

A YEAR IN REVIEW

Data and Reflections on Jewish Day
Schools and Yeshivas: 2022–23



PRIZMAH
Center for Jewish Day Schools

Introduction

This past school year was the first that was fully “post-pandemic.” It stopped dominating our planning, conversation, and our fears and became merely another seasonal illness. The desk barriers were taken down, the medical advisory teams returned to their day jobs, lunch tables were once again bustling with students in close conversation and parents and grandparents were welcomed back into school buildings.

The tremendous sense of relief of life returning “back to normal” was accompanied by an acknowledgment that so much has changed. Teachers everywhere note a “COVID-19 lag,” with student learning and social development taking a hit from spending so much time at home. Mental health issues have themselves become front of mind; more depression and anxiety are reported, and social and emotional challenges are increasing. Many school professionals still feel a sense of burnout, and the pipeline of educators remains a paramount concern throughout the field.

At the same time, the gains that many schools made during this period—not all, not evenly spread, but statistically significant fieldwide—have continued and solidified. Some schools are still bursting at the seams, with wait lists around the block, new classes opening, and buildings filled to capacity. Some schools that for years had struggled with long-term success are facing a new demographic and financial reality. Other schools that suffered during COVID-19, often due to local regulations, are back at earlier enrollment levels or beyond. As a whole, the field of Jewish schools is in a stronger place today than four years ago. We moved beyond questioning the sustainability of and investment in Jewish day schools and yeshivas. There is widespread recognition of the excellence of school leaders, appreciation of our communities, admiration for our resiliency, and an expanding commitment to our success on the part of community leaders and funders.

This new strategic landscape offers exciting prospects for us at Prizmah as we are devising initiatives that will strengthen schools and advance our work to capitalize on opportunities, now and in the years to come. Prizmah works to connect professionals and raise awareness of successful practices in core areas of school management, including admissions, development, fiscal responsibility, governance, educational innovation, and more. We develop intimate familiarity with Jewish schools, and seek to translate that into programs, offerings and services that inspire school leaders to continue to learn, grow, and thrive.

At the root of this work is deep, comprehensive, up-to-date knowledge and data of the field. Our participation in NAIS’s (National Association of Independent Schools) comprehensive information system, DASL (Data and Analysis for School Leadership), enables our schools to compare their data in hundreds of areas with schools broken down by multiple sectors, including by region, by religious affiliation, by size, with the larger field of Jewish schools and the totality of independent schools in North America. We continue to conduct pulse surveys that provide important real-time information on the state of Jewish day schools and yeshivas.

NEW THIS YEAR: We’ve created a [Facts at a Glance](#), offering key data points culled from the huge quantities of input collected in DASL, that is chock-full of handy data about our field.

Each year, we include sections on enrollment, development, and finance, the three pistons in the engine of school financial success. We also write about areas of interest that have newly arisen or present new information not previously available. This year we discuss important insights on “big bets,” areas of strategic thinking that have the potential to yield the biggest impact on our field.

We hope that you find this annual summary informative and inspiring as you lead your schools in the new year.



*Written by Elliott Rabin
in collaboration with Odelia Epstein*



Sources of Data and Knowledge

Many of the figures in this report come from DASL, the platform originating with NAIS that Prizmah uses to gain knowledge of our field. Because data entry in DASL occurs during the school year, before the final tallies are in, much of the information collected pertains to the previous school year. Hence, you will notice a mix of data from the 2022-23 and 2021-22 school years in the report.

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

[Prizmah Facts at a Glance: A Summary of Key DASL Data, 2022-23 School Year](#)

[Enrollment Pulse Survey Report, December 2022](#), by Amy Adler, Beth Rivkind, Odelia Epstein, Prizmah



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2/3

of Schools had Increased or Stable Enrollment

from the beginning of COVID-19

5%

Increase in Preschool Enrollment

2022-23 over previous year

325%

Growth in Outreach and Engagement Professionals

in the past 5 years

Enrollment

KEY FINDINGS

The 2022-23 year was notable for the consolidation of prior gains. The majority of new students who enrolled during COVID-19, 72%, have chosen to remain in their Jewish day schools and yeshivas, down just slightly from the previous year (80%). This shows that our schools continue to provide great value once families are in the door; even when they have the choice to return to their previous schools, whether public or private, most families like what they experience and remain. Among these, Orthodox schools reported a 95% retention rate; other schools, 70%. Moreover, the field is still seeing substantial numbers of transfer students, with nearly one thousand coming from public schools and 343 from other private schools, according to the 136 schools that participated in our pulse survey. Looking at different regions, the Southwest (88%) and Northeast (81%) continue to see the largest gains, while the Midwest prolongs its demographic slide (63% of schools reporting declines).

