believing in Jewish Day School Education*, which focuses exclusively on this subject. Many of the essays in that celebratory volume continue to provide valuable insights; they can all be found on PEJE's website.

### *Challenges – Vision*

To make a vision a reality, the professional leader of the day school and the board must articulate that vision and ensure that it is widely disseminated (see the next two sections of this journal). They need to work together and embrace a common view for the desired future of their particular school. Indeed, they have the extraordinary potential to transform their schools and their futures.

Finding the time to develop and review vision statements can be challenging with all of the pressing concerns that can preoccupy the board and head. In most instances, they find it is easier to focus on mission, and the vision piece is neglected. Such a strategy is shortsighted.

At every crossroads in Jewish history, great challenges have been met with visionary thinking that has helped propel the Jewish community toward a brighter future. Today we stand at a crossroads with our Jewish day schools. As much as people focus on the lack of financial resources as the Achilles heel of our schools, I believe that a lack of vision is the more critical challenge. Vision is essential to our survival as a vibrant community.

Overall, we need to work toward a bold and substantive vision. Seymour Fox, a personal mentor, challenges each of us in this regard: “[I]n the normal course of events, you will invariably fall short of your carefully thought-out vision. That is the way of the world: If you start with cognac, you’ll be lucky to end up with grape juice. But that’s not a bad result when you consider the alternative—if you start with grape juice, you’ll probably end up with Kool-aid.”

### **Board Leadership**

As stated earlier, the board provides strategic direction and strives to support the school financially to ensure its long-term success. Trustees are, in fact, “owners” of our institutions. Led by the chair, they must make decisions that are in the best interests of the next generation of students, rather than focusing on the immediate needs of the current children.



Factors that determine the effectiveness of the board include:

- ❁ **Establishing a year-round, working Committee on Trustees** that focuses on the selection, composition, and operation of the board, including monitoring each member's performance and disciplining those who do not fulfill their responsibilities. A key task of this Committee is identifying the right people to serve as chair and members. Too often, the creation of a slate of officers and board members happens under a tight deadline. This should be avoided since board membership demands the utmost care and requisite time to shape the most strategic slate.
- ❁ **Working synergistically with the head.** While heads of school are not officially members of the Committee on Trustees, they need to work with the board chair to ensure that the Committee is functioning well. Before an individual is nominated to become chair, the head needs to be consulted to ensure there is sufficient positive chemistry to make the relationship work.
- ❁ **Creating a board with a healthy representation of non-current parents and community leaders.** The percentage should be at least 40%-50% to allow for a substantial presence of those who can more naturally be objective.
- ❁ **Seeking candidates who have had solid experience** as part of another high-functioning governing body.
- ❁ **Maximizing the success of meetings** through carefully crafted agendas, creative seating, and determining the proper timing and length of these meetings.
- ❁ **Leveraging the power of one individual, usually the board chair, to influence the direction** and performance of the board as a whole.
- ❁ **Finding the right board members.** This starts with the chair and then applies to every board member slot. Schools must identify candidates whose "fit" for this strategic role has been carefully evaluated.
- ❁ **Saying thank you, promptly and in writing** (not email). This enhances the quality of relationships; the core of the good work we do is in the forging of solid relationships.



### *Challenges – Board Leadership*

Many of our day schools are fairly young institutions that are not experienced in governance. Common mistakes include: boards that have more than 24 members; the excessively high percentage of board members who are parents of current students; too many boards elected by the parent body as opposed to being self-perpetuating; isolation and burnout; and the prevalence of a democratic or parent cooperative mentality. Expanding on the last point, we must work to elevate the enterprise so that people realize that the head and board chair are in charge of crafting a volunteer-professional dynamic, but not one in which all voices count equally.

Overall, we need to build a strong cadre of volunteer leaders, ideally with previous board experience. Once there are fewer members who are parents of current students, the board will more often than not witness a considerable elevation in the quality of its performance.

### **Professional Leadership**

Complementing the board, the other partner in the leadership team are school professionals, and in particular, the head of school. Just as the board exerts tremendous influence in its sphere of work, so does the professional leadership play an essential role in shaping the school.

