

Partnership for Excellence in Jewish Education and Measuring Success

February 2013
Shvat 5773

LEARNING FROM PARENT VOICES

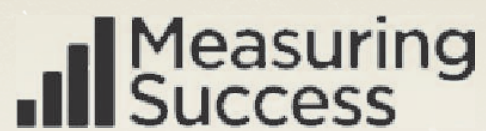
How to Turn Positive Perception into Enrollment Growth

By Daniel Held

**for Partnership for Excellence in Jewish Education
and Measuring Success**



Jewish Day Schools עתידנו Our Future



Daniel Held

Daniel Held is a doctoral candidate in education at the Jewish Theological Seminary and a Wexner/Davison Graduate Fellow. He consults to a wide range of educational and Jewish communal institutions. Prior to moving to New York, Daniel served as Director of Student Activities at TanenbaumCHAT, Toronto's Jewish community high school, and as a senior member of the educational staff at Brandeis University's Office of High School programs. Daniel has held a variety of lay leadership roles. He writes a monthly column on Jewish education for the Canadian Jewish News. Daniel can be contacted at danielmheld@gmail.com.

Partnership for Excellence in Jewish Education (PEJE)

PEJE's mission is to strengthen the sustainability and affordability of Jewish day schools. We believe that day schools are essential for fostering an engaged Jewish people for an enduring future. We work through communities to bring expertise and knowledge to their schools and operate on the field level to advocate for the Jewish day school enterprise. Our flagship programs include Endowment and Legacy Institute, which includes Generations, Leadership and Fundraising Academy, and the Affordability Knowledge and Resource Center in collaboration with the Orthodox Union. We deliver knowledge, expertise, and self-assessment tools to schools and communities and connect schools to one another. We are based in Boston and can be reached at info@peje.org.

Measuring Success

Measuring Success enables nonprofits to achieve their missions through data-driven decision-making. Since its inception in 2003, Measuring Success has worked with more than 800 nonprofits, foundations, and associations, 50% in the Jewish community. Our work with schools includes Jewish day schools, independent schools, and charter public schools. Measuring Success' other sectors include Synagogues/Churches, Collective Measurement Platforms, GrapeVine, and Federations & Community Foundations. We are based in Washington, D.C., and can be reached at info@measuring-success.com.

PEJE – Measuring Success Partnership

For a decade, Measuring Success has partnered with PEJE to create performance measurement tools, analysis of trends in the data, and consulting services to help schools increase the outcomes of perceived quality, enrollment, and financial sustainability. During this time, Measuring Success has worked with more than 330 Jewish day schools across North America as well as 250 non-Jewish independent schools. Other services developed by PEJE and Measuring Success and managed by Measuring Success include:

- Parent Survey
- Admission Tracker
- Strategic Financial Modeling Tool™
- Alumni Survey
- Faculty Survey
- Student Survey

The tools and data are validated by Measuring Success' work with non-Jewish independent schools, and most of the tools are available in both independent school and Jewish day school versions. For information about these services, contact info@measuring-success.com or parentsurvey@yardsticksuite.org.

Findings from the Jewish Day School Parent Survey™

Parents' perceptions of the school play a critical role in Jewish day school (JDS) enrollment. In supermarkets and synagogues, at restaurants and Starbucks, Little League games and bat mitzvahs, parents share their impressions of the school, and, importantly, others listen. The impact of parents' word of mouth on day school enrollment is paramount. This White Paper reports on the largest study ever conducted of day school parents. All told, between 2007 and 2012, more than 22,000 parents (and 3,000 non-current parents) from 77 schools rated their satisfaction with their school by completing the Jewish Day School Parent Survey™ (Parent Survey) conducted by Measuring Success and funded and subsidized by PEJE. The survey asked parents to agree or disagree (5-point scale) with a series of statements describing their school. Analysis of the responses to the parent survey and information from other day school data sources uncover that perceived quality is the only factor with a significant relationship to enrollment. The data form a visible connection between parents' perception of quality and their willingness to recommend the school to others.



The focus of this paper is what we learned from these parents about what makes them promoters of the school. Driven by data from parents' views, this paper proposes concrete strategies to drive day school enrollment.

Why is enrollment important?