Likewise, two-thirds of our schools have increased enrollment or remained steady during this time. Nonetheless, the greatest increases took place in our largest schools, of more than 500 students. While schools of all sizes reported a majority had increased or stable numbers, the trend showed that increases correlated with school size: in schools with 301-500 students, 59% of schools grew; in those with 501-700 students, 64% increased enrollment; in those with 701-1000 students, 86%; and in those with more than 1000, 100%.

Similarly, the field's sharp gains in preschool enrollment bodes well for future success. Last year we noted that since the rise of COVID-19, after a significant enrollment drop in our preschools when students could not attend in person, the bounceback was even greater: 22% increase, including 4.7% growth from pre-COVID-19 levels. The fact that this year saw another 5% rise indicates that this trend is far from a one-time blip. Instead, it shows that there is rising confidence and continued growth in the Jewish day school world.



OUTREACH AND ENGAGEMENT PROFESSIONALS

This year for the first time, Prizmah ran a survey of outreach and engagement professionals. We identified 38 people with these or related titles, of which 21 participated, representing schools from across the United States and Canada, from small communities and large cities, ranging in size from under 100 to over 600. The most common reasons why these positions were established were to increase enrollment and build community; more than half also work on family retention, and a third include alumni in their portfolio.

Among areas of impact, professionals most often listed “bringing new prospective families into your enrollment pipeline”; building community for current and prospective families was also ranked high. Many respondents work in other school roles, most commonly marketing, admission, communications, and development; 71% of them are employed full time. They report forging partnerships mostly with synagogues, federations, JCCs and nursery schools. Most strikingly, the field has seen an increase of 325% in the number of people working in these positions in the past five years.

\$1,432,395

Median Funds Received

per school
(2021–22 school year)

519

Median Number of Donors

per school

78%

Median Participation in School Fundraising by Parents of Current Students

per school

Development

KEY FINDINGS

Fundraising is a critical component of a school's financial health. For all schools in our field, the amount taken in by tuition is less than total expenses; the difference must be supplied by other revenue streams, of which development is by far the largest. Here's what that looks like in practice. In the 2021-22 school year, the median total expenses for our schools was \$7,635,956. During this same period, the median portion of expenses raised by tuition fees was 70%, leaving a 30% hole in the budget. Fortunately, median fundraising was \$1,432,395, representing 19% of the money needed, a significant boon. The remaining shortfall is made up from revenue streams such as grants, summer programs, extended day programs, government funds, special events and endowment.

The strength of fundraising in our field testifies to the passionate attachments that our schools inspire, as well as their importance that is widely recognized throughout the community. According to DASL, 519 donors contributed to the median school fundraising in 2021-22. Impressively, 78% of current parents or guardians contribute to the school's fundraising campaigns, above and beyond the tuition costs.

Clearly, parents are motivated by their recognition of their students' teachers and the quality of education, the dedication of the faculty and administration, and the efforts to provide a Jewish education that will form a foundation for their students' lives. Parents of former students and grandparents continue to support their students' schools well after graduation; they comprise the biggest donor block after current parents, with a median donation of \$246,365 per school. Employees also contribute at a high rate (57%), a sign of attachment that is more than obligatory.

Among fundraising purposes, endowment building is clearly a significant priority for the field. The median amount contributed to schools' endowment is \$119,346, representing about 8% of total fundraising dollars. The median endowment per student currently holds at \$9,761. As noted in prior Prizmah reports, Jewish schools increasingly recognize the importance of endowments to longterm sustainability, with the majority building upon an established endowment fund or looking to create one in the near future.

\$24,250
**Median Gross Tuition
Per Student**

2021-22

\$17,425
**Median Net Tuition
Per Student**

2021-22

70%
**Median Net Tuition
as a Percentage of
Total Operating Expenses**

2021-22

Finance

As the economy was strong after the COVID-19 shutdown, schools returned to their normal tuition increases and compensated for charges that had been held low for the past two years. Tuition charges rose around \$3,000 from 2020-21 to 2021-22, and the amount that parents paid the school rose at about the same amount. Alongside these increases, schools were able to capture more net tuition dollars through a combination of more full-pay public school transfers, selective reductions in scholarships and tuition assistance, and the embrace of new tuition models. Overall, the percentage of school operating expenses covered by tuition payments remained steady at 70%, even as costs and revenues grew.

The good news is that a majority of our schools are fiscally solvent, “in the black.” Data collected in DASL shows that median expenses per student were \$23,547, versus income per student at \$24,704. That is, when broken down on a per student basis, schools netted more than \$1,000. Of course, this is the median figure, the middle of a wide range. Nonetheless, this shows that the majority of schools are operating sustainably, with a cushion enabling them to save for important occasions (endowments, capital campaigns) and plan for the future.