Guidelines for success include:

- 🌿 **“Getting the right people on the bus.”** Jim Collins has immortalized these words of advice. Clearly, any successful organization must have the right people in the right positions, where they can best contribute to the fulfillment of the organization’s mission. As schools grow, it is especially important to have the right people in place to support the efforts of the school head.
- 🌿 **Creating an administrative structure with distributed leadership.** The growth of schools underscores the need to create a well-functioning leadership team with a clear delineation of job descriptions for each position—and then to adhere to those descriptions by holding everyone accountable. This includes those individuals who help the head manage the reporting responsibilities to the board, including the development director, financial officer, and office manager.



- 🌿 **Setting limits/work-life balance.** One of the realities of the headship in a Jewish day school is the excessive number of evening meetings that may be scheduled during the school year. It is important to manage the timing and length of meetings, including alternative plans for sessions scheduled early in the morning or late in the afternoon, so that people can be home for dinner and enjoy time with family. Otherwise, too many late-evening meetings will likely impair performance during the next day.
- 🌿 **Leveraging the power of collegiality among leaders.** There is no substitute for the leader-to-leader connection ... sharing the vision and experience of others working toward common goals. This sense of collegiality involves not only head of school to head of school, but also the relationships cultivated within a single Jewish day school, wherein professional leadership promotes teamwork, problem sharing, and potential solutions. Connected to this is the opportunity to benefit from peer-assisted professional development—for instance, shadowing colleagues over the course of a couple of days and then debriefing.
- 🌿 **Learning from mistakes.** It is important to admit mistakes and move on. While this is often hard for leaders to do, it is much more beneficial than engaging in a long battle and blame game. The most effective leaders combine a mix of humility and a zeal for their cause (the characteristics of Jim Collins’ “Level Five” leadership for nonprofit organizations).
- 🌿 **Building and improving leadership depth, teams, and succession.** This involves seeking new Jewish day school leaders from within the ranks of public and private school leaders and having a leadership succession plan in place at all times.
- 🌿 **Creating Head Support and Evaluation Committees.** This will ensure that the top professional leader receives ongoing, constructive feedback in an open and confidential manner. In such a setting, heads of schools can speak candidly about their challenges, and there is an opportunity to make adjustments both early in a new head’s tenure, as well as ongoing, as needed.



*Challenges – Professional Leadership*

There is altogether too much turnover, and the turnover is not adequately anticipated. Tied to this, the aging of our current leadership pool may lead to a crisis as more leaders of day schools step down, often after substantial tenures. We need, therefore, a greatly enhanced capacity to cultivate, attract, and secure the next cadre of leaders. Talented educators need to be identified early on in their evolution; then they need to be trained, mentored, and placed in entry-level administrative positions where they can grow. Structures have to be in place to combat isolation and to protect these key, emerging leaders from premature burnout.

Overall, the professional leadership team has the boundless capacity to drive Jewish day school communities toward higher standards of excellence. We must all be involved to help ensure as robust a pipeline of professional leaders as possible.



## Financial Resources

We have examined the three pillars of the tripod—vision, board, and professionals—which must be firmly in place at all times. But how can we use the framework to sustain schools? In this regard, some people question whether there should be a fourth leg, namely the requisite financial resources to support the operations of the school. While it is never just about money, it is absolutely necessary to secure sufficient resources to support Jewish day schools. Fund raising and resource development have been part of PEJE’s agenda from the beginning, but as PEJE expanded to fund existing schools, the discourse about financial resource development became more charged. Today, the challenges seem greater than ever before.

To be sure, the tripod depends on resource development, and it is essential that the board and professional leadership work together to get the job done. In fact, we have come to speak about the “development quartet”—two professional team members (the head and the development/institutional advancement director), and two board team members (the board chair and the vice president for development/development chair).