To begin, we lay out three reasons – demonstrating the breadth of rationales – why day school enrollment is critical:

- Enrollment is important from a **Jewish people perspective**. We believe that the future of the Jewish people is tied to Jewish education, and we know that, in staggering numbers, day school graduates are more active and engaged in Jewish life than their peers.¹ Increasing enrollment increases the reach of the rich Jewish education offered by day schools. It allows schools, and the teaching and learning that happens there, to impact the lives of more students and more families.
- Enrollment is important from an **organizational health perspective**. Tuition is the largest source of income for schools. Schools operating at capacity lower the effective cost per student. Enrollment therefore is a critical piece in the day school affordability and sustainability puzzle.
- Enrollment is important for the **socio-educational success of students**. Schools operating at capacity offer the best social and emotional environment for children, allowing them multiple academic options and a robust ecosystem of peers. For both students and their families, fuller schools make it easier to create caring communities built on learning, support, and friendship.

What drives enrollment?

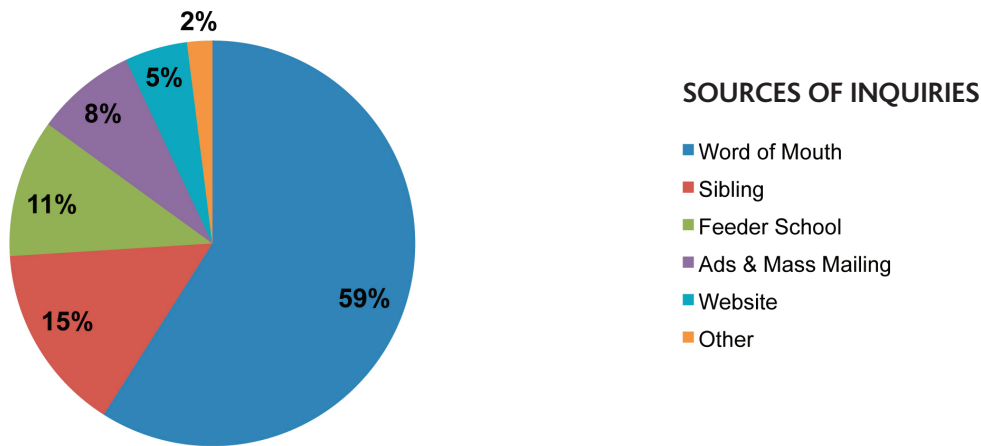
There are many theories that inform enrollment strategy and decision-making. Often, these theories are derived from anecdotes or intuition, rather than data. For example, we commonly assume that raising tuition will decrease enrollment; new facilities will increase enrollment; and more advertising will bring in more students. However, analysis of day school data does not support these theories.

- **Tuition is not a predictor of enrollment.** Examining enrollment at 200 schools – both Jewish day schools and non-Jewish independent schools – in the years before and after the recession, no relationship was found between tuition increases and enrollment. To put it bluntly, “There is no mathematical relationship between tuition change and enrollment.”²

¹ Chertok, F. et al. “What Difference Does Day School Make? The Impact of Day School: A Comparative Analysis of Jewish College Students,” Brandeis University. Maurice and Marilyn Cohen Center for Modern Jewish Studies (2007)

² *Measuring Success and Independent School Management. Full Steam Ahead: Part 2. Cutting-Edge Research and Opinion for Excellent Independent Schools.* 2010. <http://isminc.com/documents/research/general/full-steamahead2.pdf>

- **Buildings don't grow enrollment.** If you build it, there is no guarantee they will come. Enrollment data from 40 schools that built new facilities between 1995 and 2005 shows no relationship between the new facility and subsequent enrollment growth.³ While new facilities, when needed, can be an important part of institutional growth, they should not be viewed as admission tools.
- **Word of mouth blows advertising out of the water.** 75% of day school admission inquiries come from word or mouth or siblings and only 8% from advertising,⁴ as demonstrated in the chart below. While schools invest in brochures and advertising, raising the positive perception of the school, cultivating positive word of mouth and training the right parent ambassadors will have stronger impact on enrollment.



Source: Measuring Success Admission Tracker data from 6,500 inquiries in 60 schools

With the majority of inquiries coming from word of mouth, schools must ask: How do we increase the promoters of our school while minimizing detractors?

³ *Measuring Success Peer Yardstick Benchmark Report™ on Enrollment Drivers, funded by PEJE, 2003-2008.*
Available at: http://measuring-success.com/site_media/media/docs/Generic%20ESMS%200607%20Report%20Final.pdf

⁴ *Measuring Success Day School Admission Tracker™ funded by PEJE.* Available at:
http://measuring-success.com/site_media/media/docs/Admission%20Tracker%202012_v3.pdf

What do promoters care about?