External revenue streams make up a growing portion of the balance sheet, helping schools stay afloat. Schools are becoming more aware of opportunities for government funding, which are complex but substantial; as of 2021-22, the median received from federal, state and local government support per student was \$2,117. Income from major gifts and grants was about double that, \$3,707 per student. These along with other non-tuition streams raise school income about \$8,000 per student, a third of total revenue.

Expenses reveal schools’ priorities and values. For example, median instructional support salary expenses are \$1,316 per student, representing a substantial and growing segment of school staffing. Jewish schools are increasingly investing in support for learning and mental health. Median total salary nears \$15,000 per student, two-thirds of schools’ expenses; of those, administrators’ salaries are about \$3,500. Of the remaining costs, a big portion (\$2,500) goes to benefits and payroll taxes; plant expenses, major repairs and depreciation cover another \$3,400. Median professional development funds amount to \$119 per student, an area perhaps ripe for growth.

60%

**Heads Who Have Served
in Their School
for 5 Years or Fewer**

73%

**Heads Who Have Been
in This Role
For 5 Years or More**

5 YEARS

**Median Tenure of Heads
at all Jewish Schools**

Headship and Tenure

As Odelia Epstein noted in the spring 2023 *HaYidion* ("[How Long Do Heads of School Stay in Their Jobs?](#)"), the reality of tenure has outstripped perception. For many years, the claim has been often repeated that new heads, on average, served 2 or 3 years in the role before they moved out of their roles. The gap between heads of Jewish schools and other private schools, it was believed, could be measured in many years, if not more.

Whatever the truth of that notion in the past, research conducted this year by Prizmah on Orthodox heads of school salary and benefits as well as data collected through DASL (Data Analysis for School Leadership) shows that the gap has been filled, and tenure in our field has made significant strides. From a total of 118 heads of school, the median tenure at Jewish schools is now identical to schools across NAIS, at 5 years; and the average is just slightly behind: 7.7 years at NAIS, 6.5 in Orthodox schools, 7.5 at other Jewish schools.

These numbers show that Jewish schools are now fully at par with the larger field of private schools. Whereas 60% of heads have been in their current school for 5 years or less, 73% have been serving as heads for more than five years, reflecting a widespread phenomenon of heads moving between and often among schools several times in their careers.

This progress in tenure is the result of significant attention across the field. The continued, long-term appeal of programs to support rising school leaders, including DSLTI (Day School Leadership Training Institute), Orthodox Women's Leadership Cohort, and YOU Lead, alongside the growing recognition of the vital importance of coaches and mentors and the willingness of boards to invest in their heads through such supports, have given heads new to their roles the skills and encouragement to persevere.



Big Bets

A decade ago, the big bets in the field were all about elevating education, scanning the trends in the larger educational field and figuring out how we might include them in our walls. (We chronicled some of these back in the day in *HaYidion*, in issues called [Rising Ed Trends](#) and [Bold Ideas](#).) STEM and STEAM, Makerspaces, robotics, the new landscape of technological tools and the blossoming of educational websites: Schools were excited and daunted by these new possibilities and trying them out for size. There was much talk of “21st century learning,” and various gurus were promoting them in TED Talks and professional development consulting. Now we are face to face with Artificial Intelligence, and teachers and administrators are adapting to the new technological landscape.

Ten years and many ambitious initiatives later, the buzz in the field revolves around addressing current fieldwide challenges with bold, systemic solutions. Prominent lay leader and day school supporter Steve Levy wrote an article, “[The Next Big Bet](#),” outlining some of the possible areas that funders might consider as the day school field continues to grow and develop in ways that require strategy and resources, vision and initiative.

Steve’s biggest bet addresses the **teacher pipeline** challenge. Numerous factors and trends have made it increasingly difficult to find qualified teachers to hire and fill holes in the faculty. The profession of educator is too often held in low prestige, with the relatively low pay rendering it difficult to live in cities where housing costs have skyrocketed. The biggest shortfalls are usually in Judaics and Hebrew, but depending upon location, other positions can also present quite a struggle. (In Montreal, for example, the need for French-speaking teachers far exceeds supply.) Prizmah has made this challenge a top priority in our work, with numerous models of teacher development and recruitment under consideration. Prizmah is collaborating with JEIC on a new initiative to widen the teacher pipeline.

Although the challenge of **affordability** remains ever-present, schools and Jewish communities have worked tirelessly to bring innovation and develop fresh approaches. Last fall, Prizmah published an [issue of HaYidion](#) presenting many creative affordability programs from across the country, some spurred by foundations, others by federations, alongside the essential work pioneered by schools.

The field has been experimenting with different types of programs for years, including ones for communal professionals, for middle income families, income cap programs, indexed and multi-scale programs; Prizmah has identified more than 135 examples of tuition models in schools and believes that expanding the number of schools offering diverse tuition models has potential to move the needle on affordability.

