

A YEAR IN REVIEW

Data and Reflections on Jewish Day Schools and Yeshivas: 2022

Written by Elliott Rabin in collaboration with Odelia Epstein and Dan Perla, with support from Prizmah colleagues



PRIZMAH

Center for Jewish Day Schools



A LETTER FROM PRIZMAH LEADERSHIP

Believing in Jewish day schools makes one an optimist. No matter the changing tides or trends, day schools and yeshivas remain our greatest investment in a vibrant Jewish future. The dramatic turnaround that many schools experienced in recent years, as more parents sought out and stuck with day school education, highlights the intrinsic value of our schools and their essential role in the lives of families and communities.

At Prizmah, thanks to the support of so many throughout North America, we have been able to lead and serve the day school field in ways that harness the momentum of recent growth and to develop and promote resources that can sustain that energy for years to come, whatever challenges may arise.

In the past year, Prizmah has convened leaders and gathered knowledge in areas that are critical for day school sustainability: enrollment, development, finance, tuition modeling, and the pipeline of educators. This report captures the current moment in time as we look back on a year of resounding growth and recognize those areas where our efforts can be redoubled. As you will read, in the field overall, enrollment continues to grow and build upon recent success; fundraising goals are being met and exceeded, establishing new bases for future campaigns. At the same time, the challenge of recruiting and retaining sufficient numbers of qualified, excellent teachers looms large for our field, as for the field of education more generally.

Please join us in celebrating a year of accomplishment for day schools and their leaders as we look forward to cultivating deeper relationships and delivering value across North America.



Paul Bernstein
Chief Executive Officer



INTRODUCTION

Key Metrics

For most schools in Prizmah’s network, 2020-21 was a year of remarkable accomplishments in the face of unprecedented challenges. Following upon the Covid closures at the end of the previous school year, this was to be a year when we just needed to survive, to try every possible method of holding school in person, when allowed, of keeping students and teachers safe and healthy, of retaining students despite the obstacles to normal learning, of finding the funds and funders for the school to continue and pay for all of the needed upgrades. Instead of just surviving, many schools found themselves going above and beyond their most optimistic expectations: not just keeping students healthy but having no transmission; drawing many new students, with some schools reaching capacity and above; working collaboratively to care for student wellbeing at an unprecedented level; enabling students under quarantine and others who were immunocompromised to participate online; preserving the strong sense of community, of communal connection, support, celebration and joy; tapping into donor enthusiasm for the school and eliciting wellsprings of response especially among the school’s core funders.

By contrast, this school year, 2021-22, raised the question of where our schools would land, especially with Covid abating thanks to the vaccines. All the students who transferred into Jewish schools—would they stay there or return to their previous schools? Would new students be drawn to our schools when parents saw how well we managed during the crisis? Would fundraising momentum wane during a more normal time? And would the pressures that Covid exerted on school professionals, including teachers, administrators, counselors and more, start to manifest themselves in burnout, mental health challenges and resignations?

By and large, as this report will demonstrate, the answers have been resoundingly positive. Students and their families loved what they found in their Jewish schools, and they not only stayed, they spread word to their network of friends. The pool of funders grew, and fundraisers returned to focus on conducting campaigns for endowments alongside annual drives. School leaders, faculty and other professionals have tried to recenter their lives to bring healthier work-life balance, establishing needed boundaries and taking time to rejuvenate themselves and their families.

But while they looked to restore a sense of normalcy remembered from pre-Covid years, they found themselves still coping with new waves of Covid variants and the attendant sense of anxiety and fatigue. Even as masks came off and many felt that we entered a period that feels more relaxed and “normal,” the need for continued Covid monitoring and testing, while continuously adjusting our protocols and communications policies, left a lingering burden on our schools’ professional leadership.

