
**PEJE SERIES IN DAY
SCHOOL AFFORDABILITY:**
*Jewish Day School
Affordability in Perspective*

MAY 2004

- Building For Future Growth
Rabbi Joshua Elkin, Ed.D.
- Why Jewish Day School?
- Why Be Jewish?

PEJE

Partnership for Excellence
in Jewish Education



Teachers and school children —
precious jewels of our community
MIDRASH RABBAH, SONG OF SONGS

Building For Future Growth

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BUILDING FOR FUTURE GROWTH

The Current Environment

After a decade of unprecedented growth and very positive public relations on day school impact and vitality, we have witnessed a spate of articles and anxiety dealing with the impact of the shifting economy on day schools, the high costs to families, and in general, a sense that the day school movement may have peaked, with drops in enrollment being reported by some schools.

The effects of the economic downturn have been felt by all non-profits, and day schools are certainly no exception. The environment is challenging, and an attitude of "business as usual" will not serve any school well. Schools are realizing that the changed circumstances require new ways of working and thinking. Though there have been some signs of economic recovery, concerns continue to be expressed about the high cost of a day school education, and the high cost of living Jewishly. How can we regain the momentum and promote the high value of day school education in the wake of lagging enrollments?

Understanding "Affordability"

Jewish day school education is unquestionably a costly proposition for families. The conventional wisdom is that approximately one-third of current day school families can handle the cost relatively easily. A second third encompasses those with the lowest income levels; they are supported quite adequately, in most cases, by existing scholarship/tuition remission/income scaling programs that are already in place. The middle third includes middle and upper-middle-class families who struggle to pay the tuition bills. They perceive themselves as falling above the income level to

qualify for tuition assistance, and below the level that makes tuition payments manageable. The challenge of affordability is focused, therefore, primarily on one economic segment of the community which includes both those already in day school as well as those who have considered, are considering, or will consider a day school education.

Usually missing from the discussion of affordability is the question of value and excellence. What is the value of a quality Jewish day school education in the open market? A recent writer on affordability in the independent school world coined the "PAVS" matrix:

Prestige: the public perception of the quality of the school.

Affordability: the perception of the price of enrollment after any tuition reduction such as financial aid.

Value: the perception of what a family receives for what it is paying.

Sacrifice: the degree to which a family is willing to prioritize paying for education and possibly forego certain other things.

"The combination of perceived prestige and affordability will determine how much a family, having been convinced of a school's value, is willing to sacrifice to send a child there." (Mark Mitchell, "The Affordability Dilemma" in Marketing Independent Schools in the 21st Century, NAIS 2001). Affordability cannot be viewed independently of the other three factors.

The perception of value should be a major focus when discussing day schools. These schools are not simply about Jewish identification; they are about comprehensive Jewish education and Judaic literacy. Parents enroll their children in Jewish day schools not simply so that they will identify as Jews, but so that they will be empowered with the skills, values, and experiences to become educated members of the Jewish community. When a high

school teenager chooses a Jewish day school education, s/he may be stimulated by an identity-enhancing experience, but s/he is actively seeking much more: specifically, knowledge and literacy. As my colleague Seymour Epstein says, Jewish education has been, is, and will always be, the strategic plan of the Jewish people, and day schools represent a significant foundational piece of that plan going forward.

Making the case for day schools depends on recognizing the value of the institution. We have discerned six major rationales for day school education that resonate with individuals: educational excellence, values, the internal day school community, the desire for a vibrant Jewish community, leadership, and Judaic literacy. Please see "Why Jewish Day School" at the end of this essay for a brief expansion of these rationales and suggestions for how you can tailor your advocacy messages to the rationale that most strongly resonates with your audience.

As a number of leading Jewish publications have recently addressed, in advocating for day schools, we are really marketing Judaism. Convincing a potential parent or donor of the value of Jewish day school education depends upon that individual's acceptance of the value of being Jewish. As my teacher and colleague Rabbi Yitz Greenberg so often says, "In today's world we are all Jews by choice." Being able to respond to the existential challenge of "Why Be Jewish" is a necessity for anyone seeking to improve or advance Jewish educational endeavors. To help frame that response, we have included our attempt to answer the question at the end of this essay, again using a number of individualized approaches.