Analyzing responses to the Parent Survey uncovered the three drivers of parent satisfaction that most significantly increase parents' likelihood of recommending the school to others.⁵ Across all school and parent types, parents are more likely to recommend the school if they feel or perceive that the school:

- 1 Supports the Jewish development that the parents desire for their child,
- 2 Academically prepares the child for high school or college, and
- 3 Responds to parent concerns about the child or school.

Some have suggested that excellence in individual academic areas – STEM subjects among others – is the most important factor in parent satisfaction. However, the Parent Survey found that these three universal drivers have a significantly greater impact on parents' likelihood to recommend than the strongest academic drivers. A positive perception of the school's support of Jewish development is more than *five times* as powerful as a positive perception of science, math or other significant subject areas. The chart below demonstrates that if a parent were to move from *agree* to *strongly agree* on the scale of "school supports desired Jewish development for my children," he would be 64% more likely to strongly recommend the school. If his perception of the quality of teaching of science were to similarly increase, he would be only 12% more likely to strongly recommend the school.

A positive perception of the school's support of Jewish development is more than five times as powerful as a positive perception of science, math or other significant subject areas.

TOP 3 DRIVERS OF PROMOTERS

- Promotes desired Jewish development [64%]
- Academically prepares students for high school or college [41%]
- Responds to parent concerns about the child or school [41%]

IMPACT OF INDIVIDUAL ACADEMIC SUBJECTS ON PROMOTERS

- English/Language Arts [16%]
- Science [12%]
- Mishnah, Talmud, and Halakha [8%]

⁵ The survey used parents' response to the question "likelihood to recommend the school to a friend" as a proxy for overall perceived quality and to determine which parents were the promoters. This is based on research across multiple industries. See Bain & Company, *The Ultimate Question*, www.netpromotersystem.com/book/index.aspx

Unpacking the three drivers:

1 Supports the family's desired Jewish development for their children. The element with the strongest impact on parents' likelihood to recommend the school is the school's meeting the family's desired Jewish development for their children. The good news is that, regardless of their self-described denomination or the type of school (from Reform to Orthodox, elementary to high school), it is the Jewishness of the school that parents care about most. If parents judge the school effective in building the Jewish identity they want for their children, they will be stronger promoters of the school.

Parents understand the development of this identity as accomplished through affective rather than content-specific education. For example, parents' understanding of the school's philosophy and the school's fostering of care and commitment to Judaism and a love of Israel have a greater relationship to parents' perception of the quality of Jewish development than curricular subjects such as Hebrew and Bible.

HIGH IMPACT ON PARENTS' PERCEPTION OF JEWISH DEVELOPMENT	SOME IMPACT ON PARENTS' PERCEPTION OF JEWISH DEVELOPMENT	LOW IMPACT ON PARENTS' PERCEPTION OF JEWISH DEVELOPMENT
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I have a clear understanding of our school's philosophy School fosters care and commitment for Judaism in my son/daughter School promotes a love of Israel in my child 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Tefilah Mishnah/Talmud Feeling part of a social community of parents 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Hebrew Bible Instilling moral values

BANG-FOR-THE-BUCK STRATEGIES: PROMOTING THE CHILD'S JEWISH DEVELOPMENT

- Clearly articulate and communicate the school's Jewish philosophy and mission with parents, applicants, staff, admission gatekeepers, and other stakeholders.
- Seek mission alignment throughout curricular and co-curricular Jewish activities.
- Celebrate the Jewish nature of the school by sharing videos, blog posts, recordings, and pictures of the Jewish nature of the school. Invite parents and grandparents into the school for tefilot, holiday celebrations, and commemorations.
- Send the "Jewish" home – create a school-home bridge for students to practice living Jewish values, culture, and rituals in age-appropriate depth and in ways that make the philosophy and mission of the school come alive. For example, for younger children, send home recordings of the Shabbat songs sung in school or Tu B'Shvat seedlings planted. Encourage older children to bring home discussions about Jewish values and texts.

6 PEJE – Measuring Success Partnership

One key element in fostering parents' positive perception of the Jewish development of their child is clearly articulating and sharing the school's mission. The example below comes from the head of a school with relatively high Jewish development scores in the Parent Survey. It demonstrates how one school brings a clear vision of its mission to prospective and current parents.