Two new studies have confirmed the strength of day schools and their vital, growing importance in the ecosystem of Jewish life and community today. A report titled “[The Jewish Education of Today’s Jewish Leadership](#),” written by Ezra Kopelowitz of Research Success, demonstrates the importance of deep Jewish learning for providing the knowledge and dispositions necessary for Jewish leaders today. Furthermore, the influence of Jewish schools is rising rapidly, as many more Jewish leaders today went to those schools themselves and send their children there than was true in the past. In [Inside Jewish Day Schools: Leadership, Learning, and Community](#), Alex Pomson and Jack Wertheimer survey a wide variety of Jewish schools to discover the dynamic nature of school leadership in the face of educational and demographic changes. They reveal how school leaders manage to align their own vision with the vision of the school’s mission and lay leadership to steer the school to success for the students and in the marketplace, even as they confront a wide range of challenges in the short and long term.

At the same time, underlying structural challenges to our schools’ long-term sustainability persist; these lie at the heart of Prizmah’s strategic work to strengthen the field. Not all schools have succeeded to the same degree in drawing new students; Prizmah has extensive services to support schools in recruitment and retention. Our work with communities on middle-income affordability plans creates opportunities for more families to feel that day schools are places that are right for them. Prizmah’s endowment programs aim to give all schools the cushion they need to have a sustainable future where the widest range of earners can attend. And Prizmah continues to support boards, to coach heads, to conduct searches, accredit schools, assist in pipeline challenges, and much more.

Together, as a field, we can develop the skills and capacities needed for all of our schools to thrive.

SOURCES OF DATA AND KNOWLEDGE

[Data and Analysis for School Leadership](#) (DASL)

[Development Pulse Survey Report: Annual Campaign & Endowment Trends](#), by Odelia Epstein and Traci Stratford, Prizmah

[Enrollment Pulse Survey Report](#), by Odelia Epstein and Amy Adler, Prizmah

[Seizing The Moment: Transferring To Jewish Day School During The Covid-19 Pandemic](#), Jewish Day School New Parent Study, conducted by Rosov Consulting for Prizmah

[The Jewish Education of Today’s Jewish Leadership: Day Schools, Overnight Camps, & Other Educational Experiences among Lay & Professional Jewish Communal Leaders](#), conducted by Research Success Technologies Ltd., sponsored by Keren Keshet

[Career Arc of Jewish Educators](#), CASJE

[The State of the Field: Hebrew Education in North American Jewish Day Schools](#), Tal Britt Gale, Hebrew at the Center

Additional information comes from studies that Prizmah has independently conducted for schools and communities, articles published by Prizmah in *HaYidion* and *Kaleidoscope*, information from NAIS studies, and observations gleaned by the Prizmah team through hundreds of hours of conversations with day school leaders.



PORTRAIT OF A FIELD

This report from the Prizmah Knowledge Center team uses data culled from Jewish schools over the 2021-22 school year to perceive and understand trends in the field, substantiating impressions that Prizmah staff have observed throughout our interactions and conversations with school stakeholders. It presents findings in five main areas:

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MAIN TAKEAWAYS

1. Enrollment

Day school enrollment overall continued strong growth; schools retained the vast majority of students that transferred during Covid and attracted new students as well.

2. Development

Schools have increased their fundraising goals—and met or exceeded their targets in greater numbers. They are transitioning from reactionary fundraising in support of pandemic measures to a focus on resilience through ongoing fundraising and endowment building.

3. Finance

After a Covid slump and recession forced schools to limit tuition increases while expenses grew, schools are now in a healthier place to align net tuition with budgetary needs, in line with historical precedents.

4. Tuition Modeling

With a renewed faith in the long-term viability of day schools alongside their critical importance for the Jewish community, funders are increasingly supporting experimentation with new and tried models of tuition plans that make day schools more affordable to more families.

5. Pipeline of Educators

Day schools employ the largest number of full-time Jewish educators by far of any sector. Yet a shrinking pool of candidates requires attention to elevating this profession, attracting more people to become Jewish teachers, and incorporating practices to retain faculty in this essential work.

Enrollment increased by 3.7%

Fall 2019 to Fall 2022

**Two out of three schools
report an increase in applications**

2021-2022

80% OF STUDENTS

who newly enrolled in JDS in 2020-2021
re-enrolled the following year

1. ENROLLMENT

Key Metrics

The enrollment story of 2021-22 is that the gains witnessed in the previous year continued and consolidated in the new year.