If we agree that day schools are a solid value, yet at the same time costly, how can the day schools and the Jewish communities within which they reside make this form of education as accessible and as compelling as possible to the widest audience of parents and students? Collaboration and comprehensive efforts are required, and so we offer specific recommendations for schools and communities to undertake.

Opportunities for Each Day School

Messages & Marketing

1. Market the value of your school with bold vision, research, and individual testimonies. Use your alumni to demonstrate the lifelong impact of your school and its proven track record over a period of years. Use the two tools at the back of this booklet, "Why Jewish Day School" and "Why Be Jewish," to respond to the specific concerns of your targeted market. Knowing what matters to your audience will help you make the strongest case.
2. Educate your current and prospective parents to the real cost of the education, and demonstrate convincingly how fairly priced the tuition is.
3. Advertise widely your financial assistance policies. Make the application process easy to initiate in a private and dignified manner, and ensure complete confidentiality at all times. Current parents in the school should never sit on any financial assistance committee.
4. Create comfortable opportunities to learn about and to showcase the vital role that grandparents currently play and could play in the future in the financial support of their grandchild(ren)'s day school education. A recent AARP survey revealed that 52% of respondents indicated that they contribute financially to a grandchild's education; yet, within the Jewish day school world, there is little if any acknowledgement of this reality. Target current and future grandparents for specific messages about day school excellence, community, and vitality. This population may need specific information about what distinguishes today's day schools from those of a generation ago.

5. Institute a proactive campaign to get people to visit your school and spend a couple hours experiencing what is actually going on. There is something that happens when a newcomer walks through a day school's doors. No matter how much they've heard or read about the school and its advantages, seeing the actual facility translates the abstract into reality.

School Operations

6. Adopt an ongoing school improvement posture to help underscore your long-term commitment to excellence. Survey parents annually in order to benchmark your progress toward a very satisfied constituency.
7. Improve governance in general, but in this instance, in order to succeed more effectively in presenting new annual tuition levels so as to enhance parent trust and confidence in the conscientious fiscal stewardship of the school.
8. Improve your bottom line (thereby minimizing the need for tuition increases) by carefully monitoring expenses. Maximize tuition income by: aggressive recruitment, including increased attention to the pre-school pipeline, catering to diverse learners, and improving student retention (reducing attrition). Maximize fundraising revenue by: instituting or strengthening an annual campaign; creating giving circles at higher and higher levels; launching or expanding a scholarship endowment fund. Maximize auxiliary income by renting your school's facility at competitive rates and exploring ways of leveraging potential income-generating resources. Monitor expenses more effectively by improving financial management procedures, and by participating in cost savings opportunities such as PEJE's Joint Purchasing Initiative.

Collaboration & Community

9. Challenge community leadership and donors to replicate the kinds of tuition subvention programs that have enabled individual philanthropists or foundations to contribute actively to making day school education accessible to more families. See www.jesna.org for a listing of such tuition subvention programs from around the country.
10. Work collaboratively with the day schools in your area to explore ways you can cooperatively advocate for increased day school enrollment and funding.

Suggestions for Community Initiatives

1. Make day school affordability a communal priority by putting it on the communal agenda. Drawing attention to the issue can be an important way of developing creative solutions.
2. Increase federation support of day schools. When more community leaders are convinced of the extraordinary value of day school education, the community's investment in its future will find expression in increased funding and other kinds of federation support, such as marketing, leadership development, research, and fundraising experience. Day schools have much to learn from federation expertise.
3. Build endowments for the purposes of increasing scholarship assistance. Please see the PEJE Series in Affordability pamphlet for more specific information.
4. Create ways to "reward" families that send children to day schools, i.e. discounts on JCC or synagogue membership.

5. Promote the value of intensive Jewish education among top leaders. Invite community leaders to use day schools as sites for meetings or events, and be sure that the community's most influential volunteers and professionals have toured the local schools.
6. Give parents of young children the opportunity to experience serious Jewish learning first-hand. The popularity of intensive adult Jewish learning programs is a natural stimulus for thinking and supporting day school education, and the setting of the adult classroom is a natural staging ground for discussions of educational choices among those who are already connected to Jewish identity and knowledge. Consider using local day schools as sites for adult education and recruiting day school faculty to teach these courses. Provide adult learners who are parents of young children--particularly of one-to four-year-olds--with information about day school options in the community.