“Communication is the key. Beginning with the trustees and the faculty/staff, we discuss, revisit, argue, and then present a consensus about who we are and what our goals are. In this way, we bring a clear message through the recruitment and admission process (via both staff and recruitment ambassadors – the volunteers). We have very high yield on those who visit our school and excellent retention, of course because of quality, but also because we ‘walk our talk’ from the start of the school choice process through the entire educational journey. We’re articulate and transparent about our values and philosophy of Jewish life, literacy, values, and inclusion – people are happy because they have a full and honest opportunity and personal process to understand who we are, and then, when they enroll, they are getting what they wanted and expected.”

– Shoshana Bilavsky, Head of School, Seattle Jewish Community School

② Academically prepares students for high school or college. No matter the level of school – early childhood, elementary, middle, or high school – parents who believe that the school is successfully preparing their children for their next academic step are more likely to recommend the school to others. This is equally true for those seeking next steps into Jewish day schools, independent schools, or public schools; elementary or high schools; colleges or yeshivot. As with the development of the parents' desired Jewish identity, what parents mean by academic preparedness is less a function of the quality of individual academic subjects, and more a perception of the school's ability to open academic doors and options, and its guidance of children through the transition from one school level to the next. This is evident in the following chart. Various factors assessed by the Parent Survey are grouped by the strength of their impact on parents' likelihood to recommend the school.

HIGH IMPACT ON PARENTS' PERCEPTION OF ACADEMIC PREPAREDNESS	SOME IMPACT ON PARENTS' PERCEPTION OF ACADEMIC PREPAREDNESS	LOW IMPACT ON PARENTS' PERCEPTION OF ACADEMIC PREPAREDNESS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Graduates have access to multiple attractive academic options • School develops my child's critical thinking skills (analysis, synthesis, and evaluation). • Transition between divisions. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • English • Science • School nurtures my child's self-esteem • Math 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social studies • Arts • Teacher understanding individual needs • Teacher role models • Most Jewish subject areas (Hebrew, Mishnah, etc.)

A relevant data point comes from the 50% of parents completing the survey who indicated that they had seriously considered another school for their children in the previous two years. Overall, these parents perceive that their Jewish day school does not academically prepare children as well as other local competition including private, charter, and public schools.

- Of parents considering **other private schools**, only 18% of JDS parents think their current school provides better academic preparedness than the private schools they are considering.
- Of parents considering **local public charter schools**, only 37% of JDS parents think their current school provides better academic preparedness than the public charter school they are considering.
- Of parents considering **local public schools**, less than half (48%) of JDS parents think their current school provides better academic preparedness than the public schools they are considering.

While current perception of academic preparation may be poor, the Parent Survey data suggest the types of changes that will positively impact parents' perception of this important driver. School offerings that align with the high-impact factors shown in the chart at the top of the page include, for example, investment in college counseling and adoption of a school-wide critical thinking program. For day schools to compare more favorably with other school options in the area of graduate preparedness, schools will have to implement meaningful improvements, and demonstrate these efforts and their success to parents and other stakeholders.

Of parents considering local public schools, less than half (48%) of JDS parents think their current school provides better academic preparedness than the public schools they are considering.

BANG-FOR-THE-BUCK STRATEGIES: PROMOTING THE CHILD’S ACADEMIC PREPARATION FOR HIGH SCHOOL AND COLLEGE

- Hold individual meetings with students and parents early in the selection process. Be proactive in using these opportunities both to promote multiple options and to aid in the transition.
- Emphasize the skills that students learn that will equip them for their next step academically – time management, study skills, etc.
- Have alumni share their success stories from multiple settings – students in colleges who speak about their study skills and students in yeshivot who speak about their Talmud prowess.
- Bring an array of recruiters and share photos of each recruiter who comes through the school.
- Publicly promote the pathways of alumni. Tell the story of what next steps they choose and celebrate the diversity of these pathways. Prepare a “brag ad” celebrating their admissions, hang banners of the schools they select, post a map with pins where alumni study.
- Offer alumni and their parents as resources to current families making school selections. Connect current families to students and parents who made similar choices.

Basing their strategy on data, between 2008 and 2011 Ida Crown Jewish Academy implemented some of the recommendations above and saw a statistically significant increase in parents’ perception of academic preparation. The perception of parents indicating strong agreement that the school academically prepares their children for high school and college increased from 36% of parents strongly agreeing in 2008 to 45% in 2011.

“Our first yardstick report showed that one of the most important indicators of college preparation for parents was the number of college recruiters that come to the school. Our data also showed that parents were concerned about our math program. So we focused on bringing more college representatives to the school to meet with students as well as updating the math curriculum. By continuing to collect data through the Jewish day school parent survey, we have been able to show our parents changes and results, and we have seen parent satisfaction increase.”

