

## *Educating and Sustaining a Board of Directors in a Jewish Community Day School*

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Dr. Barbara Davis

# A Word from the Editor

The word “network” in “Jewish Community Day School Network” is frequently underappreciated, as we strive to enhance two other words: “Jewish” and “community” in our self-definition. But

RAVSAK began as a network, a meeting of minds of heads of school and lay leaders who set out to create a set of connections among people who felt somewhat isolated and alone in their pioneering efforts to create pluralistic Jewish schools. So much has changed!! As you begin the new school year, your RAVSAK school is part of a network of several hundred Jewish community day schools throughout North America and in other parts of the world as well.

The complex web of relationships that characterizes a network still plays a vital role in assuring the success of any RAVSAK school. This issue of *HaYidion* examines a particular aspect of the associations that connect a school: the linkages between a board, its members, its constituents, its committees and its head of school.

The latter connection is especially significant. It has been said that the relationship between a board and its head of school is the most critical factor in determining whether a school will succeed in achieving its goals and serving its students. Yet at any given moment within the RAVSAK network, 15% of schools do not have a sitting head. And the average tenure for heads of Jewish community day schools is less than half a decade.

So the matters raised in this issue of *HaYidion* are of crucial importance to our schools, our lay leaders and our heads of school. We hope that you and your Board members will find these articles not only fascinating reading, but also of practical value as you carry out the very important educational mission with which you have been charged.

All of us at RAVSAK wish you a very pleasant and fulfilling 2006-2007 academic year!

*Dr. Barbara Davis is the Secretary of RAVSAK, Editor of HaYidion and Head of School at the Syracuse Hebrew Day School in Dewitt, NY. She can be reached at shds@twcny.rr.com.*



Deann Forman

# Welcome Aboard

## RAVSAK Welcomes Deann Forman, Director of Development and Operations, to the RAVSAK Team.

The Executive Committee of RAVSAK is pleased to announce that effective August 15, 2006, Deann Forman will serve as our first Director of Development and Operations. Ms. Forman’s hire represents the next of many steps toward the fulfillment of RAVSAK’s strategic plan. As Director of Development and Operations, Deann will work closely with our Executive Director in ensuring a vibrant financial future for RAVSAK while developing

the systems and protocols requisite to organizational excellence.

Deann has been working in operations and development in the non-profit sector for the past ten years. She spent several years in the Boston area managing programs for adults with disabilities, and most recently she served as the Program Development and Evaluation Manager at the Metropolitan Council on Jewish Poverty. Deann has a passion for helping non-profit organizations thrive and advance

their mission, and she is excited to be applying these skills to promoting pluralistic Jewish education with RAVSAK. Deann holds a Bachelors degree in psychology from Brandeis University and an MPA in non-profit management from Columbia University. She also has a degree in American Sign Language interpreting, and she is a graduate of the Muehlstein Institute for Jewish Professional Leadership. Deann lives in Manhattan with her husband Sidney Vidaver and their daughter Eliora.

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Production: Robin Feldman  
Design and Layout: Adam Shaw  
Contributors: Patrick Bassett, Mark Berger, Boardsource, Bathea James, Susan Weintrob, Arnee Winshall  
For advertising information, please contact Marla Rottenstreich at marlar@ravsak.org or by phone at 646-496-7162.

**RAVSAK**  
315 West 99th Street, Suite 8-B  
New York, NY 10025  
p: 212-665-1320  
f: 212-665-1321  
e: info@ravsak.org  
w: www.ravsak.org

# From the Desk of Bathea James, RAVSAK President



Bathea James

Most experts and laypersons alike agree that a meaningful education is not measured by discrete fact acquisition, but rather on the attaining of skills, tools, experiences, and information in environments that promote a positive disposition to learning. We assume little about prior knowledge, escorting each child at her/his own pace along a carefully crafted spiral-up curriculum in which one encounters lays the groundwork for the next.

My tenure as RAVSAK President and the opportunities it has provided me to see so many of our schools in action confirms that certainly this is the view of the vast majority of Jewish community day schools: We seek to engender communities of learning and joy for our children which focus as much on their potential for future

growth as they do on their learning in the moment.

Assuming then, for a moment, that this paradigm represents educational best practice, then why do we so often neglect to provide the same course of excellence for our boards?

Throughout the year, RAVSAK receives countless phone calls from distressed board presidents and heads of schools, seeking guidance as to why the board “just doesn’t work.” When probed for more information, board presidents speak at length about political infighting, a lack of commitment on the part of new board members, a plague of burn-out from old (and frequently recycled) board members, and an overall sense that there are too few highly invested in-

dividuals for the complex work at hand.

Heads of school report that their boards are caught in the management-trap, seem more interested in hot lunch than in fund raising, and all too frequently act with impulse and capriciousness.

Frustrated board members (oh yes, they call us, too!) decry endless and pointless meetings, an inability to wrap themselves around “big picture” issues, and what one lay leader recently dubbed the day school bait and switch: “I was asked by a friend to be on the board because of my creativity, but since agreeing to serve I

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## Membership Information

As the new school year begins, so does another year at RAVSAK. This year we mark our twentieth year of providing guidance, resources, professional and lay development and overall support to Jewish Community Day Schools. What began as a grassroots organization has grown into the largest day school network for pluralistic day schools in North America, serving over 110 schools.

RAVSAK offers a number of tangible benefits to its members: free job posting services; resource and data collection; a national listing of member schools; an annual leadership conference; advocacy and representation on the regional and national levels; a quarterly newsletter; accreditation services and support; curriculum consultation; board training; Project SuLaM; list-serves for professionals and lay leaders; and discounts with dozens and dozens of businesses and

organizations. We also offer board retreats, teacher-in-service, Head of School placement, website development and Judaic accreditation.

RAVSAK also provides an extensive list of intangible benefits: aligning your school with the fastest growing, most dynamic network of schools; guidance in the difficult issues of Jewish pluralism; a community of practice of leading educators and lay leaders dedicated to serving the broadest scope of the Jewish people.