On average, Jewish schools saw an unprecedented increase in enrollment, 3.7%, from fall 2019, the beginning of the first Covid year, to this school year. That figure breaks down to a 4.5% rise among non-Orthodox schools and 2.5% rise among Orthodox schools. The impressive increase in both sectors signals that previous assumptions about enrollment obstacles did not apply during this time—and possibly were flawed to begin with. Orthodox schools were assumed to be near market saturation among a mostly captive audience; nevertheless, their growth during Covid indicates that there are still potential families who are not yet “in the door,” and therefore these schools may consider marketing beyond their traditional circles. Many non-Orthodox schools had seen their numbers flatten over the years, finding themselves wedged between top-tier public schools on the one hand and strong private schools on the other. The dramatic increase in their students represented the first time that they had seen enrollment growth since 2008. They saw the barriers to enrollment growth fall away; the old hunch that “If only people would see the great education taking place inside our building, they would want to send their children here” proved demonstrably true.

The leap in enrollment among non-Orthodox schools was especially gratifying and surprising, given that this sector had not experienced growth since at least 2008. Once the new students were in the door, they didn’t want to leave. Among all students new to Jewish schools during the pandemic, 80% chose to reenroll the following year rather than return to their prior school. Families who transferred to day schools during the pandemic were pleased by the academic excellence they found. One family said, “Academically, it has been an improvement: more rigorous, more challenging, more individualized attention.” Another noted, “The facilities are wonderful—computers, STEM room. All the add-ons—I wasn’t expecting all of that.” Parents who previously may have been uncertain of the educational value of their local Jewish school were pleasantly surprised at what they found.

Perhaps most impressive has been the growth in enrollment in Jewish preschools. Unlike K-12 enrollment, which grew in both years, nursery to pre-K fell by 14.2% in 2020-21 because Covid restrictions fell especially hard on younger children. Remarkably, they bounced back to their prior enrollment levels and well above in 2021-22, with a net 22.1% increase compared to the prior year. Overall, this sector grew by 4.7% compared to pre-Covid levels.

81%
AVERAGE COMPLETED APPLICATIONS
as % of Inquiries (2021-2022)

82%
AVERAGE ACCEPTANCES
as a percent of applications (2021-2022)

83%
AVERAGE ENROLLMENTS
as a percent of acceptances (2021-2022)

10.3%
AVERAGE ATTRITION RATE
(2021-2022)



As we noted last year, patterns of enrollment were uneven and depended on several factors. Regional influence often loomed large, concerning both educational policies—when schools were allowed to open or forced to close their buildings, what Covid-related procedures they were required to implement—and demographic trends. While the field predominantly saw striking growth, one-third of schools experienced a drop in enrollment over this period.

Nonetheless, enrollment indicators remain strong as we emerge from the hardest Covid times. Anecdotally, many schools are reporting yet another year of rising interest and increased applications. Some for the first time speak of experiencing full classes with wait lists for the new year. The prospects for the field of Jewish schools have never been stronger.



2. DEVELOPMENT

Key Metrics

In the [2021 Year in Review](#), we observed that school stakeholders pulled together during the most difficult days of the pandemic to provide the support that the school needed to survive and thrive. Core funders raised their donations and were joined by new backers to ensure that the school would be able to implement Covid measures, such as air filters, plastic dividers, cleansers, extra janitorial and nursing staff, additional room rentals, outdoor classroom facilities, and more, that would make it possible for schools to be open for in-person learning. Despite the pandemic's impact on the economy, the global uncertainty, and the numerous other needs in the community and beyond, school funders rallied our communities together to make our students and teachers a top priority.

In fiscal year 2021-22, the momentum continued with further growth in development contributions. Eighty percent of Jewish schools reported meeting their development goals, and two-thirds exceeded them. The percentage of schools that did not reach their goals fell from 45% the previous year to just 21%. For FY2022, half of the schools said that they increased their fundraising targets, and 81% expected to meet or exceed them yet again.

Simultaneously, the results from Prizmah's Pulse Survey show a shift from reactionary fundraising focused on immediate pandemic needs to development aimed at deepening school resilience. In particular, endowment funds are finding their way to the top of the fundraising priority list. The majority of schools now report having an endowment; across the field, the total valuation of endowments is approximately \$700 million. As of June 30, 2021, top reported endowments were \$62M and \$54M, as compared with \$46M and \$45M just one year prior. Of the 27 schools that reported not having an endowment, nearly 50% are planning to launch an endowment campaign in the next five years, while an additional 41% are interested in doing so in the future.

