

Measuring the Success of a School's "Jewish Mission"

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Notes from the Executive Director

This season I enter into my fifth year as Executive Director of RAVSAK. When I first began at RAVSAK, my fall newsletter column focused on our need to get organized, to grow the network, and to find someone interested in donating a "gently used fax machine." I am most happy to report that with the skillful leadership of our Executive Committees and the unprecedented support of a handful of philanthropic partners, RAVSAK has more than achieved this mandate: We have organized ourselves into a leading voice in Jewish education, grown faster and stronger than any other membership organization, and, yes, we even have a fax machine! Humor aside, we have much to rejoice – and much still to do – as we celebrate RAVSAK's 20th anniversary.

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Dr. Marc N. Kramer

Notes From The Executive Director

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2005-2006 has much in-store for RAVSAK members. We have expanded our repertoire of consulting services, providing guidance and resources in board development and education, teacher training, executive placement and the transition process, Judaic curriculum, mission/vision alignment, and conflict resolution.

Our on-line services now include password protected school profiles, peer-alike bulletin boards, and list-serves in addition to cost-effective website development, graphic design and website hosting. Project SuLaM: Study, Leadership and Mentoring is well underway, with all 16 participants implementing culture-enriching projects in their schools across North America. Middle school and high school issues are at the top of our agenda as we seek new ways to strengthen both and increase the number of children in the upper grades. The Annual Leadership Conference will feature some of the most important figures in the field independent school education, including Pat Basset, president of NAIS, Mark Silk, program director of the New Teachers Center, Christina Druin, director of PlanOnline, Charlotte Abramson, project director of the AVI CHAI Judaic Benchmarks and Standards Program, and many more. This promises to be a truly wonderful networking and professional development event.

This year will also see the development and launch of a new strategic plan which will provide a blueprint for RAVSAK’s contin-

ued success. Central to our vision is the development of a national leadership board composed of “thinkers, doers and givers” prepared to help shape the future of the Jewish community day school experience. We are seeking your input in the formation of this board. Please let me know of the lay and professional leaders in your community who may have the interest and capacity to serve at the national level.

Let me conclude by thanking the members of the Executive Committee for their time, talents, commitments and trust. The entire staff- in fact, the entire network- benefits from their thoughtful leadership.

My heartfelt wishes for a *shana tova u’metuka* (a sweet and good year) to all. May it be G-d’s will that each and every child and family we serve grow in their knowledge of Torah, their connections to Israel, and their life-long commitments to *gemilut chasadim* (acts of loving kindness).

Dr. Marc N. Kramer is the Executive Director of RAVSAK. He can be reached at mkramer@ravsak.org.

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FORWARD



Dr. Jack Sparks

Dear Friends of RAVSAK

Imagine NOT being asked to donate to a worthy organization? This request is not for your money but for recommendations and names. RAVSAK is growing, not just internationally, (with our first school abroad) but also in terms of the record number of schools, professionals, lay leaders and students we serve. When we opened our national office five years ago, we had fewer than 50 dues-paying member schools and nearly 10,000 children. Today, there are approximately 30,000 students in RAVSAK's 100 member schools, and while we continue to provide excellent service, we are doing so from an infrastructure designed to support a network one-third the size. In order to insure the financial viability of RAVSAK, our agency needs financial stability to support requi-

site growth. Growing pains come as a mixed-blessing; there is so much to do and so much more that could be done with the right resources in place.

The Executive Committee hopes to establish a National Board of philanthropic donors to assist in the task of raising funds for RAVSAK's increased services and programs. This National Board, ideally, will be comprised of lay-leaders, women and men across the nation, for whom day-school education is a priority and for whom participation on RAVSAK's National Board is the next step in their philanthropic journey. These lay-leaders may be former parents who no longer are involved in your school but are "ripe" to move to another Jewish education involvement; they might be current parents or community folks whom you deem are ready for this type of national in-

volvement. We need your help to identify the individuals who can and will make a major difference in the future of Jewish community day school education world-wide.