To our comprehensive catalogue of benefits, this year we are adding “lunch and learn” sessions taught by professionals on the national level for Heads of School, Judaic Directors and Lay leaders. Online resources will be available on our website and we are launching a new program of colleague-to-colleague mentoring. To top it all off, you can finally pay

for membership and conference registration by credit card!

Mark your calendars now for our 20th Annual Leadership Conference to be held in Los Angeles on January 14-17, 2007. We are happy to announce that NAAJHS (North American Association of Jewish High Schools) and PARDeS (Progressive Association of Reform Day Schools) will be joining us this year. You can register for the conference and hotel by visiting [www.ravsak.org](http://www.ravsak.org). Early bird registration is open until December 1, 2006.

In order to receive and take advantage of all the benefits RAVSAK has to offer, your school must be current in its dues payment. Please take a few moments to update your membership on line by visiting [www.ravsak.org](http://www.ravsak.org) and clicking on the red school login

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Susan Weintrib

# Smart Boards

Most boards are made up of smart and dedicated individuals. These volunteers are committed to doing extremely meaningful work. With the Head of School, they set the tone and the vision of the school. Often

they are parents of the school's students or members of the surrounding community. The assets they commit to the school are crucial to the school's growth, and these assets are beyond their needed financial contributions. Board leaders contribute their intellect, their reputation, and their social or political capital. Many trustees are professionals who, in their own fields, make important decisions: they strategize, collaborate, supervise and, in fact, do much of what a school's board does in any given year.

But a board that wants to examine issues, assist consensus building and think creatively needs time to reflect and evaluate its processes and its development, as well as its decision-making. Good governance comes from effective leadership. But how does a board effectively lead?

Creating structures and processes for board use enhances the joint brainpower that is an integral part of a board's governance. Discussions and collaboration at board meetings facilitate growth but often a catalyst is needed to move to a new level of planning and envisioning. That catalyst can be an annual retreat, attendance at workshops or a consultant facilitating a reflection process. Taking time to reflect aids in planning and strategizing and is essential if a board is to continue to grow as the school's think tank.

I am reminded of the first time my daughter taught a voice lesson. She was then an opera major at the internationally known Manhattan School of Music. After the lesson was over, she called me. "It was awful. I think the student hates me," she confided. I asked her what her plan had been

for the lesson. "Plan?" she asked. After she worked on a plan for the next and following lessons, the lesson went very well and both she and the voice student felt supported. All teachers, myself included, have had times when they "winged it." I have learned from over 25 years of teaching and administrative experience that whatever I am doing, planning definitely makes it work better.

We do a lot of planning at Hannah Senesh Day School. Young schools like mine have definite stages of planning based on critical points of growth. As we begin our 12th year, we are moving past the important years of the founding board, past a board that began as managerial to one that is becoming generative, focusing on vision and strategies.. But the road can be rocky and unclear.

"The contributions boards make to mission-setting, strategy-development and problem solving certainly shape organizations," writes Richard Chait in *Governance as Leadership*.

There is no doubt that board governance does even more than shape an institution—its leadership can make or break any school. With such a crucial role to play, the question naturally arises: what training and support do board members receive to be able to complete such an essential mission? Unhappily, the answer is often none.

I had been both a board member of a synagogue and a medical ethics panel as well as been an administrator who worked with boards. Until I joined the RAVSAK executive committee, I had never been part of a board that planned retreats or self-evaluations. Seeing the higher levels that emerged from these moments of reflection, I discussed with my school trustees the possibility of planning our first Board Retreat. They agreed and followed my suggestion to invite Marc Kramer to facilitate our daylong meeting.

We found that Marc stretched and challenged us. His thought-provok-

ing remarks allowed us to grow more quickly and strategically than if we had never had a retreat. The trustees were energized by our discussions, thought differently about challenges in the school and felt more of a team. We have since invited other consultants to our school, for our board, our administration, our parents and our students. The practice of setting aside time for discussions and planning is seen by some as a waste of time:—"Can we afford to take out time from running the school for this? Can't we use our limited time in a better way?" The answer is that workshops that are well organized and presented by talented facilitators are absolutely necessary to effectively and strategically supervise the operations of a school.

Yet board development is not practiced enough. Often there is nothing in place to adequately support new trustees, leaving them to struggle alone. Lack of guidance and support may cause frustration, a departure from the board or an underutilization of a trustee's talents. Frequently, criteria for adding new board members are ambiguous at best or non-existent in some cases. Structures for regular meetings often consist of people reading reports or arguing over a 4th grade end of year program. The commitment and vision that brought these dedicated and smart people to volunteer their time is often not used in the best way. So what's a smart board to do?

As an educator, I know that planning ahead works well for both teachers and their students. The teaching of planning and strategizing skills has become a pedagogical focus of mine at Hannah Senesh. The ability to learn, to organize and to prioritize is equal in importance to the information or data relayed. Much of the class's foundations is set when students are taught how to learn, are given tools to comfortably read and connect to Jewish and other texts, and are given the confidence to engage in high-level discussions. Students thus learn how to continue their own learning. The

support of a board's learning should be as important a goal as supporting our students' learning, for the support of the trustees leads to the support of the children and the excellence of the school in all its programs.

Understanding the importance of board development reminds me of the story of Rabbinic students arguing about who was the most observant. Their teacher overheard the discussion and reminded the students that their observance was like a ladder. "It matters less where you are on the ladder than in what direction you are headed," the teacher reminded them. No matter where we are on the ladder of our own learning, with mutual support, the development of individual and collective leadership allows us to continue our climb, bringing with us our school, our community and our collective future.

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*Susan Weintrob is Head of School at Hannah Senesh Community Day School. She is VP of Development on the RAVSAK Executive Board and can be reached at [sweintrob@hannahsenesh.org](mailto:sweintrob@hannahsenesh.org)*

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have only been asked for money."

What's going on here? I will not risk "quick fix" answers, but instead I offer these hypotheses:

The root of the problem may be that the board has yet to invest itself in a learning program that parallels student learning, focused on the gradual building of skills in service of long-term commitment and achievement.