We have also come to understand that, according to fund-raising guru Jerold Panas, people give to schools and other organizations for three main reasons:

- 🌿 They believe in the vision/mission.
- 🌿 They believe that the school is delivering in accordance with its stated mission.
- 🌿 They have confidence in the leadership of the school, especially the head.

Accordingly, when we articulate a cogent vision and mission, produce results, and hire the right people, especially at the top, Jewish day schools can be successful in garnering the resources they need.

The results are self-evident: Dozens of schools have received million-dollar gifts, and many of those schools have received gifts that are up to the 10 million-dollar level and beyond. This says a great deal about the capacity of the schools to present themselves as worthy of such transformational investments.



In today's economically fragile environment, however, significant challenges persist and call for creative solutions. Such solutions include establishing an endowment, securing matching funds, and growing a much more robust annual campaign.

In the final analysis, resource development is truly a partnership between the board and the professionals. While the ultimate responsibility for raising money to balance the budget rests with the board, heads of schools have a vital role to play as an active partner in fund-raising efforts.

### *Challenges – Financial Resources*

PEJE is well positioned to address issues related to financial sustainability, but each school needs to adopt a well-conceived and coordinated resource development effort within the institution, as well as on the communal level, especially when multiple schools are involved.

The time is ticking for the transfer of wealth from one generation to another; we must move forward and adopt best fund-raising practices. The main reason why people don't give is because they have not been asked. Furthermore, many who give set their own number, as opposed to being asked to consider a much higher number.

The individual and collective goals need to be both realistic and aggressive, and the "asks" must be personal and face-to-face. Ultimately, with significant increases in annual and endowment/legacy giving, the affordability challenge can be met.



## Coaching

Jewish day schools are complex institutions, and solutions are not always clear-cut, even when a system of checks and balances is in place. That is why the role of coaching can be so instrumental.

For example, a difficult-to-resolve day school issue is often that of salary and benefits. In such circumstances, when the head and the board chair cannot find a satisfactory compromise through their own devices, a coach can make all the difference. In other circumstances, coaches can be very helpful in working individually with the head on other operational issues.

A common goal of all our schools is to build their capacity to become more independent and self-sustaining. This can be a daunting task, and so capacity building often benefits from the guidance of experts. Coaches can help schools learn what works and what does not work; they can provide feedback on the leader's performance and foster a setting that promotes serious, personal reflection.

What about the balance of coaching versus cash to help day schools? When PEJE started the Challenge Grant Program for new schools in 1997, we put together a package that was 80% cash and 20% coaching. When we evaluated the program, however, we found that coaching and expertise were more valued than the cash. Therefore, we reversed the equation such that 80% of the next round of grant would go toward supporting expertise and training, and only 20% would be in cash as a way of incentivizing the application process. In this regard, expertise can be a more powerful currency than money.

Today, PEJE continues to invest in coaching as a central focus of what we do—at our Assemblies, in our more targeted smaller convenings, and through our online directory of PEJE-approved coaches. Still, it appears that the day school field is seriously under-coached. While we are making progress, this issue requires more attention to ensure that leaders receive the professional support they need.

In the future, we envision a culture of using expert coaches that will have been established within most of our schools. The accumulated experience of best practices and successful interventions will have contributed to the creation of a library of resources that will help inform and guide our leaders.

In short, all roads lead to coaching.





## Collaboration for Change

**Don't go it alone.** That's the over-riding philosophy regarding change.

Another lesson from many day schools is that change shouldn't come too fast—instead, it should be a deliberate and, most of all, a collaborative process that involves those likely to be affected by the change. Whatever the new initiatives are, whether to improve students' respect for one another or improve the physical appearance of the building, key to their success is the buy-in from all affected parties, including the staff, board, faculty, and parents.

One source of potential tension that needs to be addressed is the relationship between synagogues and day schools. Issues include: synagogue resistance to day school recruitment from the synagogues' early-childhood programs; perceived competition around the provision of adult learning opportunities; and pressure on the rabbi not to speak publicly and positively about day schools. A good way to deal with this is to assign day school parents as their school's liaison to their synagogue, which leads to dialogue about how to establish better working relationships.