Please consider this request seriously and email or phone Marc Kramer with your suggestions. Our hope is to begin recruiting the National Board after the New Year.

Wishing you wonderful success this school year,

Shalom,

Dr. Jack L. Sparks
VP for Development

Dr. Jack Sparks is the V.P. for Development of RAVSAK and Head of School at the Albert Einstein Academy in Wilmington, DE. He can be reached at: sparks@aeacademy.org.

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Gifts For Our Children



Dr. Ray Levi

I was sitting in a sidewalk café as I watched five Minneapolis Jewish Day School students aged 6 to 12 run past. They dashed into a shop, followed shortly by the father of two of the children. A couple of minutes later the children scampered out of the store and ran on down the block to their next destination. The father joined the mother of the other three children and followed slowly.

This scene might have been unusual in Minneapolis, but consider that it took place in downtown Jerusalem, just a few blocks from the Ben Yehudah Street mall. Certainly, this image runs counter to the view most of us have of Israel at the present moment. Despite media portrayals, the streets of Jerusalem and Tel Aviv are bustling with activity and a sense of vibrancy that we associate with earlier days.

As I contemplated this scene, I considered the gifts that these children, participants in a congregational Family Mission to Israel in June, had been given by their parents. By experiencing everyday life as well as historical sites, they were seeing Israel both as land whose rich past informs our identity and as a living, vibrant country in which they could play in parks, dash down streets, or swim in the Mediterranean Sea. In addition, they were discovering in a country half-way around the world, the global interconnectedness of our lives. There were familiar foods and new ones as well as access to options that are only kosher in Israel. There were recognizable signs in a land dominated by Hebrew. They could hear familiar popular tunes--and familiar Israeli folk tunes. In

short, the students were making their first steps as citizens of the larger Jewish world.

Over the course of the next several days, my thoughts focused on the gifts we provide for our children. There are countless smaller ways to provide gifts that achieve the same goals as those just described and summertime offers us many such opportunities. Some children are offered the gift of camp to explore specialized interests. If the camp is away from home, the children gain the independence of living with groups of their peers. Perhaps, the summer offered an extended time for a family vacation to discover the close company of parents and siblings as well as share the adventures of exploring new terrain. Hopefully, this summer also offered children the gift of unscheduled time, time simply to be lazy, read a book, create one's own entertainment, move at a self-determined pace.

Families enrolled in our schools have each made a determination to offer their child(ren) the gift of a Jewish day school education. That choice, certainly deeply appreciated by us, comes with a reciprocal responsibility to provide a quality experience for families. Given the significance of the opportunity parents have chosen what are some of the gifts we as educators should be offering?

As a Jewish day school educator, I feel a great responsibility to provide for and share quality experiences with families -- academically, socially, emotionally, religiously, spiritually and as members of a global society. Some of the many gifts that I believe a Jewish day school education offers include:

- Helping children learn that they

are valued members of a community by taking responsibility for one another and sharing core values.

- Nurturing intellectual and spiritual curiosity through a curriculum that encourages depth of experience.
- Developing pride in Jewish identity by teaching students to become active participants in Jewish rituals and customs.
- Cherishing student voices by giving a variety of means to share what they know and understand; meeting individual learning styles and fostering imagination.
- Offering a rigorous and integrated general studies and Hebrew/Judaica program, in a nurturing environment of teachers committed to life long learning.
- Exposing children to technology and its applications for research, presentation and connecting with the larger world.
- Helping students become citizens of a multi-cultural world, and deepen their connections with Israel, through diversity education and hands on experiences with adults and children from other communities.
- Fostering empathy and a sense of empowerment through community service and tzedekah.

As the longer, slower days of summer become the fast-paced, over-stimulating days of the start of a school year, it is my hope that each of us continues to find the time to consider the wide array of gifts - small and large - we do and can offer our students, families, schools, and communities.