– Rabbi Leonard Matanky, Head of School, Ida Crown Jewish Academy

3 Responds to parent concerns about the child or school. Customer service is a third key element of perceived quality. Parents, deeply invested financially and in countless other ways, expect the school to respond to concerns in a timely and effective manner. Schools must ask themselves: When a parent has concerns about his/her child’s progress, is the school responsive in a rapid and caring manner? How does the school address issues before they register as a parent concern? How does the school communicate its attentiveness to parent concerns in a way that consistently bolsters the parent-school partnership?

BANG-FOR-THE-BUCK STRATEGIES: CUSTOMER SERVICE

- Establish and maintain a policy of returning parents’ calls and emails within 24 hours. For non-classroom staff, the turnaround time should be sooner. Make this policy known to parents.
- Circulate articles of interest to parents; communicate regularly about both the educational and sociological trends you are tracking and how you are addressing them within the school.
- When an issue arises – from bullying to complaints about the lunch menu – clearly articulate the school’s plan of action and rationale.
- Reach out to parents individually twice a year – especially those from whom you don’t hear! A personal email or phone call to check in can go a long way. Although they are busy times of the year, Rosh Hashanah and Passover could be ideal times for these calls.

When asked if the school is adequately responsive to expressed concerns about my child, there was great variance in parent responses. Schools range from a low of 17% to a high of 60% of parents strongly agreeing that the school is adequately responsive. However, a proactive stance can significantly boost the perception of the school’s responsiveness.

"From the interview process through the first day of school and beyond, our mission statement is center stage. It states very clearly that responding to the individual needs of children and building a sense of community with parents is paramount. The key with parents is not to be reactive, but rather proactive. I recently sent a New York Times article around to our 7th grade parents about trends in children's poor behavior at Bar/Bat Mitzvahs and assured parents that this was something that we were aware of and addressing. The reaction was overwhelmingly positive; many parents responded that this was something that they personally were very concerned about and that they were so happy that the school was not only aware of it but also supporting families."

– Zipora Schorr, Beth Tfiloh Dahan Community School

How can we foster word of mouth?

By capitalizing on the three universal drivers, schools have the opportunity to positively impact parent perception of quality. However, in order to reap the full benefit of high perception of quality and magnify its impact on enrollment, schools must take practical steps to encourage satisfied parents to share their stories with others. By training ambassadors and framing opportunities for them to engage with potential families, schools can work to convert positive perceptions of quality into higher enrollment.

BANG-FOR-THE-BUCK STRATEGIES: MOBILIZING PARENTS' WORD OF MOUTH

- Identify your strongest supporters and promoters and train them to be effective ambassadors. They, along with student ambassadors, can offer tours of the school, host admission meetings in their homes, and identify potential new families.
- Design and distribute lawn signs, bumper stickers, and other regalia signaling pride in the school and potentially sparking conversation about the school.
- Organize parents to attend communal events equipped with talking points, information and photos of the school.
- Encourage those inquiring and applying to call current parents to ask questions and hear their perspective.

A Strong Admission Department: Ushering inquiries to applications to enrollment

A high perception of quality coupled with a well-oiled ambassadors program is not sufficient. The buzz amongst parents and stakeholders is important, but schools need the infrastructure to track inquiries, convert interest into applications and applications into enrollment. No matter how good parents' word of mouth may be, without the support of a strong admission department, a school's good reputation will fall short of its enrollment potential. Strong admission departments work with current parents to convert their recommendations into inquiries and to steward inquiries through the admission process.

Equally important, the school must work to stem attrition. When asked if they would recommend the school to others, 14% of parents replied *strongly disagree*, *disagree*, or *neither agree nor disagree*. This number, referred to as the percentage of "detractors," is in line with average attrition rates in Jewish day schools. The fact that the percentage of parents who are defined as "detractors" corresponds to the percentage of students who attrit, validates the belief that parents who are detractors may, in fact, leave the school. The data from this analysis of what drives day school promoters, together with your own data, can help you turn detractors into promoters – an important element in your school's attrition prevention plan. Schools must proactively work to retain students, and when students and families do leave, conducting exit surveys will allow leaders to track trends and thereby avoid the trap of labeling each case as idiosyncratic.