The board may, in its pursuit of excellence, set unrealistic expectations for themselves and for their head of school, in effect, setting all parties up for failure.

Board members may be asked to make decisions about matters they do not fully understand and about matters beyond their control. Board members are too often asked to "not wear their parent hat" at board meetings – a request that seems silly on the surface and unfair beyond that.

I hope that as a lay or professional leader in a Jewish community day school you will find information and ideas in this edition of *HaYidion* that are supportive and inspirational.

My wishes for a most successful school year,

Bathea

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*Bathea James is the President of RAVSAK. Bathea can be reached at [bathea@msn.com](mailto:bathea@msn.com)*

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# Are Committees Needed?

Determining an effective board structure is no longer as straightforward as it used to be. Today, a traditional board with numerous committees is only one of the options. Many boards are looking for more flexible ways of managing the workload while adjusting to the board's evolving needs. Here are some alternatives to delegating various tasks to specific committees.

## Role of a Committee

Committees can be a practical way to structure and manage the board's work. Sometimes a smaller group can be more focused and efficient in dealing with issues than the board as a whole. A committee can be created to provide counseling and advice to the board. While the committee submits its recommendations for the board's approval, the board is not obligated to go with committee suggestions. Committees are more effective when their charter and scope of work is clearly defined by the board.

## Traditional Committee Structure

Most boards consider committees an essential part of board structure. Traditionally, the organization's bylaws define the board's standing committees and their roles. A more flexible approach may be a statement in the bylaws that committees can be formed on an as-needed basis and then board policies define the details. According to a BoardSource survey, the most common standing committees are executive, finance, development, and planning committees. In addition, boards can form ad hoc

committees or task forces that are formed to carry out a specific task. These also need a job description.

## Qualities of an Effective Committee

A streamlined committee structure makes the work of the board easier. Involving board members in committee activities is a direct way of taking advantage of everybody's special skills and expertise. An effective committee has:

- a clear job description and defined goals;
- a chair who is able to involve all members in the committee work;
- members who are committed and willing to spend the needed time to accomplish their tasks;
- a sense of being part of the full board and not working in isolation;
- an understanding of time constraints and deadlines;
- an understanding that it does not make decisions; rather it advises and recommends; and
- an evaluation process to assess its own achievements.

## Task Forces or Ad hoc Committees

Some boards do not form any standing committees, rather a need is identified and a task force or an ad hoc committee is formed to carry out the necessary charge. Each task force is unique, so the answers will vary to questions like: How often should it meet? Who should serve on the task force? How big should the group be? Task forces allow a board to concentrate only on pressing issues and help it avoid wasting time on activities that are not of

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**ENCOURAGE** Jewish Staff to focus on their Jewish Identity and the role of Israel in it

**HELP** non-Jewish staff to gain an understanding of a critical aspect of Jewish identity for their students

**SUPPORT** group building opportunities that facilitate greater team work

**CREATE** deeper connections to Israel and Klal Yisrael

strategic importance. If a task force has done its job well, the board can proceed to make wiser decisions. Examples of these work groups include a bylaws task force or a search committee.

### Zero-based Committee Structure

To push efficiency even further, some boards start each year with a clean slate. All committees are abolished automatically and only those that are still needed are re-instated. An evaluation process allows a board to reassess the composition of a committee and redirect the focus of the working group if necessary. Benefits of this approach:

Stagnation can be avoided. The board is flexible and future-oriented.

Leadership opportunities are more frequent.

Leadership changes are not threatening.

### Outsiders as Committee Members

Very infrequently does a board possess all needed skills and expertise. Some organizations choose to invite outsiders with specific contacts and knowledge to serve on committees or task forces. Committee members do not have the same liabilities and pressures as full-fledged board members. It is an excellent way to bring new talents and perspectives to a board and for busy professionals to serve an organization of their choice. Other benefits include: The board gets the work done without having to increase its size; former board members can stay active as committee members; and future board members can be cultivated into board service.

### No Committees at All

Small and particularly cohesive boards may need no committees at all. Board members manage the workload together as a committee of the whole or delegate tasks to individual board members. This requires effective leadership and commitment from every member.

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*References: Robert C. Andringa and Ted W. Engstrom, Nonprofit Board Answer Book (BoardSource 2001). Marla J. Bobowick, Sandra R. Hughes, and Berit M. Lakey, Transforming Board Structure: Strategies for Committees and Task Forces (BoardSource 2001).*

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# Founding a School – What Does the Board Have to Do With It?

Arnee Winshall

In 1995, a small group gathered to found JCDS, Boston's Jewish Community Day School. The community was skeptical that we could succeed as an intentionally pluralist day school "without a natural constituency". They were not able, however, to dissuade us from our task. Driven by a clear vision of success, a mission and goals document, a philosophy, and a set of core values and supported by a lot of very wise and committed individuals, we forged ahead and have never looked back!

We did not know a lot about what was needed to create a school. However, what we learned served us in getting started and has continued to serve us over the past 11 years. We let our vision, mission, core values, and goals guide us.

We welcomed a wide range of people with whom we connected through various networks to join us and contribute to our thinking. We learned that in order to build a board that would enable us to fulfill our vision, it is key to identify areas of expertise, wisdom, and the kinds of sensibilities needed to maintain the core values. It is also vital to infuse the decision-making with integrity, intentionality, accountability, and kavod. Equally important is to include those with differing perspectives, to create a safe space in which anyone at the table can challenge the assumptions being made, and to ensure that everyone's voice is heard and opinions weighed. We came to appreciate that there is something to be learned from almost every perspective; uncovering the learning and figuring out how to apply it will continually strengthen the institution.

Throughout the process, we continue to ask: who are the constituents that need to be served and what kind of people will best be able to understand and advocate for the needs of these constituents? Parents, staff, donors, and community members have been included in discussions, as well as those who represent the diversity of religious practice reflected in the school or in the desired population of the school. Provision is made for representation from across the cultural and economic range of the school and the community and from institutions which are viewed as key strategic partners.