Dr. Ray Levi is the Vice President for Planning of RAVSAK and Head of School at the Minneapolis Jewish Day School in Minneapolis, MN. He can be reached at rlevi@mjds.net



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Parents Are Teachers





Dr. Barbara Davis

Things I've Learned

I don't know about you, but since I became a day school principal -

- My husband has to do the grocery shopping (unless I sneak in and out of the supermarket at 6:00 on Sunday morning);
- In addition to loving Shabbat for itself, I love it for the fact that parents and board members can't call me;
- I have come to hate the parking lot where the worst conversations take place;
- I have learned that the 4th Amendment which guarantees the right to privacy is precious indeed!

Now don't get me wrong. I absolutely love my job, wouldn't trade it for the world, and would proba-

bly do it even if they didn't pay me (don't tell my president!). It is an endlessly fascinating challenge, an opportunity to do something really meaningful in my professional life, and the source of the most amazing experiences. I have been in my position for almost 20 years. Among day school principals, I guess that makes me something of a rarity. Apparently, according to RAVSAK statistics, the turnover rate for heads of community day schools is high - 20% of all positions are vacant at any time and the average head lasts less than 4 years. Why so much turmoil in the profession?

I realize that most if not all heads of community day schools are stressed by being overworked, underpaid, overwhelmed, pulled in too many directions, and answerable to too many people.

But I suspect that these tensions would not be so difficult to bear were it not for one specific deficit. After all, we are heads of school by virtue of experience, expertise, a talent for dealing with children and adults, the ability to multi-task and a commitment to a Jewish future in America. I think the specific lack we have is **time for ourselves**.

My favorite inspiration from *Pirke Avot* is Hillel's tripartite declaration that begins, "If I am not for myself, who will be?" Though I used to think this seemed somewhat selfish and self-centered, I have come to realize that it is quite the opposite. As educational and school leaders, we must see to it that we meet our own personal and professional needs so that we will have the strength, wisdom and compassion to meet



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the needs of others.

One of the most wonderful things about working in an academic environment is that each year has a beginning and an end. Each year provides us with a fresh chance to do it better, to get it right, to make a difference. In most other jobs, things just go on and on and a certain dulling routine sets in. Not so in a school setting! Not only do the students continually change, but curricula and technology and values change. We must constantly update and upgrade. That is why the summer months for academic administrators are not just vacation time – they are time to refresh ourselves by catching up on the latest research, the hottest books, the most current thinking - not to mention a few relaxed full breaths of fresh air.

I hope that each and every head of school recognizes the importance of using vacation time to refresh, renew and recharge. It is vitally important to your own survival and to the success of your school. It is said that caregivers should allow themselves one hour per day and one day per week off. From personal experience I know that this is a bit “pie in the sky” as far as the academic calendar goes – but the concept is what matters.

And here is where RAVSAK becomes so important. As each of us works ourselves into a state of near exhaustion by mid school-year, at the point at which the term “professional development” seems like a fantasy, RAVSAK makes the dream a reality. In a warm and sunny city during a school vacation break, professional colleagues, outstanding ex-

perts and committed lay leaders gather for a few days to recharge their batteries, share experiences (both good and bad) and learn, always learn, something new, exciting and interesting.

It is good to remember as we plunge once again into the maelstrom of a new year that a refreshing oasis of personal and professional development awaits us in January. Before you get too busy, mark the dates on your calendar and make your reservations. You'll make this year even better by starting it off with a date for taking care of yourself!

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.

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Stuart Dow

HeadLiners: Making Commitments

A Head of School's Reflections on Leadership

Just over four years ago, when I was chosen to be the founding headmaster of the new Jewish community high school in Houston, I considered at length the sort of culture I wanted to help create. More specifically, I thought of the different schools I had attended as a student and how each sought to inculcate certain behavioral norms -- reflecting on those that were effective and those that were not. In addition, having had recently served on the board of directors of a local charter school that required students to sign contracts, I thought about that approach: Was that a viable option that would meaningfully impact our kids? In part, I concluded yes; in part, no. I very much liked the notion of a student entering into a written agreement with the school; but if the terms were determined in advance by the administration, it seemed to me we lost a valuable teaching opportunity. For such an agreement would be tantamount to the terms having been dictated. Instead, why not allow a group of students decide for themselves to what standards they would hold themselves accountable? I much preferred the idea of "commitments"

rather than "commandments."