Among the challenges in forming collaborations is the fact that constituencies overlap, and there can be duplication. Another challenge involves building a collaborative relationship with early-childhood programs, whether under Jewish auspices or not. The relationship is not only between the early-childhood director and the day school admission director; the head of the day school also needs to be involved, along with the early-childhood teachers who usually have close relationships with the parents of their current and past pre-K students.

At PEJE, we facilitated collaborations among schools by launching online communities that break down isolation while sharing challenges and promising solutions. We have also created regional collaborations and groupings of day schools to efficiently disseminate expertise. One of the ancillary benefits of this regional work is that we help to nurture a collaborative posture among the schools. Looking at the day school field today compared to 25 years ago, we see a sense of togetherness in many communities, which stands out as one of the new paradigms.

Day schools have a shared destiny; the more schools and their leadership work together to address common challenges, the better off the field will be.



Research on how day schools are perceived by the broader community shows that they are viewed in accordance with their weakest link. If, for example, one school has a tax payment issue, then most members of that Jewish community not directly connected to a day school will generalize that all of their local schools have the same problem. Conversely, a rising tide raises all boats.

The relationship among day schools and federation (and central agencies) deserves special consideration in this discussion. The federation system embraces a collaborative model—pooling resources and donations and leveraging them to optimize the benefit for the Jewish community. Federations with more than one day school are increasingly viewing their schools as a collective and as an opportunity to collaborate across multiple schools. But rather than demonstrating a collaborative spirit, some schools choose to remain competitive with each other and jockey for position in advocating for their individual needs. This is unfortunate and misguided.

Ultimately, the relationship with federations cannot be just about money. It needs to be about vision, expertise, and shared volunteers; it needs to be about collective problem solving and about pooling energies and resources. More communities are making progress in this critical area, proving that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts.

Other opportunities for collaboration at the national level include:

- 🌿 Working with the four day school networks (RAVSAK, Schechter, PARDeS, and Yeshiva University's Institute for the University-School Partnership).
- 🌿 Coordinating the collection of data through the JData project, housed at Brandeis University.
- 🌿 Seeking points of contact between the Wexner volunteer leadership development program alumni and the board leadership challenges and opportunities within individual day schools.

## **New Horizons for Collaboration**

In the past decade, we have experienced the rise of two programs that are changing our landscape:

- 🌿 The PJ Library program of the Harold Grinspoon Foundation
- 🌿 The Birthright Israel program



The PJ program has distributed 75,000 books per month each academic year to young children and their families in nearly 150 communities. The opportunity for collaboration in this initiative is huge, but it will take time to build relationships with the PJ professionals in each community. As long as tension exists around the ownership of the list of PJ families, we cannot develop a collaborative spirit among PJ staff and organizations looking to introduce their programs to the PJ community. It therefore behooves the day school leadership to adopt a long-term view of this challenge by engaging with their local PJ coordinators.

In addition, exploring collaboration with the nearly 250,000 Birthright graduates requires imagination. Many of these 18-to-26 year-olds are starting on a journey back to their roots. Given the research on the impact of this 10-day event, day schools should figure out how to collaborate with Birthright and its graduates. The Birthright groups that went to Israel in 1999 and 2000 are now adults, some with children enrolled in PJ. We need to build linkages and connections to day schools.

The job for day school leaders is to determine how to deploy a robust program that will reach not only the early-childhood professionals in JCC's and synagogues, but also the ever-growing number of PJ recipients and Birthright participants.



## Affordability

We repeat: Don't go it alone. This imperative resonates even more in our challenging economic environment. Indeed, schools operating in individual silos are finding they need to reach out. In virtually every community that has addressed affordability, we have found that schools working together—and with their federation and/or central agency—have a decided advantage. Also, in some instances, participation in a grassroots effort has been beneficial. By necessity, we expect that more such collaborations will continue to spring up across the continent.

Day school needs are beyond the scope of what any individual school can handle and outside the capacity of what a single generation of parents can manage. These essentials must be addressed in a multi-generational way, not only from those families directly benefitting from day school education. Jewish day schools belong to the entire community and span the generations.