There are also particular skills that have been critical to ensure that decision-making and governance are most effective. It is important to have board members with experience in both for-profit and not-for-profit organizations, and in accounting, strategic finance, strategic planning,

marketing, fundraising, management and organizational skills, and legal expertise (especially as it pertains to real estate, personnel, and not for profit governance). Of equal value are persons with relevant educational and educational administrative expertise, those who have contributed to the success of parallel endeavors, and those who can infuse the board discussions with Jewish neshama and learning. This cannot be underestimated. Having someone who can frame the challenges in Jewish terms and bring Jewish texts to bear on the thinking are invaluable assets to every aspect of the work.

In developing our board, we bear these criteria in mind and begin by generating lists of the people that exemplify them. We then map out what each of them brings to the table and look for what is missing and what is being duplicated. Taking the time to profile our board in this way helps ensure that we are creating a strong working group and brain trust to guide our efforts.

Another step we recommend taking is to articulate the kind of knowledge and learning needed to inform the endeavor. Having done this, we identify those with expertise and associated with institutions that exemplify what we want and need to learn. We have then invited and requested those identified to be our teachers. We visit schools that demonstrate certain strengths and talk with educators who are recommended to us. We seek out others who have created institutions known for their clarity of vision and integrity or for the effectiveness of their organizations. Since the beginning, our approach has been to listen and learn and develop relationships with those who are willing to help and with those who have something to contribute. We also take the time to give back and share our learnings with others and to acknowledge and thank those who contribute to our growth and success.

In order to augment our efforts, some of our founding board members who had been involved in start-up businesses advised us to develop a strategic plan as soon as possible. We knew that as a new endeavor we should not undertake to do this on our own, but rather find a professional with the appropriate expertise to facilitate the process. We solicited recommendations from within and outside the Jewish world and conducted interviews to choose the right person. We also asked those we were interviewing how much this process would cost; who should be involved; how much time each of the constituencies would need to invest, and

what the deliverables would be. We raised the funds to pay for this from private individuals who appreciated our taking this business-like approach and through a planning grant from our local federation.

Following the advice of organizations with expertise in the independent school field, we were fortunately directed to ISM (Independent School Management). Although we were initially concerned whether they would understand the needs of a Jewish day school, we discovered that they had worked not only with some of the best independent schools in the country but with a number of Jewish day schools.

Through the years we have also benefited from our relationships with RAVSAK ([www.ravsak.org](http://www.ravsak.org)) and PEJE ([www.peje.org](http://www.peje.org)). In fact, as a grantee of PEJE in the earlier years, ISM re-visited JCDS which provided us with both continuity and a fresh look at the evolution of our organization. In addition, NAIS (National Association of Independent Schools – [www.nais.org](http://www.nais.org)) has been a great source of knowledge with some of the best handbooks on school governance and fundraising that can be found.

ISM provided us with strong recommendations for how to evaluate our operations and ourselves, how to think about and structure governance, how to run the school through planning, and how to develop benchmarks for evaluating our performance and progress.

Our experience revealed that the following are critical factors in creating and maintaining an effective board:

- Include smart, thoughtful, creative, and committed individuals to help you develop clarity about your mission, goals, and values as an institution.
- Profile the expertise and the kind of thinkers you need. Choose people who are reliable and team members, who will put the common good ahead of their own agenda. Ask the best people you know to either participate or help you identify the people you need.
- Personally recruit board members, being clear with them about how they can contribute and what expectations you have of them.
- Respect your lay leaders' boundaries and use their time effectively and strategically.
- Invest early on in a professional to facilitate the creation of a strategic plan and road map for development and revisit it regularly.
- Work to build the group into a team using text study and brainstorming in an environment of respectful listening and respectful disagreement.
- Do not be afraid to reach out beyond your board for additional expertise, feedback, and input. This often leads to discovering potential new leadership and helps you to avoid becoming stale.
- Identify the thought leaders in the communities whom you want to reach and ensure that they are involved and informed in some way.
- Serve all your constituents in a balanced way.
- Say what you mean and mean what you say.

- Operate with integrity and transparency.
- Constantly ask yourself if you are modeling the behaviors you would like to see throughout the school and if you are striving to be the board of choice – collaborators, partners with the community, partners with your staff and with your families, and informed by our Jewish traditions.

Remember that if you do your job well the school in your trusteeship will be around to serve your children's children.

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*Arnee Winshall is the Founding Chair of JCDS, Boston's Jewish Community Day School. Arnee can be reached at: [arnee@winshall.com](mailto:arnee@winshall.com)*

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button. If you have any questions regarding this information, please call the RAVSAK office at 212-665-1320.

Wishing all of you and your families a *Shana Tova U'metuka*.

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*Robin Feldman is the Director of Member Services. She can be reached at [rfeldman@ravsak.org](mailto:rfeldman@ravsak.org)*



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Mark Berger

# The Most Important Board Committee

As a long time nonprofit board member, consultant, teacher and CEO, I am often asked, "What is the most important committee a community day school should have? Is it development or education? Maybe finance, head of school support or evaluation?" All of these are important and necessary. But one committee rarely mentioned is the governance committee. The questioner usually looks surprised and says, "The governance committee?"

In the forty some years since the expansion of the community day school movement, we have seen new schools prosper and thrive. As a participant in the scene (and a past day school board chair), I believe that one area that has not kept pace is the board. Without any data, I would suggest that most community day school boards still consist of a majority of current parents of the student body. Why? When nominating time comes around, it is the easiest audience to draw from, but not necessarily the best.

What does a governance committee do and why is it so important? It has several key tasks that help drive the board and the school forward.

It is a standing committee of the board, normally recognized in the school's bylaws. It should include both current board members, as well as others outside the school community.

It meets year round, and it often chaired by the past board chair. Unlike the traditional nominating committee that meets a month or two before the annual general meeting, a governance committee has an ongoing agen-

da that requires attention on a regular basis.

It develops strategies for board membership recruitment. It often starts by creating a grid of skills and interests the board seeks (demographics such as parents and other family members of current and past students, geography, congregational participation; and skill sets, such as Jewish community knowledge, fundraising, legal, marketing, human resources, etc.) Note that the skill sets will change as the school changes.