Survey your parents

Our schools employ feedback, quizzes, and tests to buttress student learning. So too, faculty, administration, and boards should be continuous learners. Regularly collecting and analyzing survey data (which can encompass parent, alumni, faculty, and student surveys) allows school leaders not only to track progress on questions such as parents' perception of quality and their willingness to recommend the school, but also allows school leadership to iteratively change policy in line with data, rather than anecdotal perception. The ongoing use of data therefore facilitates school's maximum performance and sustainability. While this can be done alone, it is even more powerful when your schools' data is compared with your peers both locally and nationally. Repeating the survey after you have made strategic improvements gives you the data to measure the effectiveness of those improvements and report success.

Often, we allow parking lot chatter and anecdotal comments to shape our understanding of parents' perceptions of the school. Parent perception plays too central of a role in enrollment for us to leave our understanding to assumptions and hearsay. Without data to inform decision-making, schools risk investing resources in ineffective areas and therefore reducing impact.

Summary

Fifty percent of respondents to the Parent Survey said they would strongly recommend the school to others. With the majority of admission inquiries stemming from word of mouth, these promoters play a vital role in recruiting new students, but more families should be sharing their positive perceptions. Analysis of the survey data reveals that parents are more likely to promote the school if it supports the Jewish development that the parents desire for their child, academically prepares the child for high school or college, and responds to parent concerns about the child or school. Across school and parent types, these three universal drivers are the most important factors in determining to what extent parents will promote the school. This paper elucidates each of these drivers and offers concrete suggestions on how to capitalize on the feedback offered by parents in the survey. There is evidence from schools who repeated the survey that making responsive changes does increase their promoter scores.

Schools that are not actively working to improve parent perception will encounter challenges retaining families and will have difficulty attracting new families. The data in this paper can guide you to maximize the utility of the relationship between perceived quality, word of mouth, and enrollment.

Appendix A

List of Schools that Participated in the Jewish Day School Parent Survey, 2007-2012

Akiba-Schechter Jewish Day School	Maimonides School
Akiva Academy	Menachem Mendel Seattle Cheder
Akiva School – Quebec	Milwaukee Jewish Day School
Anne and Max Tanenbaum Community Hebrew Academy of Toronto	Minneapolis Jewish Day School
Bialik High School	Northwest Yeshiva High School
Ben Porat Yosef	Oakland Hebrew Day School
Beth Hillel Day School	Pardes Jewish Day School
Beth Tfiloh Dahan Community School	The Rashi School
B'nai Shalom Day School	Ronald C. Wornick Jewish Day School
Brauser Maimonides Academy	Salanter Akiba Riverdale Academy
Chicago Jewish Day School	Salanter Akiba Riverdale High School
Chicagoland Jewish High School	Samuel Scheck Hillel – Ben Lipson Hillel CHS
Community Day School	Seattle Hebrew Academy
Donna Klein Jewish Academy	Seattle Jewish Community School
Epstein Hebrew Academy	Shalom School
Ezra Academy	Shalom Torah Academy of Western Monmouth County
Fuchs Bet Sefer Mizrachi	Solomon Schechter Day School of Greater Boston
Gann Academy	Solomon Schechter Day School of Greater Hartford
Gideon Hausner Jewish Day School	Solomon Schechter Day School of Metropolitan Chicago
Golda Och Academy	Solomon Schechter School of Westchester
Greenfield Hebrew Academy	South Area Solomon Schechter Day School
Gross Schechter Day School	Striar Hebrew Academy
Hannah Senesh Community Day School	Tarbut V'Torah Community Day School
Hebrew Foundation School of Congregation Beth Tikvah	Temple Israel of Hollywood Day School
Hebrew High School of New England	The Leo Baeck Day School
Hillel Academy of Pittsburgh	The Toronto Heschel School
Hillel Day School of Metropolitan Detroit	The Weinbaum Yeshiva High School
Hillel Torah North Suburban Day School	Torah Academy of Greater Philadelphia
Ida Crown Jewish Academy	United Synagogue Day School
Jack M. Barrack Hebrew Academy	Valley Beth Shalom Day School
Jess Schwartz	Yavneh Academy – LA
Jewish Community High School of the Bay	Yavneh Day School
Jewish Day School of Metropolitan Seattle	Yeshiva of Central Queens
Jewish People's Schools and Peretz Schools	YULA Boys High School
Krieger Schechter Day School	YULA Girls High School
Lehrman Community Day School	

Partnership for Excellence in Jewish Education and Measuring Success

88 Broad Street, Boston, Massachusetts 02110 ■ (617) 367-0001