PEJE has placed affordability at the center of its agenda, with an emphasis on collaborations. But how can we get there?

Growing revenue is a key strategy to address middle-class needs. PEJE is committed to annual giving and legacy/endowment as well as tuition revenue and vigorous advocacy so that more schools can grow these revenue streams.

In addition, PEJE is demonstrating nationally what each community must demonstrate locally. By teaming up with all of the organizations committed to day school affordability, PEJE is raising the bar of collaboration.

Of course, as stated above, affordability is a particularly daunting issue today in a down economy, and it is not going away. However, we should also again consider that it is not always simply about cost. The fact is that more parents of Jewish children who attend non-sectarian private schools are paying tuition that is even higher than Jewish day school tuition.

In a National Association of Independent Schools' publication on affordability, the author postulated that the decision to enroll a child in a non-public school has four related factors: prestige, affordability, value, and sacrifice. The problem is that Jewish day schools are failing to attract these



families/students: They either perceive the quality of the Jewish day school to be inferior (e.g., too much time for Judaic studies), or they do not value the Judaic environment, believing that the children are too sheltered.

The only way to address the affordability challenge is to attack it on all fronts:

- Advocate for the product.
- Stress its value proposition.
- Grow all revenue streams.
- Target the squeezed middle class.

In the future, we envision day schools that will steer greater resources in support of their capital and annual needs. This includes annual fundraising as well as endowment/legacy giving. The increased funds will slow increases in tuition, keeping schools more affordable and allowing them to focus on academic excellence.

Success will emerge through partnerships between the board and professionals of each school along with other schools and their federation. In the final analysis, we will see that addressing the affordability challenge is the ultimate test of collaborative horsepower.



## Community

Tied to the value proposition is the quality of the community within the school—students, family, and alums whose lives are shaped by the school. Indeed, Jewish day schools provide a unique package—not only of Judaic heritage, but also the sense of collectivity . . . building friendships and connecting with a larger community. Parents need to understand this perspective—and to witness it firsthand.

Today, many families are celebrating Judaism in the privacy of their own homes, and this kind of isolation can translate into “lost social capital.” Jewish day schools are educational and religious institutions that can restore this social capital and help us maintain the sense of a collective—not only for the students, but also for their parents.

Judaism lives in a communal setting. Many day school students keep their school friends for life while parents also meet new adult friends through interactions at the schools. The co-curricular programs, after-school programs, and after-hour events all contribute to the building of a thriving community. In this respect, Jewish day schools have become the Jewish neighborhood of the 21st century.

Looking ahead, we envision day schools across the continent fueled by bold visions of an active and literate Jewish community. Within the walls of the school, one will find a pervasive excitement for learning among students, faculty, administration, parents, and board members. High levels of collegiality will be the norm for faculty; teachers will teach by listening to their students; and students will learn by participating in class. Day school leaders will see to it that the schools incorporate best practices in education, including, but not limited to, peer-to-peer learning; discovery-based learning in math, science, and technology; second language acquisition in Hebrew; the incorporation of service learning into the fabric of school life; the power of the arts and sports; and a deep rootedness in text.



## **Building New Bridges**

Day schools will become “community centers” of Jewish education and expand their focus to include not only full-time enrolled students, but also other groups within the community, such as preschoolers, religious school students, youth groups, and adult learners. The preschool piece might take the form of a series of parent-child programs hosted by the day school and designed not only for a positive learning experience, but also as a way to introduce these families to Jewish day schools. Religious school students will respond to invitations from the local day school to participate in a *Yom Haatzmaut* celebration, a sports event, or a science fair. In addition, Jewish day school teachers will increasingly be involved in teaching outside the day school classroom to spread Torah—and also to showcase the diversity that exists within the day schools.

Jewish day schools and other organizations within the community will learn to work in a seamless way, and such collaboration will yield powerful results. The Jewish community will become much more adept at the “handoff” of families from one setting to another, and we will avoid having so many families falling through the cracks.