No one was ever born a board member. The governance committee is responsible for setting board membership training and development on a year round basis, including the annual board retreat. Board member training deals not only with day school knowledge, but appropriate roles and responsibilities for the head of school, the board chair and board members. Ironically, 'education of the board' is often a topic absent at board meetings!

It assesses the work of individual board members, and the work of the board as a whole. Not everyone is going to be a good addition to the board. For example, we often recruit to deal with the 'squeaky wheel' parent who has a single agenda. A governance committee can often take the 'heat' off the board chair or head of school by dealing with members with single agendas who aren't interested in the broad role a board needs to have.

It offers advice on the establishment and elimination of board committees. One school I consulted with had 21 committees! No wonder the head of school kept changing and board officers and members were burnt out.

Where can you get help setting up a governance committee? In the Jewish community, we tend to think our work is unique. Day schools leaders shouldn't fall into that trap. While RAVSAK, PEJE and the denominational day school movements have valuable resources to offer, don't forget to look at the work of other independent schools and nonprofits.

Your state or regional association of independent schools can often be a great resource. Your day school's board work is very similar to independent schools. Your local nonprofit technical assistance organization offers low cost training for nonprofit boards. The board chair, the head of school and governance chair should attend training sessions together.

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## ASSESSMENT TOOL FOR THE BOARD

<p>1. Our board focuses on the long term, strategic impact of issues and decisions.</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>Rarely 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Always</i></p>	<p>10. There is a depth of leadership on the board allowing for a clear transition of leadership.</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>Doesn't exist 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Exists</i></p>
<p>2. We create an annual board agenda for the year using items derived from our planning document.</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>Rarely 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Always</i></p>	<p>11. Our board officers and committee chairs are highly respected by the board and in the community.</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>Not true 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 True</i></p>
<p>3. Our board governance committee has profiled our board and is cultivating potential new members based on the profile.</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>Rarely 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Always</i></p>	<p>12. Our board undergoes regular training and education about the organization.</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>Rarely 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Always</i></p>
<p>4. Our board meetings are organized around one main action item on which a vote is taken or consensus reached.</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>Rarely 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Always</i></p>	<p>13. All of our board members are donors to the Annual Fund.</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>Rarely 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Always</i></p>
<p>5. "Current events" (day to day activities) are not the dominant issues at our board meetings.</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>Rarely 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Always</i></p>	<p>14. Our board committees regularly tap expertise from the community.</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>Rarely 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Always</i></p>
<p>6. There is a Head of School Support and Evaluation Committee that meets regularly and assists the HOS.</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>Doesn't exist 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Works Well</i></p>	<p>15. All of our board members are involved in the Annual Fund or special events fundraising as volunteers and leaders.</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>Rarely 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Always</i></p>
<p>7. Our board committees are given explicit charges and assignments annually.</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>Rarely 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Always</i></p>	<p>16. Our board members actively advocate for the interests of our organization while out in the community.</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>Rarely 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Always</i></p>
<p>8. Our board governance committee annually evaluates the board's performance.</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>Rarely 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Always</i></p>	<p>17. One hundred percent of our board members take their "due diligence" seriously.</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>Rarely 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Always</i></p>
<p>9. The board governance committee annually evaluates each board member's performance.</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>Rarely 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Always</i></p>	<p>18. Board members truly understand their responsibilities and roles.</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>Not well 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Fully</i></p>



Patrick F. Bassett

# The NAIS Governance Survey-2006

Every five or six years or so, NAIS conducts a governance survey to determine benchmarks for independent school board composition, structures, alignment between board chairs and heads, and priorities. While occasionally we receive notes from heads about

how annoying it is to receive so many surveys from NAIS on so many different topics, we are thankful for the large number who do respond (over 500 in this case), since the results are so critical for providing the information that all heads, boards, and schools will benefit from.

In the Fall 2006 issue of Independent School magazine, an issue dedicated to the theme of Governance, readers will find a summary article by NAIS's Donna Orem on the results of the survey. In this column, I'd like to note how the data relates to the FAQs we receive on governance and the answers to those questions we give (and post in the Frequently Asked Questions section of the NAIS website.) I'd note in passing that the composition, structure, alignment, and priorities are remarkably simi-

lar to those from five years ago, so there are powerful themes about the norms of governance that emerge from the data.

## What is the Typical Board Composition?

While board size can range from 5 to 50 or more, independent school boards tend to have around 20 members (averaging 22--twenty voting members and two non-voting "ex officio," such as heads, Parents Association reps, or honorary trustees). On average, males comprise six-in-ten board members. In terms of ethnicity, about 80% are Caucasian. In general, board members fall into the broad 36-55 year-old age range. Board members represent a wide range of occupations, especially entrepreneurs, homemakers, educators, lawyers, and bankers. On average, roughly one-half are parents (for day schools, far fewer for boarding schools); about one-in-five are "past parents" whose children have graduated from the school, and a similar proportion are alumni/ae (much higher proportion of alums for boarding schools). External community members, including heads from other schools, account for about one-tenth of the membership. Faculty members on NAIS boards are very few and far between, and no schools have current students as voting members.

## Should Faculty, Staff, Students, or the Parents Association President be Represented on the Board?

While many schools do have such representation, best practices dictate, survey data confirm, and NAIS counsel recommends against such practice. We believe faculty, staff, Parents Association officers, and even students, as appropriate, should be on board committees or task forces but not as members of the board.

Why not? Confidential and contractual matters are discussed that involve some of these constituencies, and frank and candid conversation can be and often is muted or conducted in the parking lot when sensitive matters arise if, for example, faculty are on the board. Most importantly, however, is the fact that there are only a handful of seats around the board table, and fund-raising is a critical task of a board, so board members need to have considerable resources to donate and the commitment to ask for considerable resources from others. (The average trustee gift to annual giving is over \$5000 per trustee per year, not considering the substantial leader-

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ship giving expected from trustees in capital campaigns.) Beyond the head, frequently the business manager, development director, and/or admissions director attend board meetings as resources, but are not board members and do not vote.