With the focus across the field on affordability, we know endowments are going to play an important role in enabling schools to create more affordability initiatives. Prizmah sees the development of endowments as a strategic priority for the field and looks forward to partnering with schools and communities in this work over the years ahead.



3. FINANCE

Gross tuition per student

2020-2021 Median: **\$19,820**

2019-2020 Median: **\$18,180**

Net tuition per student

2020-2021 Median: **\$13,150**

2019-2020 Median: **\$13,614**

Net tuition as a percent of total operating expenses

2020-2021 Median: **70%**

2019-2020 Median: **73%**

Information from DASL (Data and Analysis for School Leadership), Prizmah's annual data collection instrument run in collaboration with NAIS, offers a glimpse of the impact of Covid on schools, as well as a sense of how schools managed to stay the course in the face of the pandemic.

Looking at the transition into Covid times from 2019-20 to 2020-21, gross tuition costs—"sticker price"—rose at a normal rate, with a median increase of \$1,640. However, median net tuition—what families actually paid—actually declined slightly, by \$464. This suggests that day school families felt the squeeze of missing income, and their ability to afford tuition diminished. Similarly, net tuition also declined as a percentage of schools' operating expenses, with the median lowering from

73% in 2019-20 to 70% in 2020-21. This figure is not surprising given the reduction in net tuition and the increase in Covid-related expenses. Although these declines are noticeable, especially as a departure from usual and expected trends, the fact that they were relatively small bodes well for the ability of schools and their families to bounce back in subsequent years.

When we factor tuition in with additional school fees, the average cost rose only slightly from 2019-20 to 2020-21, \$761, despite the steep rise in expenses. The size of this increase shows that schools took stock of the economic hardships of the times and were determined to find as many other ways as possible, other than tuition, to cover the difference in expenses. We know that many schools were able to access a mix of public and private funds, including government Covid disbursements, federation grants, and contributions from individual donors, to fill in the shortfall.

This past year, 2021-22, tuition with additional fees rose on average at a more normal rate, \$1,620 over the previous year. More people were able to return to work, employment trends rebounded strongly, and families were more able and willing to increase their school payments in line with inflation and normal growth. Schools clearly anticipated not only this increased capacity in their communities, but also a gratitude among school stakeholders for the incredibly hard work and long hours that school administrators, teachers and staff put in during the pandemic year. They sensed that the time was right to raise tuition in line with the rise in expenses, both from natural causes like inflation, salary raises and needed improvements, and from lingering impacts of Covid adjustments.

Most common alternative models:

- 1 Middle-income tuition discount or tuition cap
- 2 Tuition discount for Jewish communal professionals
- 3 Tuition discounts in entry-level grades

40% (Estimated)
schools offering one or more
alternative tuition models
Fall 2019 to Fall 2022