What PEJE Is Undertaking

PEJE recognizes that one of the easiest arguments to make against day school education is the high cost to families. While schools and communities are on the front lines of the challenge of conveying day school education's value, PEJE is working, along with its national partners (the day school associations and JESNA), to reframe the dialogue about day schools and to strengthen the capacity of each day school to sustain the kind of changes that will enable growth and increase enrollment. Our strategic objectives and activities are focused on empowering schools to be able to undertake the kinds of initiatives suggested above. The capacity of each day school must be strengthened to support excellence in educational quality, governance, effective communication, and financial resource management. PEJE uses its strategic activity areas to ensure this empowerment and capacity building by:

1. Offering grants for capacity building initiatives to schools and groups of schools working collaboratively;
2. Delivering a system of general and focused coaching to support improved organizational performance;
3. Convening conferences to focus on such areas as Resource Development, Financial Management, Recruitment, and Governance;
4. Disseminating research, knowledge, publications, and best practices to make the case for day schools and recommend models that enable day school excellence, accessibility, and affordability; and
5. Implementing national advocacy efforts to keep the value of a day school education on the front burner of the Jewish community, with special attention directed toward federation and endowment leaders, grandparents, and early childhood Jewish education leadership.

Despite the challenges of the changing economy and the multiplying demands on today's middle class families, day schools remain one of the Jewish community's best means for ensuring a literate future. As PEJE works to grow day school enrollment and ensure the excellence and long-term viability of all day schools, we are committed to a vision of a Jewish community whose members and leaders are informed, literate, and caring. We celebrate the achievements of many new schools in the past decade, and we look forward to the continued growth and vibrancy of all day schools throughout the United States and Canada. We are honored to be partners and catalysts for a next decade of growth.

WHY JEWISH DAY SCHOOL?

Making the Case Using Propositions to Suit Specific Rationales

When you ask day school parents and supporters about their motivation for choosing day schools, answers vary. These six rationales cover the most frequently heard responses. Customize your message to its targeted audience, and create your own data points and quotes to demonstrate the value of day school education.

Educational Excellence—the quality of the product itself

Day schools offer a challenging dual or integrated curriculum and usually have small class size allowing for individual attention from creative, knowledgeable teachers. The use of Hebrew as a living language develops children's capacity for learning. Most graduates of day schools find that their rigorous curriculum prepares them well for advanced study.

Data point: College matriculation of day school graduates. Visit www.peje.org for an annual listing of college matriculation data from Jewish high schools.

Sample quote from day school graduate: "The combination of a Jewish and general studies curriculum that I got at my day school really grounded me in the kinds of organizational and critical thinking skills that I need in college."

Values

Parents choose day school education because it fosters a values system and identity development they seek for their children. By living Jewish concepts such as *tikun olam* and *gemilut hasadim*, day school students become ethical and moral individuals.

Data point: The social action activities your day school sponsors.

Sample parent quote: "With all the challenges kids face today, we were so glad that we could choose an education for our children that supported the values we taught at home and created a nurturing environment where the peer group itself reinforces the things we think are important."

The Internal Day School Community

For some families, day school is a "gateway institution" that brings them in contact with the Jewish community for the first time or in the most meaningful way. The support network of peer families and the sense of community at the school is appreciated by families who seek to preserve that connection even after their children graduate.

Sample parent quote: "Day school is much more than just classrooms and homework. The support we've found from school staff and the friends we've made among other parents have made our day school the warmest Jewish community we've been a part of."

Vibrant Jewish Community

A Jewish neighborhood is incomplete without a vibrant day school. As the institution most dedicated to growing future knowledgeable Jews, day schools represent the vision for the future Jewish community. Through expression of values such as Klal Yisrael (Jewish unity) and diversity within the Jewish community, denominational and community schools represent a range of Jewish ideology and practice. As a hub of Jewish learning, day schools connect the larger community with a cadre of Jewish teachers and a full-service facility for Jewish living.

Data point: "In general, attendance at a day school for seven years or more exerts the most powerful positive impact on Jewish identity."

Being Jewish Very Important:

Day School 7-12 years	64%
Day School 1-6 years	58%
Supplementary School 7-12 years	51%
Supplementary School 1-6 years	40%
Sunday School 7-12 years	40%
Sunday School 1-6 years	39%
No Jewish Education	36%

Source: "The Impact of Childhood Jewish Education on Adults' Jewish Identity: Schooling, Israel Travel, Camping, and Youth Groups" by Steven M. Cohen & Laurence Kotler-Berkowitz, UJC Report Series on the National Jewish Population Survey 2000-2001.