While many if not most schools have the Parents Association president on the board ex officio, NAIS recommends that the board choose someone to be a PA officer and liaison to the board rather than vice versa, for the same reasons as cited above: board members need to be chosen not as representatives of one constituency or another but rather for their expertise, their strategic alliances, and their access to resources. (In the typical day school, around 50% of board members are current parents, the rest coming from the ranks of past parents, alumni, grandparents, and community leaders, all recruited locally; in the typical boarding school, few if any trustees are current parents: most are alumni, recruited nationally. It is NAIS's experience that boards that exceed the 50% current parent norm are much more likely to be inclined to spend their time micro-managing rather than governing: i.e., keeping focused on the strategic ("time to build a new library and information center, not on the topical, "what happened in the library last Thursday.")

The board's bylaws should codify the size of the board and its membership. Generally independent school bylaws should follow a standard, accepted legal format and include all the important relevant information. However, they should be personalized to each school, strong enough to guide the board's activities but flexible enough to allow the board to grow and change

## Should the Head of School Serve on the Committee on Trustees and Thereby Influence Board Member Selection?

The head of school is a vital member of the board of trustees. He or she serves as the professional, institutional, and educational leader of the school and is authorized to oversee all administration. The head works with the board and staff to implement new policies and procedures regarding the operation of the school.

In some schools, the head is a full, voting member of the board, but in most schools the head is an ex officio member (non-voting): i.e., at the meetings ex officio (by virtue of office). NAIS believes the ex officio role to be the appropriate one, since the board needs to go into Executive Session (only full board members present) at least once per year, when it discusses the head's evaluation, compensation, and contract.

No one has better knowledge of many of the constituents as potential board members than the head of school, so of course most schools would include the head of school

as an ex officio member of the Committee on Trustees/Nominating Committee. (In fact, it is typical that the head of school would be ex officio a member of all board committees and task forces, attending as many of the meetings as humanly possible.) The head's recommendations should be considered fully and confidentially; that being said, board members of the committee should fully consider the head's input, but the head should not be a voting member of the committee, since voting a recommended slate of officers and board members is a responsibility rightfully vested in the board.

## What's the Appropriate Process for Vetting Trustee Candidates?

In immature and dysfunctional boards, there is no process for vetting trustee candidates. The conversation in these cases usually goes something like this: "Oh my God, it's August, we have three spots to fill on the board for September, and we haven't nominated anyone yet. Who comes to mind?" Followed by, "Gee, my neighbor whose kid is in the second grade seems awfully nice and interested in the school. Why don't we invite her to join the board?" In mature and high functioning boards there is a very deliberate and effective process that looks like this: The board's Committee on Trustees...

- Identifies from the strategic plan the expertise the board should seek: i.e., "We about to go into a building phase, so perhaps an architect or contractor would be helpful to have on our board."
- Cull from the rosters of constituents (parents, past parents, alumni, and grandparents) a list of potential candidates who have the skill set.
- Asks the head and development director to make a "first cut," including those whose interactions with the school indicate interest and ability and excluding those whose interactions with the school have been problematic.
- Makes a second cut at the Nominating Committee level of those who can fulfill all three of the R's of Trusteeship: raising image; raising students; and raising money.
- Appoints the leading contenders to a board committee or task force to observe their leadership in action: i.e., weed-out those whose expertise as a positive is overwhelmed by their lack of ability to work effectively within the group.
- Nominates the best of the lot.

## How Does an Independent School Deal with a "Renegade" Trustee?

Disruptive trustees present a very awkward situation.

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An individual trustee has no authority apart from the board as a whole. However, this rarely prevents a “single agenda” trustee from recognizing that his or her “issue” does not have board support. When such individuals persist, and disrupt the ongoing collective work of the board, it is the job of the board chair to intercede, speak with the individual, and either persuade the trustee to desist or resign. In addition, it is advisable to have a code of conduct for trustees, a “board contract” (sample on the NAIS website). In principle, board bylaws should stipulate procedures for removing a trustee, if that exigency becomes necessary (typically by a vote of the majority of the board). In practice, strong board chairs correct the problem more quietly and informally, by inviting the obstreperous board member for a “walk in the woods” with the board chair and another board member, usually someone else who has some relationship with the offending trustee. Double-teaming to point out “the error of one’s ways” is often sufficient. If it’s not, then the matter of continued presence on the board must go to the board for a vote.

A complicating variation on the theme occurs when the offending trustee is the board chair. This theme usually gets played out in one of two ways: a board chair who becomes domineering, intimidating, and micro-managing of the school’s affairs; or a board chair whose per-

sonal or corporate life becomes scandalous in some way, causing embarrassment for the school. In such delicate decisions, the head must confer with the chair of the Nominating Committee and perhaps some other key Executive Committee members or officers of the board to undertake an “intervention.” If all else fails, the chair of the Nominating Committee or the vice-chair of the board initiates a vote to remove the chair from the board, which happens rarely but decisively in some cases.

When the disruptive party is an entire faction within the board, the board leadership has every right and even an obligation to counsel the individuals that they have two choices: “to give it up” if their issues have been addressed by the board and decided contrary to their wishes or “to resign.” When the issue is the politics of the board itself, such as dissent over the slate for new members and officers, then NAIS counsels that the Committee on Trustees/Nominating Committee be very mindful that “harmony” on the board is an essential ingredient for successful board work. For example, should a “dissent” faction attempt to offer additional nominees for election or a counter-slate, the board president is perfectly within his or her rights to refuse to accept nominations from the floor, in following the board protocol for a slate to be offered by the Nominating Committee (Robert’s Rules notwithstanding, since unless Robert’s Rules

[Continued on page 16]



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are specified explicitly in the by-laws, they do not apply). Should the original slate fail to pass, of course, then the board could send the task back to the committee or open nominations.

For boards to function effectively, politics should stop at the boardroom doorway, so that the real business of the board, planning strategically for the future of the school, can take stage center.