For this approach, where expectations were not externally mandated, but instead were internally generated, was more consistent with what I envisioned. Such a school culture would not only be a more pleasant environment in which to teach and learn, but it would be more likely to help develop an ethical sensibility and sense of character that was likely to endure over the course of a lifetime. In addition, this philosophy jibed nicely with our theological approach in Judaic Studies. Meaning, while we certainly treat Torah and tradition with great reverence, as a pluralistic Jewish day school, I want students to view religious text and issues of authority critically. So, before they ever even sat in a classroom on our campus, the Pioneer class of 9th graders -- who just graduated this past spring! -- worked at an off-site retreat to create the student ten commitments, which since then all subsequent entering students read, review and sign.

But in keeping with a school culture that seeks to treat students as mature members of a learning partnership, we decided that

members from the other two constituencies -- parents and teachers -- should make similar commitments. So four years ago, members from these two groups also gathered and went through the same exercise as the students had -- they wrestled with what mattered most and set goals for their respective behavior. And again, to this day, all parents sign their commitments, as do all teachers who post theirs in their classrooms!

Together, these three sets of documents continue to help set the tone of Emery/Weiner. We review them annually, discuss them regularly, and hold all members of our school community to them. And by so doing, we work to effectuate a unique school culture that is ostensibly less formal in tone, and yet in practice is every bit as rigorous in the content of character we seek to develop. Student, Parent and Teacher Ten Commitments can be found on the opposite page.

Stuart Dow is the Head of School at the Emery/Weiner School in Houston, TX. He can be reached at sdow@emeryweiner.org.

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Ten Commitments

Student Ten Commitments

I, the undersigned, commit to the following:

1. To treat all members of the school community, including other students, teachers and staff with respect.
2. To be honest in all that I do.
3. To be respectful of all property, personal and public.
4. To exercise my freedom of speech in such a way that it does not disrupt class or hurt other people.
5. To listen and communicate with other members of the school community.
6. To resolve all disputes in a non-violent manner.
7. To be prepared for and participate in class.
8. To be tolerant of other people's differences.
9. To set high expectations for myself and seek to improve in all that I do.
10. To demonstrate good sportsmanship.

Parent Ten Commitments

I, the undersigned, commit to the following:

1. To take an active role in my child's education, and to help my child succeed academically, socially and emotionally.
2. To ensure that my child arrives at and is picked up from school and school functions timely.
3. To respect diversity in religious observance and belief.
4. To abide by the religious standards of observance set by the school.
5. To expect my child to abide by all school regulations and student commitments—relating to dress code, academic performance, the treatment of others or property—and to support the school in the enforcement of its regulations and commitments.
6. To make myself available for consultation with faculty and administration upon their request and conversely, to find appropriate ways and times to communicate with them, if I so desire.
7. To respect the school's educational choices for my child.
8. To refrain from lashon harah (speaking badly of others).
9. To discuss with my child the dangers of alcohol and drug use.
10. To recognize that I, not the school, must take ultimate responsibility for the actions of my child.

Teacher Ten Commitments

I, the undersigned, commit to the following:

1. To treat with respect all members of the school community.
2. To be compassionate, responsive and available to students, parents and colleagues.
3. To affirm the individuality of each student and the religious pluralism of our community.
4. To ask for help when I need it, and to provide help when I am able.
5. To create a classroom environment that is academically rigorous, and yet is still a safe and supportive space for risk-taking, exploration, and creative expression.
6. To communicate effectively and appropriately with all members of the school community, to retain a sense of humor, and to participate actively in the school community by sharing my views and ideas.
7. To be consistent in the application of classroom and community standards.
8. To develop a fair and authentic grading system that reflects that goals of the class and the methods of instruction.
9. To strive to find a balance between my professional life and my personal life to the advantage of both.
10. To have emunah—meaning trust or faith—in my colleagues, my students and myself.