The day schools will also figure out how to engage alumni—a seriously untapped resource—in the life of the school following graduation. This will represent a breakthrough for the schools and a boon to the whole day school movement.

Finally, a word about turf battles. These have to end. As a community, we are too often known for our internal disagreements. Rather, we need to meet the challenge of building collaborations and realizing the extra strength to be gained by working for the common cause of Jewish day school education, which we all so deeply embrace.



## Resources

Elkin, Joshua. *Guiding Principles of Day School Excellence*, [www.peje.org/index.php/publications-a-media/books-and-articles/guiding-principles-for-jewish-day-schools](http://www.peje.org/index.php/publications-a-media/books-and-articles/guiding-principles-for-jewish-day-schools), 1999.

Elkin, Joshua and Frank, Naava. *Portrait of Excellence*, [www.peje.org/index.php/publications/books-and-articles/portrait-of-educational-excellence](http://www.peje.org/index.php/publications/books-and-articles/portrait-of-educational-excellence) PEJE, 1999.

### On Vision:

Berrin, Susan (ed). *Ten Years of Believing in Jewish Day School Education*, PEJE, 1997.

Berrin, Susan (ed). *The Leader's Compass*, PEJE, 2009.

Fox, Seymour. *Vision at the Heart*, Mandel Institute, 1997.

Nanus, Burt. *Visionary Leadership*, Jossey-Bass, 1992.

### On Board Leadership:

Berrin, Susan (ed). *Sources on the Source*, PEJE, 2008.

DeKuyper, Mary Hundley. *Trustee Handbook: A Guide to Effective Governance for Independent School Boards*, NAIS, 2007.

Lakey, Berit M. *The Board Building Cycle: Nine Steps to Finding, Recruiting, and Engaging Nonprofit Board Members*, Boardsource, 2007.

The Source, *Boardsource*, 2005.

### On Professional Leadership:

Collins, Jim. *Good to Great and the Social Sectors*, Harper Collins, 2005.

Hoerr, Thomas. *School Leadership for the Future*, NAIS, 2009.

### On Financial Resource Development:

Colson, Helen (ed). *Philanthropy at Independent Schools*, NAIS, Third Edition, 2009.

Panas, Jerold. *Asking: A 59-minute Guide to Everything Board Members, Volunteers, and Staff Must Know to Secure the Gift*, Emerson and Church, 2009.

### On Coaching:

Zorfass, Judy. *PEJE Guide to Coaching*, PEJE, 2010.

### On Community:

Pomson, Alex, and Randal Schnoor. *Back to School: Jewish Day School in the Lives of Adult Jews*, Wayne State University Press, 2008.





## Biography

Joshua Elkin was the Founding Executive Director of the Partnership for Excellence in Jewish Education (PEJE), a position which he held for fourteen years. Under his leadership, PEJE grew and evolved into a sustaining resource for the entire day school enterprise across North America, and across the denominational spectrum. Under Josh's leadership, PEJE helped promote higher standards in board governance, improve partnering between boards and heads of school, expand financial resource development, and increase broad advocacy efforts in support of the value of Jewish day school education.

Prior to joining PEJE, Josh was the Head of School at the Solomon Schechter Day School of Greater Boston for twenty years. He led that school through its expansion to two campuses with over 550 students. He was also instrumental in bringing independent school accreditation, outside expertise for assessing school performance, and strategic planning not only into his own school, but to the broader day school field as well.

Since stepping down from his position at PEJE, Josh has embarked on a new venture as an executive/leadership coach. Supporting and nurturing leaders has always been an important part of Josh's work; by opening this coaching practice, he hopes to devote most of his time to this priority area, with a special emphasis on the coaching of the board chair-top executive leadership dyad. In addition to coaching, Josh will be devoting time to consult, mentor, teach, and speak.

Josh is married to Judy Israel Elkin, previously a Jewish educator and currently a life and professional coach. Together they are the proud parents of Jonathan, Benjamin, and Liza, all of whom attended Jewish day schools from K-12.



*Jewish Day Schools עולמינו Our Future*