Sample federation leader quote: "When I talk about the future of our community, I know that I stand on firm ground because of the strength of the day schools in our area. More than any other institution, it is our day schools that ensure a vibrant future."

Leadership

Day schools foster leadership skills and traits within their students. At the same time, day schools themselves depend on dedicated volunteer and professional leaders to oversee and implement the vision of the school. Connecting leadership with Jewish literacy is a key for Jewish survival.

Data point: Twenty-eight percent of the 2003 Young Leadership Division of the Jewish United Fund-Jewish Federation of Metropolitan Chicago attended Jewish day school, and they credit their day school education as part of their motivation for volunteering. Ninety percent of the 1964-1992 graduates of Buffalo, NY's Kadimah School contribute to federation and other Jewish charitable organizations. Find out the leadership roles your school's graduates are playing.

Sample quote from day school graduate: "Taking action to make a difference, knowing the sources of Jewish tradition, envisioning the best possible future, and working with kids from different backgrounds, these are all the kinds of leadership skills I learned from a very early age in my day school."

Judaic Literacy

By providing serious educational connections to Jewish history and texts and the Hebrew language, and by nurturing relationships to Jewish tradition, beliefs, and practices, day schools make Judaism second nature, instead of second best.

Data point: Sixty-five percent of the 1964-1992 graduates of Buffalo, NY's Kadimah School reported that they frequently observe the laws of kashrut.

Sample parent quote: "I wanted my children to feel at home with Jewish texts and traditions. My own Jewish education was more limited, and I wanted my kids to have the advantage of knowledge in making their own decisions."

WHY BE JEWISH?

"Because Judaism can teach us how to deepen our lives, to improve the world, to join with others who have the same lofty aims. Judaism can teach us spiritual and moral mindfulness, a way of living in this world that promotes joy inside of us and also encourages ethical action. But finally, the answer to why be Jewish must reside in the mystery of each seeking soul, trying to find its place with others and with God."

Rabbi David Wolpe, "Why Be Jewish?"

"Our goal should be to make it possible for every Jewish person, child or adult, to be exposed to the mystery and romance of Jewish history, to the enthralling insights and special sensitivities of Jewish thought, to the sanctity and symbolism of Jewish existence, and to the power and profundity of Jewish faith."

Rabbi Isadore Twersky, "On the Goals of Jewish Education"

Day school leaders seeking to advocate on behalf of their school easily grasp the need to make the case for day school education. At a more essential level, however, proponents need to be prepared to respond to the basic question that underlies the purpose of Jewish education: Why be Jewish? The responses below are organized according to four common approaches and include quotes from contemporary thinkers. Ultimately, day schools transmit all of these messages and challenge learners to answer the question, "Why be Jewish" for themselves.

Link to Past/Traditions/Jews Around the World

Being Jewish links individuals with traditions, history, and values much larger than themselves. For many, this cross-generational, international, and timeless connection gives a sense of rootedness, builds identity, and removes the sense of being "alone in time." An understanding of, appreciation for, or belief in Jewish practice calls on the individual to act in accordance with proscribed patterns.

*"A Jew remembers a great past and anticipates a glorious future.
Judaism is a living memory and an exciting prophecy."*

Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik

"Only a person who is connected to his past, to his people, and to his roots can be free, and only a free person has the strength to act for the benefit of the rest of humanity."

Natan Sharansky

"To be Jewish is to be part of a people that gave the world monotheism and the Torah, and with those contributions changed the course of civilization...To be Jewish is to belong to this people that has held onto its life-affirming principles against all odds."

Francine Klagsbrun

"Can a man know who he truly is, if he doesn't know who his ancestors were?"

Kirk Douglas

Meaning/Holiness

Being Jewish brings meaning to life. Associating with Jewish values, prayers, and practices elevates the everyday to a sacred realm and offers moments of transcendence. In Hebrew "kedushah" or holiness also connotes "separateness." Being Jewish often means being different from the universal.