Dr. Ezra Kopelowitz

Measuring the Success of a School's "Jewish Mission"

The "Jewish goals" of a school are always stated in an abstract way in the school's mission statement.

However, from the mission statement to everyday practice is a long distance that most schools do not successfully travel.

Why is it so difficult to push forward clear standards of success in Jewish education? There are two factors, the first of which has to do with the lack of clear standards for Jewish educators. In secular studies there are nationally recognized tests in math and sciences against which a school can test its performance; and, of course there are the percentage of students accepted to top universities. What are the equivalent measures for success in areas touching on a school's Jewish mission? There is no clear answer to this question.

The second factor mitigating against measuring success in Jewish education has to do with "time". Who has the time to continually collect data, assess progress, discuss, reflect and then institute changes? With the rare exception, teachers and administrative staff are chronically over worked and simply do not have the time that is necessary to systematically tackle the question of success. Yet, given the difficulty in defining standards in Jewish education, without a process of collecting data and thinking in a systematic way, it's unlikely that a school will make substantial progress in its Jewish mission.

The lack of time for thinking about success on key issues such as Jewish identity and education

is also a tremendous problem for researchers and consultants who work with organizations. The author of this article is a sociologist who has worked extensively with Jewish institutions on the question of success, and has repeatedly found that reports, which are at first greeted with enthusiasm, are eventually shelved. After initial discussion, the people responsible for instituting change simply don't have the time to properly implement the consultant's recommendations.

While researchers and consultants are uniquely equipped to help educational institutions grapple with questions of success, the product they offer is not useful. The researcher's product is the report, which tends to be large and inaccessible, and always demanding of large investments of time and often money to read and implement. Moreover, even the best reports eventually become obsolete, requiring new data collection and analysis to update them; and, again the demand for additional allocations of time and money.

Even a school that does not hire a consultant will to some extent attempt to gather basic data on its educational work, if only to satisfy and report to its constituents – parents, students, teachers, school boards, accreditation agencies and in many cases, donors. This process is often done haphazardly and at a tremendous cost to staff work hours. Once the required report is put together, it too is shelved and the entire process repeated when the next deadline approaches.

An Israeli high-tech startup

named Research Success Technologies has developed an Internet system that will change the way educational institutions grapple with the question of success in general, and on Jewish issues in particular. ReST Office is designed to solve the lack of time that educators have for thinking about their educational goals by creating a comprehensive system which allows for data input as part of everyday work, simple analysis and easy report building. The approach of Research Success Technologies is to empower the school itself to conduct ongoing data collection and analysis through the use of forms that are coded for the goals of the school – including applications, course evaluations, grading forms, event or special program evaluations, and parent and alumni surveys. Basic data having to do with the everyday life of the school enters the system, allowing for analysis focused on the schools goals, quickly and on short notice.

If Jewish educational institutions are going to survive and thrive, they must be able to prove that they are reaching their goals. Yet, the process for measuring success cannot make demands on the time that the school staff have for performing their jobs. Technological solution, like the one offered by Research Success Technologies is one way to move forward.

Dr. Ezra Kopelowitz is a sociologist of the Jewish experience, former Director of Research at the Department of Jewish Education of the Jewish Agency and is the founder and CEO of Research Success Technologies (<http://www.researchsuccess.com>). Contact e-mail: ezra@researchsuccess.com.