One area that seems ripe for growth is **enrollment**. Over the past few years, Jewish schools have increased enrollment for the first time in over a decade; moreover, while much of that growth derived from success in managing COVID-19, both through online education and in-person safety protocols, schools have further succeeded in retaining the majority of new families. We have the opportunity to harness this moment and make strategic investments to deepen our engagement with the broader Jewish community, thereby stimulating demand and increasing enrollment. Prizmah believes that a comprehensive strategic initiative that includes key organization partners, communal collaboration, and professional development for admission professionals can grow enrollment across the field.

A critical driver for school excellence in all areas is **leadership**. The most successful schools all have strong leadership, both in their professionals, particularly heads of school and their administrative leadership teams, and their lay leaders. To ensure excellence in our schools, Prizmah plans on strengthening the pipeline of leadership in Jewish day schools and yeshivas by expanding the pool of qualified leaders who aspire to headship and supporting new and emergent talent.

As we've emerged from COVID-19, a variety of **mental health and social-emotional** challenges have arisen as a top concern among school professionals. Some of these clearly derived from COVID-19: Students lost precious time in the presence of friends and others, in person, and their social skills suffered. Others have been brewing for several years, such as the impact of cellphones, social media, video games, texting, etc. The role of school counselors has grown exponentially, requiring attention not only to students but to teachers and administrators as well, especially during the times of COVID-19 and remote learning. Prizmah saw the field's need for more support in this area and has been strengthening counselors for years, through our annual Mental Health Summit and [School Counselor Cohort](#), in ways that they can bring awareness, tools and development to their faculty colleagues.



Schools are looking for strategies and programs that can expand their capacity for **inclusion**, the ability to welcome as wide a spectrum of students as possible and serve them in ways that meet their needs. These may include students with various learning or physical challenges, as well as students who are looking for more advanced courses or options. Relatedly, many schools are developing DEI goals, impacting recruitment practices and professional development. Prizmah has been supporting schools in this work through our programs in race and culture, and more recently, the creation of [cultures of belonging](#).

A final challenge of increasing visibility is **climate change**, whose impacts are being felt in numerous ways, from flooding and fires to poor air quality. Adamah (formerly Hazon) has taken the leadership in the Jewish community to help organizations make the transition to more sustainable practices and to increase their resilience in the face of threats. Their [Jewish Climate Leadership Coalition](#) is partnering with agencies that work with all segments of the Jewish community; Prizmah has created a day school collaborative for schools that have signed up for the Coalition. Members receive free training and consultation from Adamah, learn about opportunities for funding on projects that increase energy efficiency, and inspire each other with the work that each school is undertaking.



Conclusion

As we have emerged from COVID-19, the field of Jewish day schools and yeshivas is characterized by vibrancy and hopefulness. Overall, the field is in a remarkable place, having grown during the challenges of remote learning and solidified gains during the “years of plenty.” Administrators and faculty are happy to experience again “what they signed up for,” the joy of learning, of student voices, of movement, in-person contact and relationship-building. Schools are not just where they were before the pandemic, but, in many cases, there is a tangible sense of “being in a new place” from many positive changes.

One vital component of this optimism is the knowledge that school heads are staying in their positions longer than ever before. Prizmah has long recognized the critical importance of head capacity and stability for schools to thrive.

Our work in service of heads has expanded in many directions. [YOU Lead](#), our long-time program for rising school professionals, is now joined with [DSLTI](#), the premier program to train new heads and top administrators, under the Prizmah umbrella. The [Orthodox Women's Leadership Cohort](#) works to expand the pool of qualified and talented heads through the support of women who work in Orthodox schools. Leadership coaching and searches, along with our focus on the critical partnership between the board chair and head of school, round out a panoramic approach to the school's lead professional.

Another quality that demonstrates our field's vibrancy is its ability to identify challenges and think creatively and collaboratively to find ways to address them. Some challenges pertain to schools more or less equally, throughout the field, while others vary considerably in their impact depending on numerous factors, including size, location, demographics and finances. Issues described in section 5 above are vast, overarching areas that will not be “solved” in the immediate future. They require us as a field to work together, experiment, share learning, build upon it and iterate new initiatives in a virtuous cycle of growth.



We witnessed yet another dimension to the vibrancy of our field at the Prizmah Conference this past January. The turnout was remarkable, but even more spectacular was the eagerness of participants to connect and learn together. In the sessions, we saw people willing to share, to be vulnerable and try new things, to present their schools' outstanding successes and open up about real concerns. The significant presence of development professionals and funders, whose [reflections were featured in Kaleidoscope](#) following the conference, meant that the learning and inspiration could spread widely through important stakeholders in the school community.

In the year ahead, we look forward to studying more about the field, to gathering and learning together online and in person, to collaborating on new initiatives to address our challenges, and to experiencing the sparkling vibrancy in the classrooms, corridors and offices of Jewish day schools and yeshivas.