"There is a fundamental human need for context, a need for meaning, a larger narrative in which our own personal story makes sense"

Rabbi Bradley Shavit Artson

"Judaism can save your life from being wasted, from being spent on the trivial....Judaism is a way of making sure that you don't spend your whole life, with its potential for holiness, on eating, sleeping, and paying your bills. It is a guide to investing your life in things that really matter, so that your life will matter. It comes to teach you how to transform pleasure into joy and celebration, how to feel like an extension of God by doing what God does, taking the ordinary and making it holy."

Rabbi Harold Kushner

"What we have learned from Jewish history is that if a man is not more than human then he is less than human. Judaism is an attempt to prove that in order to be a man, you have to be more than a man, that in order to be a people we have to be more than a people. Israel was made to be a "holy people." This is the essence of its dignity and the essence of its merit. Judaism is a link to eternity, kinship with ultimate reality."

Abraham Joshua Heschel

"The purpose of Jewish existence is to be a People in the image of God."

Mordechai Kaplan

"The essence of Judaism is that all of life is rooted in the divine; we are commanded by God to live in a special way."

Blu Greenberg

"To me, being Jewish means having help in answering life's most fundamental questions, such as, 'How did I come to this place?' and 'Now that I am here, how should I live.' My faith, which has anchored my life, begins with a joyful gratitude that there is a God who created the universe and then, because He continued to care for what He created, gave us laws and values to order and improve our lives."

Senator Joseph I. Lieberman

Community/Peer Support

For many contemporary Jews, being Jewish is about being part of a community of shared practices, values, and traditions. Belonging to a group makes the world a smaller place. Existential loneliness is quelled by being part of a vibrant community. Judaism is practiced in the presence of peers, thereby supporting the viability of tradition.

"Jewish life provides something that is profoundly lacking in contemporary America—a sense of belonging."

Rabbi Irwin Groner

"There is a fundamental human need for connection"

Rabbi Bradley Shavit Artson

"For us Jews there can be no fellowship with God without the fellowship with the people Israel."

Abraham Joshua Heschel

"As a member of an extended family, I embrace the common heritage and future I share with my fellow Jews around the world."

Lynn Schusterman

Justice and Compassion

In a world filled with injustice and cruelty, being Jewish means believing you can and must change the world. The Jewish value of tikkun olam, repairing the world from its primeval chaos, gave mystics a motivation for how their actions could have an impact on the world and invoked the Biblical prophetic call for justice. Finding definitions of good and evil and applying them to their lives are how some Jews understand Jewish law.

"There is a fundamental human need for compassion, the need to give and to receive love"

Rabbi Bradley Shavit Artson

"Judaism, done right, has the power to save your life from being spent entirely on the trivial and elevate it to the level of authentic humanity. But it can do more than that....The ultimate goal is to transform the world into the kind of world God had in mind when He created it."

Rabbi Harold Kushner

"To say that the Jewish religion is but a set of rituals is to reduce Judaism to a parochial affair....It is true that Judaism is much more than a dogma. But this is not because it has no dogmas. It is rather because there are no dogmas which can sufficiently express the depth and grandeur of its insights. Judaism is not legalism; this is precisely what the opponents of Judaism claim. It is an answer to the ultimate problems of the individual and of society."

Abraham Joshua Heschel

"Civilization is our problem. Judaism is the art of surpassing civilization. It teaches us how to help cure civilization's ills."

Abraham Joshua Heschel

"The meaning of Jewish existence is to foster in ourselves as Jews, and to awaken in the rest of the world, a sense of moral responsibility in action."

Mordechai Kaplan

"The demand for justice runs through the entirety of the Jewish tradition."

Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg

"I am blessed to be a voyager on an ancient pathway that continues to offer new insights and responses to new questions of meaning, ethics, and responsibility...I am Jewish because the religion, the tradition, and the community inspire me and support me to follow the path that the Prophet Micah challenges us all to walk: 'To do justice, to love goodness, and to walk humbly with your God.' (Micah 6:8)."

Rabbi Rachel Cowan

"Service is my way of encountering God in the world, since God can only be found in our response to the needs of others. Through this response we can hope to fulfill the mitzvah of tikkun olam (repairing the world)."

Ruth Messinger

The Partnership for Excellence in Jewish Education (PEJE) is a collaborative initiative of philanthropic partners whose mission is to grow Jewish day school enrollment and to ensure the excellence and long-term viability of all day schools through capacity-building strategies that strengthen the day school field.

PEJE

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in Jewish Education

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