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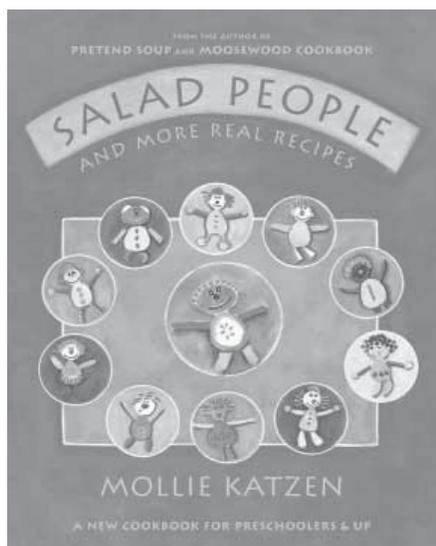
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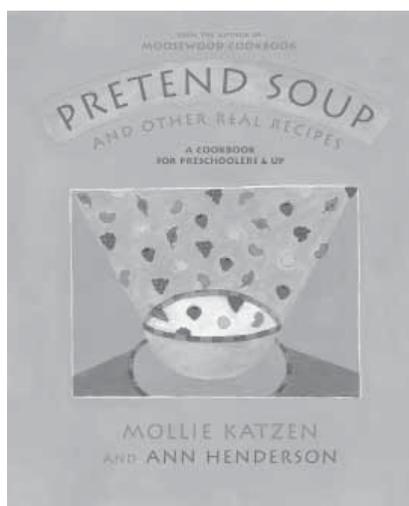
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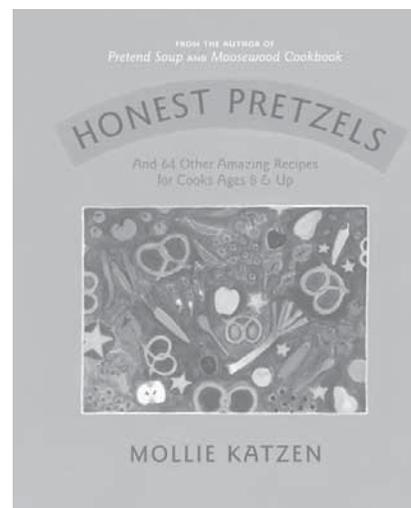


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Bathea James

From the desk of Bathea James, RAVSAK President

Dear Chevre,

I hope you have all started your new school year in a spirit of excitement and that this year will be full of learning, fun and exploration. I know that your weeks of planning, preparation and anticipation will be well worth it. As the well known saying goes "If you fail to plan, you plan to fail".

I had the pleasure this summer of meeting at our national office in New York for three days of intensive planning with the national executive board. Needless to say, I am thrilled and privileged to be working with these leaders of Jewish Education in addition to Dr. Marc Kramer, our Executive Director, and all the RAVSAK staff. We planned for the future growth of RAVSAK, development of our programs, expansion of our services and the firming up of our conference program which promises to be outstanding.

I then had the pleasure while on a family trip to England, to consult with our first potential inter-

national community day school RAVSAK member. This marks a new phase in our organization. JCoSS (Jewish Community Secondary School) would be the United Kingdom's first inclusive secondary school. This school is set to open in 2009 and would be a cross communal school to serve the whole community. "JCoSS would be a first of its kind- a truly inclusive school, open on an equal basis to all Jewish children, irrespective of birth status or synagogue affiliation and with due respect for differing traditions, beliefs, and practices." In discussion with Jonathon Fingerhut and Linda Cooke, the JCoSS co-chairs, this school will truly serve all Jewish children. This school is also set to house a specialist 60 place unit for children between the ages of 11-16 with a range of learning disabilities, developmental delays and special educational needs. The Barnett Council submitted a 46 million pound funding bid to the Department for Education Skills (DfES) on behalf of JCoSS. They are very positive that this request will be granted and hope to hear the outcome in September.

We hope to continue to build our overseas membership with schools in Israel, South Africa, and Australia as well. Community day school education that sincerely embraces all Jewish students is the future of our Jewish Community.

I hope you all have a good year and continue with success in the holy work you do. You will all be contacted shortly by one of our outreach chairs or board members. Please mark our conference dates in your calendar and remember to fill out your membership application on line.

Looking forward to seeing you all in Fort Lauderdale at the conference.

L'shalom,

Bathea James

Bathea James is the President of RAVSAK and former Head of School at the Tucson Hebrew Academy in Tucson, AZ. She can be reached at bathea@msn.com.



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and Staff of RAVSAK
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