## How do Boards Deal with "Conflict" in the School?

Increasingly, factions in the board, faculty or parent bodies are making demands upon boards, particularly when a controversial decision has been made by the school leadership, such as the changing of an important tradition, the termination or non-renewal of an employee (someone's "favorite teacher"), or the dismissal of a student (particularly the child of a board member). Sometimes, such factions demand an "audience" before the board and/or even threaten to come to disrupt a board meeting, citing public laws that indicate not-for-profit organizations should hold "open meetings." (By the way, even if a board's bylaws or a state's statutes stipulate that board meetings are "open," which means the public can come and listen, there is no obligation to offer "voice," and boards have every right to go into Executive Session on issues involving contracts, personnel and students.)

Boards are advised to have published policies (appear-

ing in school handbooks) that indicate the head as the last court of appeal on any and all admissions, re-enrollment, disciplinary, and personnel issues, with the caveat that the head reports to the Personnel and Executive Committee any problematic cases and seeks guidance and counsel accordingly. Every year, the board chair should remind the board that the head makes all the operational calls, and all board members are required, publicly, to support those calls, and the board chair should recommend a script the standard reply to challenges to the individual trustees: "At this school, the head makes all such operational decisions, after consulting with the board and its leadership, and the board supports the head right to do so. It's a privilege to serve a school where the board sticks to the strategic and has the confidence in the head to take care of the daily business of the school."

## Where Do I Get My Governance Questions Answered?

For more information on board norms, governance, by-laws, executive compensation, and contracts consult any or all of the following resources:

- Order the NAIS Trustee Handbook, available for purchase from the Publications section of the NAIS website, or by calling our publications department at (800) 793-6701.
- Search the NAIS website for "governance" and Browse Resources by Topic.
- Go to NAIS Resources/Frequently Asked Questions and scroll down to "Governance."
- Email [governancehelp@nais.org](mailto:governancehelp@nais.org) for personalized counsel from the NAIS governance counsel team (all of whom are also trustees of various schools and organizations themselves), made up of Pat Bassett, NAIS president; Debra Wilson, NAIS legal counsel; Donna Orem, NAIS coo; and Jeff Moredock, former NAIS COO and current governance counsel on retainer.

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Robert Greenberg	Birmingham, AL
Dr. Joan Gusinow	Sacramento, CA
Shelli Lavender	Ravenna, OH
Dr. Meisha Leibson	Melbourne, FL
Dr. Alice Maniloff	Durham, NC
Myra Michaelson	Vancouver, BC
Judy Miller	Milwaukee, WI
Betty Winn	Northridge, CA
Ariel Zaltzman	Hamilton, ON

## MENTORS

Mariashi Groner	Charlotte, NC
Jerry Isaak-Shapiro	Beachwood, OH
Susan Koss	Silver Spring, MD
Dr. Larry Kutler	Plantation, FL
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# PEJE Page

## (Partnership for Excellence in Jewish Education)

Convinced that a strong day school board is an essential third of the “tripod” base for day school excellence (in addition to school vision and professional leadership), PEJE supports the day school field with a number of resources designed especially for board members and board chairs.

- Visit [www.peje.org](http://www.peje.org) and select Knowledge/Leadership & Governance for a wealth of resources, including an assessment of your board’s profile, articles from NAIS and ISM, sample by-laws, case studies, and much more.

- Watch for details about PEJE Regional Conferences in 2006-2007 on admission, financial management, and a special seminar for new board chairs and new heads

of school. Each conference will contain content relevant for both professional and lay leaders from schools, with specific lessons for board members integrated into the program.

- Make sure that your school’s board members receive PEJE’s monthly e-newsletter, Hadashot V’Hidushim. Individuals can subscribe at [www.peje.org](http://www.peje.org) or you can send a list of email addresses of

board members to Dave Dudek at [dave@peje.org](mailto:dave@peje.org).

- The PEJE Lay Leadership Community of Practice (CoP) maintains an active listserv where members post questions and responses, and also hosts conference calls throughout the year with field-wide experts on topics essential for board members. To participate in the CoP, contact Mollie Aczel at [mgacz@aol.com](mailto:mgacz@aol.com).

Read below for a sampling of recent postings on the listserv and responses (identifying information has been removed to protect confidentiality):

A. I was wondering what approval levels are in place in other day schools for expenditures that are non-budgeted. As it stands now, our school has the following approval levels:

- Non-budgeted expenses less than \$500: the Rabbi/HOS can approve on his own.
- Non-budgeted expenses more than \$500 but less than \$5000: requires Executive Committee approval.
- Non-budgeted expenses more than \$5000: requires General Board (i.e. Board of Trustees) approval

We are currently considering revisiting this policy as the \$500 level seems low for a school with an operating budget in the range of \$4M.

B. I am the President of a 500 student school. Like many day schools, our tuition does not cover our cost per child. In fact, our tuition is approximately \$3,000 less than our actual full cost to educate a child. This is not a widely known fact among our parent body. We have many parents who can and might be willing to pay the full cost. Even at full cost, our school would be less expensive than most private schools in the area. We are thinking thru different ways to ask them to do so. So far, we are considering:

- Including a paragraph in the tuition bill explaining that

tuition does not cover the full cost per child and asking parents who can do so to voluntarily pay the full cost.

- Targeting specific parents (perhaps as part of our development efforts) with this information and asking them to contribute the difference to the Annual Campaign.

Have any schools had any success with efforts of this type? If so, what are the learnings?

Responses:

1. Why perpetuate the myth that people can expect to get something special for nothing (or less, in this case)? The entire Jewish community should know what it costs to educate one Jewish child for one year. How else can the community act to keep afloat such a precious and critical resource? Without a “sugar daddy,” the current financial formula cannot be sustainable, so action may be required fairly soon.

May I suggest 2 approaches:

- (1) Raise Tuition and grant scholarship. Those who can afford the tuition will be paying it appropriately; those who can’t will receive aid to help them. There’s so much to avoid in creating a tuition aid program, and so little room here, suffice to say this: give it lots of thought and discussion and do not compromise on confidentiality or fairness. About 11% of tuition dollars are in the form of scholarship at my school. ALSO: Don’t do loans through

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the school -- engage a 3rd party to provide that. Deadbeat parents will expect the school to forgive owed amounts in the spirit of "rachmonas" and that spells nothing but insolvency for the school.