6
community-
based models

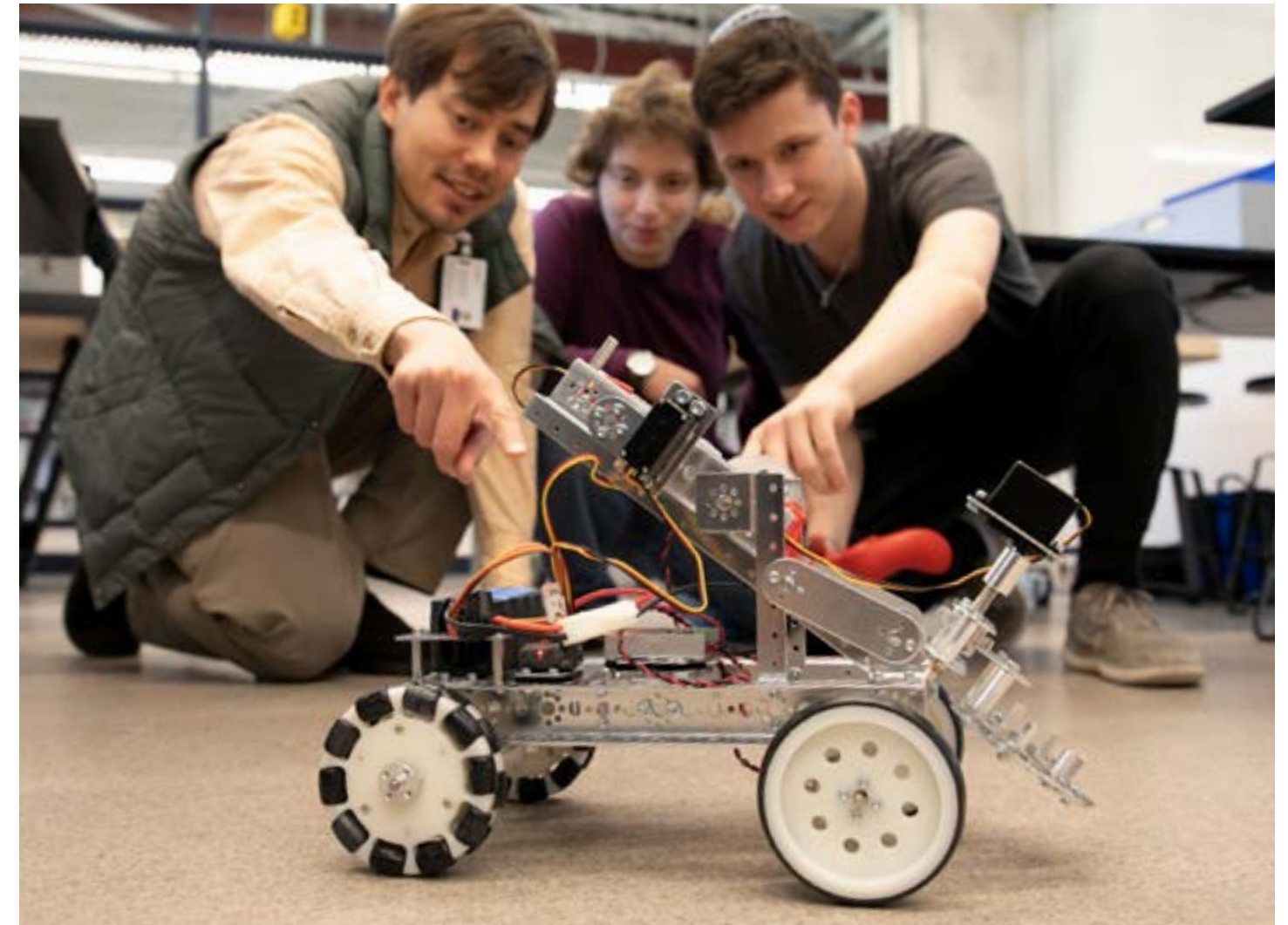
4. TUITION MODELING

The first wave of alternative tuition models began more than a decade ago and were based on the assumption that lowering tuition for targeted segments of a school population—middle income families, Jewish communal professionals, families with a child in kindergarten or other entry level grade—would lead to improvements in student enrollment. Many of these initiatives were self-funded and lacked the type of long-term funding necessary to sustain them beyond a one- or two-year period. Some of the models were introduced by schools that did not have strong reputations or whose professional leadership was transient. As a result, many of these early tuition programs failed to materially drive student enrollment growth.

These early, school-based programs were followed by a series of community-supported tuition programs. In addition to providing more sustainable financial support, many of these communal models included new program design elements intended to create more tuition transparency and predictability for families. The funders of these programs provided additional funds for academic excellence, program or facilities enhancements and other investments that were likely to increase a school's perceived value.

The results of these community models, as well as a number of school-level models that followed, has been quite positive, both in terms of improving affordability for existing parents as well as impacting student enrollment and retention. Well before the Covid-inspired enrollment gains that day schools experienced, tuition reductions for middle income families at schools in Montreal and Metrowest, New Jersey, had already led to a stabilization in enrollment and select enrollment gains. The tuition reduction program in Toronto's TannenbaumCHAT High School provided yet another example of success; it experienced 40% enrollment growth since the introduction of its donor-funded, reduced tuition model.