(2) Get a professional fundraiser and raise money. Expect a mature Annual Fund Drive to supply around 15% of the operating budget of the school. The admission interview with parents should make clear that an annual donation is expected commensurate with their financial abilities.

Remember this: there will always be some people who expect the school to provide a perfect education for peanuts. Their voices must be tempered (countered?) by those who realize that there is no free ride in this world -- "no margin, no mission."

2. Publish an annual report, noting the shortfall. Begin to education parents and the community.

C. What do other schools do to cover their offices during the summer? We are a small K-8 school. Our Head of School takes off the month of July as does as our Admissions officer. The HOS's executive assistant is also planning on taking off the month of July. They have decided to leave a message on the school's answering machine that the school office will be closed for July and to call back in the month of August. I am not sure what is appropriate. My concern is that we might lose one or two prospective parents who would like to talk with someone or get some information during that month. I am curious what other schools do in this situation, especially small schools with up to 150 students that don't have a lot of office staff.

D. Our school is a new community day school, transitioning from a Schechter. We are looking for mission and/or operational/policy statements regarding religious practices. We are working hard to bring members of all denominations along with unaffiliated community members into our school community. Our particular challenge (which I am sure is not unusual) is balancing the current school practices of a historically primary Conservative and Reform population with potential enrollment from a young, Modern Orthodox community.

E. I would like to know what other schools do in the case of faculty complaints or problems with the Head of School. We actually have a formal grievance procedure, which I believe has never been used, and I assume most schools have something similar. But does anyone use an ombudsman type person or some other more informal system for resolving these types of issues? How do

faculty and staff handle problems with the HOS if direct communication is unsuccessful?

## Responses:

1. We (the board) regard the head as the CEO and avoid refereeing disputes between the head and faculty. As a practical matter, teachers develop constituencies among the parents resulting in an unofficial conduit to the board, and some issues are dealt with in the context of the Head Support Committee.

A related issue in this time of heightened scrutiny of tax-exempt organizations is a system of checks and balances when a board uninvolved in the day to day operations of an organization cannot be expected to monitor the CEO. For this reason, more tax-exempt organizations are requiring another professional (say, a business manager or development director) to report directly to the board.

2. Many, many moons ago we had a similar problem with conflict between headmaster and staff. One of the ways we dealt with it was by doing a very thorough evaluation. As the headmaster was new at the time, this was easier than with a long time person. Another possibility might be to try and use a mediator.

3. There are two issues here....The first is involving grievance, etc., with staff other than the Head of School. We have determined, in the boundaries between HOS and the Board that the Head has complete discretion regarding the hiring, firing, and handling of all personnel issues. He does occasionally use our Executive Committee (Officers of the Board, who meet as separate group between the monthly Board meetings to set agenda, review financials, and discuss sensitive issues not appropriate for the entire Board discussion), as a sounding board or just to inform us as to things he's dealing with. We have hired him to handle such things, and if we can't support him on his ultimate decisions, then there would be a much deeper more serious problem here.

The second point is that issues with the Head of School are an entirely different matter. My feeling is that we would take the following steps -- first the President would meet with the HOS in a one-to-one meeting to discuss the issue. Then, if necessary, it would go to the Executive Committee. After that, my feeling is if it is irresolvable, that we would seek outside counsel (a PEJE coach might be someone we would turn to).

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*Have more questions? Have some advice to share? Join the Lay Leadership CoP by contacting Mollie Aczel at [mgacz@aol.com](mailto:mgacz@aol.com).*

# Dr. Marc N. Kramer, 2006 Covenant Award Recipient

Continuing a fifteen year tradition, The Covenant Foundation announced this spring that it would bestow its prestigious annual Awards on three pioneering Jewish educators for 2006. The Covenant Award, which carries a prize of \$25,000 for the recipient and an additional \$5,000 for his or her institution, is considered the premier honor in the world of Jewish Education.

Dr. Marc N. Kramer, Executive Director of RAVSAK: The Jewish Community Day School Network is one of three recipients known for their personal devotion and generosity as well as for innovations that are changing the face of Jewish education in North America. He shares this tremendous honor with Jane Cohen and Rabbi Loren Sykes.

## "Shining a Bright Light" on Jewish Education

Established by the Crown Family Foundation in 1991, the Covenant Awards honor outstanding achievement in a field that usually offers relatively little remuneration or public recognition. "From the beginning, the idea was to shine a bright light on those in the trenches, people whose work isn't usually acknowledged," says the Foundation's Executive Director, Harlene Winnick Appelman. "This work comes from the heart and

soul. You have people doing exceptional things, transforming the way we preserve Jewish heritage and values in a changing world – truly inspired educators – and they get very little in return. The Awards are a way to say 'thank you' and to give these educators a platform." This year's honorees were chosen after in-depth consideration of over ninety dedicated and talented nominees.

## Leadership and Innovation: RAVSAK's Dr. Marc Kramer

Dr. Marc Kramer is currently completing his sixth year as executive director of RAVSAK. As executive director, Dr. Kramer has transitioned the organization from a grassroots initiative into a leading professional organization and expanded its network to over 100 member schools. He is committed to the ideal of inclusion and to the understanding that one size does not fit all. Professionals throughout the

field testify to the humanity and skill that he brings to this work.

"Marc's transformational leadership has allowed RAVSAK to evolve from a loose affiliation of schools into the central address for community day school education. He has crafted a vision that ensures that children from across the spectrum of Jewish practice are able to flourish in rich, pluralistic settings," writes a colleague. "Because of Marc, RAVSAK is able to offer its member schools the support and resources to meet the increased demands for excellence in Judaic and secular education."

The Covenant Awards will be presented at the Foundation's annual Awards Ceremony, to be held in Los Angeles at the UJC General Assembly in November. Nominations for the 2007 Awards will be accepted in the fall, with a deadline of December 1. For more information, please see the Covenant Foundation website: <http://www.covenantfn.org>



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