More donors are taking notice. In Atlanta, several private foundations have partnered to offer a 50% tuition discount to Jewish high school students who have one or more parents working full time as a Jewish communal professional. In Seattle, the Samis Foundation recently announced an initiative to provide significant tuition discounts to middle income families. Previously, those families were ineligible for Samis funding and depended on the individual schools themselves to provide tuition discounts (which some did).



Prizmah has long been a leader in the field of day-school affordability and was honored to work with the Samis Foundation on their middle-income tuition program. We are currently working with other foundations on communal affordability programs, including a large, Midwest-based foundation. We are confident that more of these donor-funded, communal tuition programs will come to fruition. In fact, Prizmah recently partnered with UJA Federation of New York on a two-day workshop and training on new tuition models.

Prizmah looks forward to a future where all day schools are considered both affordable as well as excellent. The embrace of these new tuition models will hasten that day. As Prizmah board member Sam Moed puts it, "When the overwhelming majority of schools embrace these new tuition models, the term 'alternative' will become superfluous."

Of new teachers mentored through JNTP between 2014-2019, 86% were still in the field of Jewish education at the end of that time period, 83% were still working in Jewish day schools and 72% were still in the same school they were in when they began our program. This is in comparison to the sobering public school statistic that, pre-pandemic, up to 45% of new teachers left the profession within the first five years.

– NINA BRUDER AND FAYGE SAFRAN NOVOGRODER
EJEWISH PHILANTHROPY JUNE 14, 2022
[Addressing the Jewish Day School Teacher Shortage](#)



5. TEACHER PIPELINE AND RETENTION

Teacher shortages are a critical challenge throughout North America, and Jewish schools are no exception. Anecdotally, many administrators raise this issue as their top concern. The problem hits especially hard in our core areas of Hebrew and Judaics educators. As Rabbi Andrew Ergas, CEO of Hebrew at the Center, noted in [his recent article surveying our field](#), “By far the biggest challenge is the shrinking number of available Hebrew teachers, not to mention qualified Hebrew teachers and leaders.” And as Head of School Aaron Lippman at the Milwaukee Jewish Day School [observes](#), the pipeline requires teachers who are trained in pedagogy, not just proficient: “If we want the current and future generations to value modern Hebrew, we must create a sustainable pipeline of educators who love the language, love children, and can foster learning environments that support speaking and listening along with reading and writing.” Not only are Hebrew teachers hard to find, once they are hired they tend to have a [shorter tenure than Judaics teachers](#). Prizmah is working with the field in partnership with the Israeli government to strengthen this existential core of Jewish schools.

This year, CASJE released a massive, multiyear survey of this issue. Titled [Career Arc of Jewish Educators](#), the study defines the term “Jewish educator” broadly to include supplemental-school teachers, camp educators, educators in communal organizations, experiential educators, along with preschool and Jewish day school / yeshiva faculty. It is divided into separate studies that dived into teachers’ backgrounds, professional training, work experience and future plans.

The census found that day schools and yeshivas employed the second highest number of educators, after camps—20,692 in 2019-20—and by far the highest number of full-time educators at 14,519. Four out of five day school educators are female.

One striking finding is that 49% of respondents came to the profession “accidentally,” as a result of circumstances (volunteering at the school as a parent, being recruited by a friend) rather than through conscious preparation. Among those who chose this career path, many report an early experience as an intern or working in the Jewish community as pivotal for their choice. Preliminary analysis of day school educators within the CASJE data set shows that 57% of respondents teaching in day school themselves attended a day school at least as an elementary student, confirming that alumni are a significant pool of talent for this career. (It would be interesting to learn how many of this 57% teach at the same school that they attended.) This finding suggests that schools might look to give students and young adults more onramps to the field in order to encourage them on this path.

For new teachers, mentorship and other forms of support are critical for their self-confidence and incentive to remain in the profession.



For more established teachers, the CASJE study shows that mentorship, supervision and substantive, sustained professional development provide needed support for professional growth and job satisfaction. Overall, 71% of day school teachers agree that their school provides them with sufficient opportunities for professional development. 54% of teachers report receiving coaching or observation from a mentor or supervisor, 24% from a peer, and 30% from an outside consultant. While these numbers are higher than among Jewish educators working at other venues, more research would be helpful to determine what percentage in total are receiving coaching, what this coaching looks like, and what impact it has.

Long term, educators seek pathways to professional advancement that don't necessarily remove them from the classroom. Most teachers don't aspire to become administrators but do seek ways to grow in status, responsibility and income. The CASJE study found that 50% of day school teachers say that their schools give them a path for professional advancement. Opportunities for teachers to become mentors or teacher-leaders can be effective in retaining talent. In the spring issue of *HaYidion*, [Gavriel Brown surveyed mid-career teachers](#) to understand forces driving them to consider leaving or staying, and offered policies that school leaders can put in place to bolster job satisfaction for this population.

A couple of recent surveys conducted under Prizmah's auspices looked at issues surrounding teachers' job satisfaction. In one community, teachers expressed the most satisfaction with their schools' religious culture, faculty collaboration, and location. Salary, benefits and mentorship they found least satisfying. In that community, 35% of teachers considered leaving their job in the past 24 months. In another community, teachers said that compensation, mission/culture and work hours were most important for job satisfaction. 90% expressed satisfaction with their jobs, and only 24% said they occasionally thought about leaving. This accords with figures from the CASJE study, in which two-thirds of teachers report intending to stay in the field until retirement, and another 23% for more than five years. Comparable numbers for the school in which teachers currently work are 48% intending to stay until retirement and 29% for more than five years.

Although teaching is an attractive and critically important profession for the Jewish community, not enough people are seriously considering entering it. Prizmah plans to lead the field and work with key partners in the Jewish community to raise the status, appeal and, where possible, pay of our educators and innovate solutions to the central challenge of the teacher pipeline.

CONCLUSION

In the 2021 Year in Review, we were left with many questions about the continuance of our field's overall remarkable performance during the pandemic. This past year conclusively demonstrated that the success of the Jewish day schools and yeshivas during the "lean" Covid years was no fluke and could be sustained, by and large, as we emerged into, hopefully, "years of plenty." We saw that, by fall of 2021, schools had grown on average by 3.7%, and 4 out of 5 lateral transfers during Covid chose to stay in their new Jewish schools. More surprisingly, nursery schools, which had taken a hit after the start of Covid owing to limited hours and health regulations, rebounded dramatically, rising on average 4.7% from fall 2019 to fall 2021. [Writing in HaYidion](#), some of these new students talked about the welcoming community and supportive environment they encountered in their new educational homes.

Other trends similarly continued to blow wind in the sails of our schools. The cautions that our schools undertook for student and faculty health and safety continued to work, even as Covid protocols were gradually relaxed. As we've seen, school development by and large remains strong, with a new drive for strategic funding to build endowments for schools' long-term viability. Financial trends suggest that many school families have rebounded from the economic shocks of the pandemic and are again able to pay their share needed for school operations.

Nevertheless, new challenges have arisen that require urgent, strategic attention and long-term planning. One such challenge, as described above, is the teacher pipeline, which relates to the entire cultural ecosystem of valuing and supporting education as a profession. The stark rise of mental health concerns, foremost among students but among faculty as well, has given rise to significant adaptations, from increased professional support and training to, in some cases, widespread changes in educational approach, curriculum and pedagogy. Issues of burnout among administrators and faculty following the enormous pressures of these Covid years have exacerbated earlier concerns over workforce longevity.

Concerns over sustainability and affordability persist; schools are partnering with federations and donors on exploring a variety of initiatives. Additionally, there remains uncertainty over the evolution of new pandemics on the horizon, and the ever-present dangers of climate change remain.

We can take comfort and find optimism in the resilience that Jewish schools have shown these past few years in the face of unprecedented crises. Our schools have demonstrated the enormous capacity of our leaders to address challenges with honesty and integrity, of our lay and professional teams to collaborate on solutions to all kinds of challenges, of our faculty to continue to impart skills and information while conveying care for every student's wellbeing, of our families to rally to our schools and participate in them as communities, and of our students to sense the special atmosphere that our schools foster, enabling them to grow as Jews and Americans, as individual thinkers and actors and devoted members of the Jewish community and people. Together, they are working tirelessly, proactively to address the challenges ahead and establish our schools on a stronger foundation for the future.